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CHINA DAILY

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US President Donald Trump signs documents as he issues executive orders in the Oval Office at the White House on Inauguration Day in Washington DC on Monday. CARLOS BARRIA / REUTERS

Beijing open to steady US ties

China represented by V-P, ambassador as Trump begins second White House term

By ZHAO HUANXIN in Washington and HENG WEILI in New York

Beijing is ready to work with Washington to promote steady, healthy and sustainable growth of China-US relations, for the benefit of both countries and the world, a top Chinese envoy said in the first message posted after the new US administration was sworn in on Monday.

Chinese Vice-President Han Zheng, President Xi Jinping's special representative, attended the inauguration ceremony of President Donald Trump, which was moved inside the US Capitol Rotunda, due to the extreme cold gripping much of the country.

Han was attending the event accompanied by Chinese Ambassador to the US Xie Feng. At previous US presidential inaugurations, China usually was represented only by its top Washington envoy.

Hours after the inaugural ceremony, Xie wrote on X: "China is ready to work with the US side to adhere to the strategic guidance of the two leaders and follow through on their important consensus, so

as to push for the steady, healthy and sustainable development of bilateral ties, to the benefit of both countries and the world."

Trump roared into his second term on Monday, with the day's pomp and pageantry serving as the backdrop for a blunt inaugural address, and later, a flurry of executive order signings.

The 78-year-old Republican did not immediately announce specific tariff plans in the half-hour speech at the Capitol, but said the US would collect "massive amounts" of income from foreign trade duties as his administration "immediately" begin the overhaul of trade system to protect American workers and families.

Trump also pledged efforts to "defeat what was record inflation, and rapidly bring down costs and prices", but analysts have pointed out that his plans for tariffs on imports could have the opposite effect.

"If the US imposed an additional 10 percent tariff on China, and China responded in kind, US GDP would be \$55 billion less over the four years of the second Trump

China is ready to work with the US side to adhere to the strategic guidance of the two leaders and follow through on their important consensus."

Xie Feng, Chinese ambassador to the US

administration," Warwick J. McKibbin, a nonresident senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, wrote in an article on Friday.

Inflation would increase 20 basis points in the US, McKibbin noted in the article, co-authored with Peterson Institute's Executive Vice-President Marcus Noland.

In his speech, Trump repeated his intention to take back control of the Panama Canal.

"We didn't give it to China. We gave it to Panama, and we're taking it back," Trump said, in the only reference to China in his inaugural address.

Trump's remarks prompted an explicit rejection from Panama's President Jose Raul Mulino, who said the key interoceanic waterway would remain under its control.

"I must comprehensively reject the words of President Donald Trump," Mulino said in a statement published on social media. "The canal is and will remain Panama's. There is no presence of any nation in the world that interferes."

In his speech, Trump declared a national emergency on the southern border while harshly critiquing the previous administration.

"We have a government that has given unlimited funding to the defense of foreign borders but refuses to defend American borders, or, more importantly, its own people," Trump said as former president Joe Biden watched from the front row.

In the evening, Trump began signing executive orders at the Capital One Arena and later back at the White House.

One of the executive orders gives TikTok a 75-day extension during which the US will not enforce the law meant to force the app's owner, Beijing-based ByteDance, to sell the company.

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China, ASEAN plan to increase digital cooperation

By CHENG YU and MASI

China is set to deepen digital collaboration with the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 2025 and beyond, with new frameworks and action plans aimed at further strengthening digital infrastructure, promoting cloud computing and enhancing artificial intelligence governance, said an official from the country's top industry regulator.

Xu Chaofeng, director-general of the Department of International Cooperation of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said in an interview with China Daily that the nation aims to formulate a new five-year action plan with ASEAN on building a sustainable and inclusive digital ecosystem.

"The plan will prioritize digital, intelligent and green transformation, with the aim of strengthening policy communication, deepening development consensus and fostering a new digital industry ecosystem," he said.

The comments follow the 5th ASEAN Digital Ministers' Meeting and the 2nd China-Thailand Ministerial Dialogue on Digital Economy Cooperation, which were held in Thailand last week.

Zhang Yunming, vice-minister of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, who led a delegation to Thailand, discussed at the meetings the latest developments and policies, as well as future cooperation plans, in the digital fields of China and ASEAN.

Building upon this framework, digital infrastructure remains a cornerstone of the partnership. China has already made significant strides in enhancing ASEAN's digital backbone, with over 30 cross-border terrestrial optical cables linking China to various ASEAN states.

To advance this collaboration, China is pushing for the establishment of an Asian submarine cable association, alongside a computing power interconnection partnership plan.

Xu, the official from China's top industry regulator, said: "Digital infrastructure is the foundation for digital development and is essential in bridging the digital divide. More efforts will be made to enhance cooperation with ASEAN members in areas such as 5G, cloud computing, data centers and the internet of things."

He pointed out that AI is another key area for deeper cooperation between China and ASEAN, and the two sides are also committed to advancing AI technology, industry standards and governance to ensure fair and equitable development

across all member states.

To facilitate collaboration, China and ASEAN members plan to establish a China-ASEAN artificial intelligence cooperation center, which will host AI projects and drive digital transformation initiatives.

"We must ensure that AI development and governance are based on equal rights, opportunities and rules for every nation," he added.

While the digital infrastructure and technological advances are crucial, the collaboration also extends to enhancing digital skills and building talent in the region, according to Xu.

A major focus will be the creation of a China-ASEAN Digital Academy, which will help equip ASEAN member states with the expertise necessary for digital development.

Since China first became ASEAN's largest trading partner in 2009, the relationship has only grown stronger. In 2020, ASEAN overtook the European Union to become China's largest trading partner, a testament to the region's growing economic importance.

Beyond trade flows, the digital economy has become a new frontier, one where collaboration is not just a necessity but a game changer. Chinese tech giants, such as Huawei and ZTE, have been quick to lay the groundwork in ASEAN, establishing key digital infrastructure projects that connect vast regions.

Yu Xiaohui, president of the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, said, "China's achievements in digital innovation, particularly in 5G and AI, complement ASEAN's unique needs in industries such as tourism and agriculture, paving the way for broader international cooperation."

Yu said that China and ASEAN share a commitment to using digital technologies to promote innovation and sustainable development, with both sides embracing emerging technologies such as 5G, cloud computing and AI.

"The digital market in China is vast, and its ongoing opening-up is creating new opportunities for ASEAN enterprises. ASEAN's growing digital market, with over 480 million active internet users, also represents a key destination for Chinese digital businesses expanding globally," Yu added.

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The story behind Trump's TikTok move

When it comes to TikTok, Congress has spoken. The US Supreme Court has spoken. Now it is Donald Trump's turn.

Trump, who was sworn in as president of the United States on Monday, has promised to issue an executive order that will delay enforcement of a new federal law that compels ByteDance, the China-based company that owns TikTok, to

either sell the wildly popular app to a US group or be banned in the country.

His announcement, made on Sunday, came two days after the Supreme Court unanimously decided to uphold the law that was enacted last year. The court deci-

WORLD WATCH
By Anthony Moretti

sion led TikTok to temporarily shut down the app across the country late Saturday.

Whether Trump's action will be successful is important. But for now, it is equally important to remember that he is looking to do what Congress would not: positively connect with the estimated 170 million US citizens, roughly 50 percent of the country's population, who use the app for business or entertainment.

Many of those users have noted that their livelihoods are tied to TikTok, and Trump will

always have an ear tuned to conversations about business and money.

It is relevant that he is looking past the often irrational fear in Washington that began roughly five years ago — a fear that suggests TikTok is a threat to national security.

One of the pillars upholding the law to ban TikTok is the peculiar premise claiming China might be able to blackmail today's US teenagers who will become tomorrow's leaders.

The argument goes like this: at some point in the future, the Chinese government will order TikTok to hand over all the data it has on its US users.

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RAINFOREST BRINGS GIBBONS BACK FROM EDGE OF EXTINCTION

In Hainan province, vibrant biodiversity thrives in lush tropical jungles

By CHEN BOWEN in Haikou
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Among the many species of wildlife inhabiting the southern Chinese island are the Hainan gibbons, the most endangered among all gibbons and one of the world's rarest primates. The unique ecosystem is also home to nationally protected animals such as the round-nosed giant lizard, the Hainan partridge, and the Hainan peacock-pheasant. Relocation and reintroduction efforts have seen the return of 30 Hainan Eld's deer, while precious plant species like agarwood, *Hopea hainanensis* Merrill & Chun

in-depth

and the over 2,600-year-old *Dacrydium pectinatum* flourish here.

The Hainan Tropical Rainforest National Park was established on Oct 12, 2021, making it one of China's first five designated national parks. Spread over 4,269 square kilometers, the park, known as a "wildlife and plant paradise", is a haven for exclusive tropical species and genetic diversity.

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Hainan tropical rainforest's pioneering work in carbon sequestration has led to an initial transaction volume of 350,000 yuan (\$47,732). On July 10, the forestry department hosted a signing ceremony for the Tropical Rainforest Carbon Sink Trading and Project Cooperation. Three companies in Hainan subscribed to a total of 350,000 yuan in tropical rainforest carbon offsets.

With a forest coverage of 95.85 percent, it makes up over 95 percent of the island's primary forests and more than 55 percent of its natural woodlands. The park acts as a crucial ecological shield for Hainan, earning the moniker "ecological green heart" for its local and global conservation significance.

It is also the wellspring for major rivers like the Nandu, Changhua and Wanquan. This dense tropical rainforest not only stands as a pivotal conservation area for water sources but also acts as a critical ecological barrier, protecting against wind and flood hazards.

Since the launch of a pilot system for a tropical rainforest national park in 2019, the Hainan tropical rainforest has uncovered a total of 75 new species, including nine new records for China and 19 new records specific to Hainan province, according to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration.

Boon for gibbons

The national park has given the Hainan gibbons a new lease of life. The population of the species is on the rise, and their distinctive calls that have earned them the moniker of the "Rainforest Song King" can be heard across the verdant landscape. The gibbons, considered the indigenous inhabitants of Hainan province, are emblematic of the region's tropical rainforest ecosystem.

Just over two decades ago, these forest creatures were on the brink of extinction. A large-scale survey in 2003 revealed the presence of just 13 primates living in two family groups. By 2005, the Hainan gibbon monitoring team had been established, kickstarting years of conservation efforts. By 2019, the gibbon population had grown to 30 apes in four family groups.

Zhong Yufei, deputy director of the Bawangling branch of Hainan Tropical Rainforest National Park Administration, detailed the measures taken to restore the Hainan gibbons' habitat. Targeting fragmented and deteriorated habitats, the branch enhanced habitat quality through the reintroduction of native tree species like *Ficus altissima* blume and *Bischofia polycarpa*,



RAINFOREST:

Eco-revival of tropical paradise

known to be favored by the gibbons. Also, ecological restoration initiatives included the establishment of six rope corridors to facilitate the gibbons' movement across habitats.

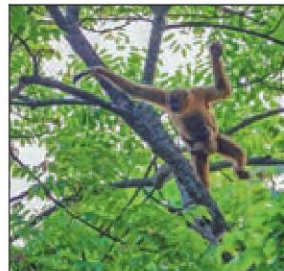
"The Hainan gibbon population has rebounded to 42 primates in seven family groups," Zhong said. "Through the unwavering dedication and initiatives of successive conservationists, the path to the resurgence of the Hainan gibbons has become more assured."

Han Wentao, deputy head of the information center at the Bawangling branch, emphasized the deployment of camera monitors in the Hainan gibbons' habitat.

"This technology empowers staff to remotely observe the gibbons' behavior and feeding patterns from their workstations, offering insights for monitoring and studying the gibbons' survival dynamics," he said.

Technological advancements are also being widely integrated into the daily patrolling and conservation efforts within the tropical rainforest. In the Bawangling area, forest rangers are equipped with special smartphones that connect to an information management platform, recording each patrol's time and route.

When monitoring personnel require specific data during patrols,



Top: A staff member of the Hainan Tropical Rainforest National Park introduces plants of the park to students in August in Wuzhishan, Hainan province. MENG ZHIJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY **Above left:** Tourists visit the park in February last year. CHEN YEJIA / XINHUA **Above right:** A Hainan gibbon forages with her baby in the park. LI TIANPING / FOR CHINA DAILY

they can easily access and export it from the management platform, streamlining the process for enhanced efficiency.

By establishing a provincial-level intelligent management center, a smart rainforest big data platform, and initiating the "sky-ground" integrated comprehensive monitoring system project, the Hainan Tropical Rainforest National Park is exploring the creation of a tropical rainforest monitoring system that aims to enhance ecological environmental monitoring capabilities through

informatization and intelligence.

Ecological corridor

Li Dajiang, director of the Yinggeling Branch of Hainan Tropical Rainforest National Park Administration, highlighted how scattered natural reserves in the central mountainous regions of Hainan have been consolidated into contiguous areas, forming

a coherent ecological corridor.

"This transformation is steadily enhancing the diversity, stability, and sustainability of the tropical rainforest ecosystem," he said.

Hainan province has positioned the national park as one of the 12 pioneering projects for comprehensive deepening of reform and opening-up in the region. "It stands as the foremost emblematic project in building a national ecological civilization pilot zone, with the full force of the province dedicated to advancing the development of the Hainan Tropical Rainforest National Park," said Zhou Yadong, chief engineer of the forestry department of Hainan province.

The park is the first in the nation to complete the calculation of Gross Ecosystem Product and has conducted GEP calculations for four consecutive years.

Experts said that each hectare of the rainforest can absorb an average of 1 to 2 metric tons of carbon annually, with its carbon sequestration capacity increasing year by year. With the implementation of stringent conservation measures, the park is poised to exhibit a higher carbon sequestration rate and greater potential for carbon sink growth.

According to calculations by the Hainan Academy of Forestry, the

GEP of the Hainan Tropical Rainforest National Park in 2022 amounted to 208.40 billion yuan, marking a 12.01 billion yuan increase from the previous year.

The development of carbon sink products centered around the tropical rainforest has been prioritized as a key focus area by the provincial government.

In July, the provincial forestry department hosted a tropical rainforest carbon sink trading and project cooperation signing ceremony. This represented the country's first national park carbon sink trading activity and the inaugural tropical rainforest carbon sink trading project.

Scenic road

Within the core protection zone of the national park, there are a total of 470 households comprising 1,885 indigenous residents. As of today, ecological relocation has been carried out for 466 households, involving 1,870 individuals, achieving a relocation progress rate of 99 percent. The park held 10 mining rights, all of which have now been relinquished.

"Hainan is dedicated to establishing a model for national park construction, engaging in numerous exploratory and innovative endeavors. The integration of the national park and surrounding communities has paved a path toward ecological beauty, industrial prosperity, and rural vitalization," said Zhou.

Hainan Tropical Rainforest National Park Scenic Road encircling the park was opened for traffic on Dec 29. Spanning about 466 kilometers, the tourist road follows the layout of the park, passing through nine cities and counties. The road links several natural reserves, resembling a green ribbon that connects the scenic mountainous regions in the central and southern parts of Hainan island.

Ma Shijie, chief engineer of the Department of Transport of Hainan Province, said construction on this tourist road project commenced on Dec 28, 2022. The road's construction incorporates environmentally friendly materials and technologies, creating 612 wildlife passages to allow for a return to nature approach, promoting harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

Zou Xianfeng, president of the Provincial Tourism Association said that the Hainan Tropical Rainforest National Park possesses unique ecological resources and world-class biodiversity, serving as a crucial pillar for the comprehensive tourism development in Hainan.

"We aim to accelerate the development of the tourism industry in the central counties of Hainan province," he said.

A view of Wuzhishan section of the Hainan Tropical Rainforest National Park. HAN BAOXIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Competition advances biodiversity study tourism, rural vitalization in Boao

By CHINA DAILY

With the aim of promoting tourism and rural development through biodiversity studies, the Boao International Student Rural Revitalization Planning and Design Competition was held recently in Boao, Hainan province.

The competition not only helped deepen young people's understanding of biodiversity and foster a sense of responsibility for conservation, it was also an innovative attempt to integrate biodiversity study tours into rural planning, said Wang Kai, president of the China Academy of Urban Planning and Design, emphasizing the importance of integrating biodiversity, low-carbon ecology and green development into planning education to address evolving industry trends.

Responding to the global consensus reached at COP15, during which China clarified its strategy and action plan for biodiversity conservation,

the event was organized by the Hainan branch of the China Academy of Urban Planning and Design (Beijing) Co. and supported by the Hainan Green Building Society. A total of 15 domestic and international universities were invited to participate, and four Chinese university teams made it to last month's finals.

The competition focused on planning for three villages — Longtan, Peilan and Beichaofangling — near Boao, China's first demonstration zone for near-zero carbon operations. After a five-day field survey in the villages, more than 20 students and university professors collected detailed data and gained firsthand insights into local conditions.

The competing teams were required to propose creative solutions, including knowledge-learning routes combining traditional rural culture with biodiversity conservation, intelligent eco-tourism experiences leveraging modern technology, and public education initiatives to raise ecological

awareness among rural residents.

"Students' professional knowledge in biodiversity is enhanced in the process of designing and planning, and their interaction with local residents also influences the villagers' awareness and behavior, including sustainable practices," said Yu Li, a professor from Cardiff University, who conceptualized the competition.

Some participants pointed out that biodiversity resources will become unique rural assets, gaining value due to their rarity. In rural development, biodiversity is the foundation for a healthy ecosystem as well as for sustaining agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

Hainan is known as a biodiversity paradise. "Any tropical plant or crop can easily thrive there. Local farmers consider it a blessing, but they have never thought about weaving their biodiversity resources into profitable tourism," said Yu.

The routes designed by participants highlight local folk traditions, medicinal plants and sustainable

farming practices while intelligent tourism incorporates augmented reality guides and biodiversity databases. The proposals offer valuable insights for promoting biodiversity-focused rural tourism and provide a foundation for future implementation, said Yu.

Participants carried out comprehensive analysis of various sites in the three villages, proposing the concept of "boundless coexistence". In their designs, they integrated elements such as forest, water, grassland, sea, farmland and village to achieve an organic fusion of human activities and ecological nature.

For instance, these villages, located at the estuary of Wanquan River, serve as crucial habitats for a large number of migratory fish. Some designs conceptualized special walking paths involving observation of the estuary, as well as endangered bird species, insect species and plants.

The participating students, some majoring in architecture, made the most of available space in their

designs. Local traditional houses were designed as hotels, exhibition halls or lecture rooms for study tours, while maintaining their originality. Injecting a new perspective in biodiversity studies, they fully considered the organic combination of traditional architecture and the variety of animals and plants.

During the competition, students conducted an online public survey, which revealed that 72 percent of respondents strongly supported biodiversity study tourism in rural areas.

If the designs are adopted, they will improve income of local villagers through biodiversity-focused tourism while enhancing visitors' awareness of biodiversity and ecological preservation, said Yu.

Li Pinjie, a student from the team of Dalian University of Technology City Institute said, "Being aware of the importance of biodiversity, we considered the site's original ecology and made efforts to preserve natural vegetation and water systems to create habitats for wildlife."

Li's teammate Lu Xiaoyue said rural vitalization should be rooted in local characteristics. Rural planning must focus on the protection of biodiversity and sustainably use the bio resources to balance development and ecological preservation.

Yu believes this competition serves as a global reference, offering innovative strategies to address biodiversity and sustainability challenges worldwide. "The integration of biodiversity education and rural vitalization showcased in this competition represents a novel approach both domestically and internationally," he said.

No country has yet fully combined these objectives within planning and study frameworks. This competition highlights the commitment of the Chinese government, academic communities and planning professionals toward biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, he added.

Xiao Xiangyi contributed to this story.

TOP NEWS

Longer Spring Festival break to spur travel boom

By ZHU WENQIAN
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The eight-day Spring Festival holiday this year is expected to unleash the full potential of China's vigorous travel and consumption markets and allow traditional Chinese culture to take center stage, tourism industry insiders said.

The festive break, from Jan 28 to Feb 4, is longer by one day, with the government officially adding the eve of Chinese New Year to the public holiday calendar. This has encouraged many office employees to take two days off in advance and club the weekend preceding Spring Festival to extend their total holiday period to 11 days.

Long-haul domestic travel is expected to dominate this year's Spring Festival tourism market, according to a report jointly released by online travel agency Tuniu Corp and the China Association of Travel Services.

Dai Bin, president of the China Tourism Academy, said, "Based on leading indicators, such as urban and rural residents' willingness to travel, the degree of the tourism supply chain's recovery, tourism investment innovations and travel bookings, the tourism economy in China is expected to have a more optimistic outlook and higher-quality development in 2025."

Chinese travelers have shown an increasing interest in exploring the country's intangible cultural heritage after Spring Festival was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December.

According to the joint report, some experiential activities such as the traditional Beijing temple fair, lion dance in Guangdong province, and *shehuo*, a 2,000-year-old performing art form in Shaanxi province, are expected to draw tourists during the holiday.

Qi Chunguang, vice-president of Tuniu, which is based in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, said that experiencing intangible cultural heritage handicraft skills — such as traditional hairdressing with floral hairpins, tie-dyeing, paper-cutting, making rice paper and crafting lacquer ware — have garnered attention.

While cities such as Beijing, Nanjing, Xi'an in Shaanxi province and Chengdu in Sichuan province are traditional cultural tourism destinations, places such as Quanzhou in Fujian province and Luoyang in Henan province have emerged as new cultural tourism hubs in recent years.

Cities steeped in cultural history

such as Taiyuan and Datong in Shanxi province are riding the wave of popularity triggered by the Chinese video game *Black Myth: Wukong*, with many travelers planning to explore ancient buildings including temples in these places.

In addition to history and culture, China's diverse topography is also playing a crucial role in tourism. While travelers from southern China are flocking to northern destinations to experience the thrill and chill of ice-and-snow entertainment, residents of northern China are preferring destinations in the south for a warm and toasty holiday experience, the joint report found.

Rachel Lee, general manager of Kantar Worldpanel China, a research institute on fast-moving consumer goods, said, "Chinese consumers have indicated a trend of continuous reallocation of expenditure toward service sectors such as dining and travel, with retail sales in these areas experiencing a 6.7 percent increase during the first three quarters of 2024."

As an important holiday for family reunions, traveling as a family serves as a major component of the Spring Festival tourism market, with more than 80 percent of travelers planning trips with their family members. The trends of parent-child travel and three generations traveling together are particularly prominent.

Qi, from Tuniu, said: "Reuniting with family members to welcome the new year and then embarking on a family trip has become a common choice of Chinese consumers. The peak of departures for travel is expected to occur on the second day of the new year."

He added that travelers coming from first-tier cities and those born in the 1980s account for a chunk of consumers who have booked travel products for the holiday.

Meanwhile, Chinese travelers are indicating a more diversified demand for overseas travel. Short-haul destinations with convenient transportation, visa-free policies and high cost-effectiveness have seen increasing popularity.

Outbound tourism products with high unit price and scarce resources are also highly favored by consumers, according to the joint report.

The reopening of the Notre-Dame, five years after the iconic cathedral in Paris, France, was gutted in a fire, has attracted attention. More Chinese consumers are including a visit to the cathedral on their itineraries, while many group tours have been sold out, the report found.



Visitors through the 31st Zigong International Dinosaur Lantern Festival in Zigong, Southwest China's Sichuan province, on Wednesday. TANG MINGRUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Fire at gathering



A thick cloud of smoke billows out of tents that caught fire in Prayagraj, northern India, on Sunday amid the ongoing Mahakumbh Mela, a Hindu festival held once every 12 years. The blaze, which police said was caused by the explosion of a cooking gas cylinder, gutted several tents and nearby huts, but no casualty was reported. RAJESH KUMAR SINGH / AP PHOTO

TikTok returns amid challenges

Revival of platform shows its massive user base and commercial value in US, experts say

By FAN FEIFEI
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As TikTok restored its services in the United States after briefly going dark over the weekend, experts said the comeback made by the hugely popular video-sharing app owned by Chinese tech company ByteDance signals its capability of finding a solution, through consultation and cooperation, for operating in the US despite regulatory challenges.

TikTok's massive user base and commercial value have been recognized by the US market despite policy uncertainties, given that social media platforms are playing an increasingly vital role in reshaping people's daily lives in the digital era, they added.

Their comments came after Donald Trump announced on his social media on Sunday that he would issue an executive order delaying the ban and give TikTok a 90-day extension once he was sworn in as US president on Monday.

Trump said the order would make clear that companies will not be held liable for violating a law that aimed to force TikTok's sale by its parent company. He even proposed new terms of a deal in which he said the US would have a "50 percent ownership position in a joint venture."

Trump's legal authority to unilaterally decide not to enforce a

“The operation and management of a joint venture will face challenges such as cultural differences and decision-making efficiency.”

Zhu Keli, founding director of the China Institute of New Economy

law, which passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in April and was upheld by the US Supreme Court on Friday, remains unclear.

However, hours after his post, the app returned, much to the relief of its legion of 170 million dedicated users. "Thanks for your patience and support. As a result of President Trump's efforts, TikTok is back in the US!" read the announcement.

At a news conference on Monday in Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said China has always believed that the operation and acquisition of businesses should be based on market principles and such actions should be independ-

ently decided by the enterprises themselves.

If Chinese companies are involved in such actions, they should comply with Chinese laws and regulations, Mao said.

"We hope the US will earnestly listen to the voice of reason and provide an open, fair, just and nondiscriminatory business environment for market entities from all countries," she added.

Zhu Keli, founding director of the China Institute of New Economy, said that against the backdrop of a complicated international situation, the restoration of TikTok's services in the US could be regarded as a positive signal, because it not only meets the demands of US users but is also conducive to bolstering openness and cooperation in the global digital economy landscape.

"TikTok should continue to strengthen communication and cooperation with the US government and relevant regulatory authorities to ensure that its business complies with US laws and regulations. Moreover, it needs to continuously improve technological and management capabilities to respond to market changes and challenges from rivals," he said.

Zhu said that while Trump's 50 percent ownership proposal could help address the US government's national security concerns over TikTok, negotiations concerning equity allocation would be complex and sensitive.

"The operation and management of a joint venture will also face challenges such as cultural differences and decision-making efficiency," he added.

Jiang Han, a senior analyst at market consultancy Pangoal, said that TikTok's rapid restoration demonstrates US users' dependence on and demand for TikTok, adding that the platform should reinforce compliance capacity to satisfy regulatory requirements and improve user experience to maintain its competitiveness in the US market.

He said the feasibility of Trump's proposal should be further evaluated and discussed, as more in-depth negotiations and consultations about the equity distribution in a joint venture are needed between the two parties.

Though Trump sought to ban TikTok during his first term, he reversed that stance during his 2024 campaign. He ended up joining the app last year and has grown his following to nearly 15 million users. He has since credited the app for helping him win over young voters.

Trump can now take credit for reviving an app with 170 million users that is especially popular with younger Americans, many of whom spend hours a day on the platform to get news, make money and find entertainment.

Heng Weili in New York and agencies contributed to this story.

Trump: Delays TikTok ban, exits climate treaty

From page 1

"I hereby order the Attorney General not to take any action on behalf of the United States to enforce the Act for 75 days from the date of this order, to permit my Administration an opportunity to determine the appropriate course of action with respect to TikTok," the White House website said in the order.

Other orders include withdrawing from the 2015 Paris Agreement climate treaty and exiting the World Health Organization, which he also did in his first term, and a hiring freeze for federal workers.

Trump also signed "full pardons" for about 1,500 defendants involved in the Jan 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol Building when a joint session of Congress was certifying former president Joe Biden's Electoral College victory.

Trump also signed 78 "rescission"

orders to cancel previous executive actions by Biden.

Security was heavy in the US capital, especially along the streets close to the Capitol, and the Capital One Arena, where the traditional parade down Pennsylvania Avenue past the White House was moved indoors.

Still, the tall-fenced streets were lined up by temporary stands and vendor carts selling Trump's signature MAGA (Make America Great Again) merchandise, from hats and T-shirts to flags and pins, to a large crowd.

Many in the crowd were Trump supporters, who expressed their hope for the development of the bilateral relations with China.

"I'm happy to see that both the Chinese leaders and American leadership are engaged in negotiations with one another. I don't see the reason why friendly relationships

can't continue so long as we respect one another as a sovereign country," Daniel Troy, 23, of Huntington, New York, told China Daily.

"You can understand the interests of the Chinese and not wanting to pay the tariff," he said. "It's going to hurt their companies, so ... once again, the key word is negotiation. As long as the two countries are in dialogue, I think we can eventually get to a place where both peoples of the United States and China are ... we reach a sort of modus vivendi as they say, a way of living."

D.R. Lansford, from Palm Springs, California, donned a hat sporting the words "45-47", indicating both Trump presidencies.

"China and America are the strongest two nations on earth. And why cannot we work together? That's my hope. That's my dream. I believe that will take place," he said at Carmine's DC, one of the downtown bars that hosted watch parties.

Yifan Xu and Mingmei Li in Washington contributed to this story.

Ban: Foreign-owned apps face uncertain future

From page 1

The Chinese government will then sift through that information and threaten to expose any US citizen who might have created or liked a video that supports China, questioned US values, or otherwise wanted to create discord within the country.

Critics have pointed out the weaknesses to such claims, with perhaps the two most important being the hand-over-the-data day might never come and similar data could be gathered about any US citizen who uses apps such as Facebook or X, both US-based entities.

Of course, when fear motivates decisions, rational actions do not often follow.

There is another error worth noting. The US government said that ByteDance could sell the app to a US group and it would continue to operate exactly as it does.

Let's set aside for a moment the fact that ByteDance has consistently said such a sale would never hap-

pen. Instead, let's focus on what attorneys for ByteDance have said. The company would strip away the proprietary software and source code development at the foundation of TikTok before if it were to ever hand over the app to another ownership group. Doing so would mean whatever TikTok is now is not what it would be in the future. Its defining features would change, and not necessarily for the better.

Is the realization of this reality influencing Trump? The answer is likely to come soon enough. But what if it comes too late? Viewed another way, just how valuable would TikTok be if significant numbers of US citizens abandoned it and turned their attention to a different social media platform? Facebook or X? Hardly.

How about Xiaohongshu, another app owned by a Chinese company that received more than 700,000 "TikTok refugees" over past weeks? Congress is certain to thump its chest and claim victory in the com-

ing days, because it has concluded TikTok is diminished — and might be killed off entirely — in the US, but just how much of a victory would it be if its users simply moved to another Chinese-owned app?

Yes, there are lots of unanswered questions and suppositions surrounding what might happen to TikTok in the coming weeks. But there is a domestic reality that cannot be lost. In backing the government and upholding the new law about TikTok, the Supreme Court, intending to or not, has given the federal government wide latitude to make future claims that any foreign-owned app is a threat to national security. The ramifications of that should concern all US people.

The author is department head and an associate professor of the Communication and Organizational Leadership Department at Robert Morris University in Pennsylvania, the United States. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Flame signals 18-day countdown to 9th Asian Winter Games

By ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin
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The flame for the 9th Asian Winter Games was lit Monday at the Sun Island Scenic Area in Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang province, marking the start of an 18-day countdown to the event.

Harbin, which previously hosted the Games in 1996, will hold the event from Feb 7 to 14, leveraging its extensive winter sports facilities and experience from nearly three decades ago.

The tradition of flame collection, an important ritual with roots in the Olympic Games of ancient Greece, represents the inheritance of the Olympic spirit and symbolizes light, peace and unity.

During the ceremony, nine envoys, walking in procession, successfully lit the flame on a torch in front of the Sun Stone, a landmark of the scenic area.

"The flame is collected from the sun," said Wang Zheng, chief director of the ceremony. "The ceremony emphasizes harmony between humans and nature."

Wang said the stage design focused on respecting the natural environment while showcasing Harbin's unique ice and snow culture. An ice sculpture of a rolling mountain surrounding the Sun Stone symbolized the belief that "ice and snow can be treasures".

The nine female envoys, representing youth and responsibility in the new era, were selected from universities across Heilongjiang. They underwent more than a month of training, including lessons on etiquette, physical preparation and operation of the flame collection device, Wang said.

The Games' torch, designed in the shape of a blossoming lilac, stands 735 millimeters tall, with a crown diameter of 115 mm and a grip diameter of 50 mm. It incorporates the colors of China red, lilac purple and snow white, while its combustion chamber features a cutout snowflake pattern.

When ignited, the torch presents a merging effect of ice and fire, symbolizing the passion and brilliance of winter sports. The "surging" design theme embodies the energy of nature, reflecting the vibrancy and passion of the Games.

This year's Games will see the largest representation of Asian countries and regions in history, with 34 national Olympic committees confirming their participation.

A total of 64 medal events across six sports will take place at five ice sports venues in downtown Harbin and eight snow sports venues in Yabuli, a ski resort cluster about 200 kilometers southeast of the city.

Monthlong online safety campaign kicks off

By JIANG CHENGLONG
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The Cyberspace Administration of China announced on Sunday a one-month special campaign to address issues undermining the "online ecosystem", including the spread of false information and promotion of vulgar content, in an effort to foster a "joyous and harmonious" online experience during the upcoming Spring Festival holiday.

The eight-day holiday begins on Jan 28.

The campaign that kicked off on Sunday will focus on handling six key issues, including inciting extreme opposition, fabricating false information, promoting vulgar content, advocating negative culture and infringing on consumer rights, the CAC said in a news release.

Efforts to tackle fabricated information will target online users impersonating delivery workers, couriers and other groups to stage false content. The campaign will also crack down on rumors related to public policies, social issues, Spring Festival travel and emergencies. The use of AI tools to create false images or misleading social topics related to the holiday is also a focus, as such behavior misleads internet users and causes harm, the CAC said.

The campaign will address vulgar content, including exploitative

hype around celebrity gossip, internet celebrity scandals and emotionally damaging rumors. Livestreams promoting vulgarity, self-destructive tendencies, indecent flirtation or harassment of passersby will also face scrutiny.

Online behavior promoting negative cultural practices such as flaunting wealth or waste under the guise of Spring Festival customs will be targeted.

The holiday is a peak period for e-commerce platforms offering promotions. The CAC also highlighted consumer rights concerns. Practices such as differentiated pricing for identical goods through algorithms in sectors such as travel, online shopping and food delivery, as well as misleading commercial promotions during livestreaming sessions, will be monitored.

Key websites and platforms will be required to establish specialized task forces to strengthen content review management. The CAC called for stricter regulation of algorithm-based content recommendations, including hot search lists, trending recommendations, information feeds and comment sections. Platforms are prohibited from using algorithms to promote illegal or harmful content.

Websites and platforms found to have severe issues will face strict penalties, and typical cases of violations will be made public, the CAC said.

Make a wish



Calligraphy teacher Qie Jiawei from Harbin Normal University writes messages and wishes on behalf of visitors on a wall of ice at Harbin Ice and Snow World Park in Heilongjiang province on Sunday. The park has introduced an ice wishing wall activity, encouraging visitors to leave messages under the park's official WeChat account. LIU YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Robot revives revered general

Tourists interact with "robot Guan Gong" at the Taihu Lake Ancient Town Scenic Area in Changxing county, Zhejiang province, on Sunday. Guan Gong, which means "Lord Guan", was an honorary name for Guan Yu, a general from the late Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) who stands as a legendary historical figure greatly admired by Chinese people. A series of celebrations, including dragon and lion dances, high pole acrobatics and intangible cultural heritage displays, were held to entertain visitors in the scenic area. WU ZHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Company developing supersonic aircraft

Ultrafast model that debuts next year expected to fly at speed of 5,000 km/h

By ZHAO LEI in Chengdu
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Private enterprises in China have shown their strong technological and engineering capability by manufacturing big rockets, advanced satellites and powerful drones. Now, one of them is determined to go further: making a superfast suborbital airliner that can tremendously shorten intercontinental travel time.

Lingkong Tianxing Technology, a Beijing-headquartered aerospace company, announced on Monday at a news conference in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan province, that its next-generation supersonic technology demonstrator is under research and development, and is scheduled to make its first test flight in 2026.

Deng Fan, the company's chief engineer, said at the conference that the prototype of the aircraft — called Quantianhou, or Soaring Monkey — will be 7 meters long and weigh 1.5 metric tons. It will use a streamlined aerodynamic design that can effectively reduce air drag and improve flight efficiency.

He said the craft will be propelled by a state-of-the-art ramjet rotor detonation engine, which combines a rotary detonation engine, rotor compressor and ramjet technology.

The engine system, Jindou-400S, is also being researched at



Quantianhou will be nearly five times faster than a conventional jet. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Lingkong Tianxing Technology. The 1.9-meter engine will weigh only 100 kilograms and will be able to create a thrust of at least 4,000 newtons.

"Using this engine will allow Quantianhou to fly at a top speed of Mach 4.2, or about 5,000 kilometers per hour, which means the craft will be almost five times faster than a conventional jetliner," Deng said.

The futuristic craft will be launched by a carrier rocket, which will bring it to an altitude of about 20 km, and it will then continue to fly on its own. Most of its journey will occur in "near space", said the engineer, who declined to disclose how it will land.

Near space is the region of Earth's atmosphere between 20 and 100 kilometers above sea level, encompassing portions of the stratosphere, mesosphere and lower thermosphere. It is above the top altitudes of commercial airliners but below orbiting satellites.

Despite the ultrafast speed,

Deng said passengers on such supersonic aircraft will be completely safe from acceleration effects.

The company's plan has become the latest endeavor by humans to revive the undying pursuit of ultrafast travel, which has long been symbolized by the legendary airliner Concorde.

Concorde, the first supersonic passenger-carrying commercial airplane, was built jointly by aircraft manufacturers in the United Kingdom and France. It was first flown in 1969 and was put into commercial operation in 1976. However, the epochal jetliner did not fit well in the civil aviation industry due to its loud noise, high fares, stringent requirements for airports and environmental impact.

If everything goes according to plan, the prototype for a commercial-use supersonic airliner named Dasheng — or Monkey King, a legendary hero in Chinese mythology — is expected to conduct its maiden flight in 2030. If that becomes reality, Dasheng will revolutionize the global air transportation sector, he added.

"Just imagine making an intercontinental flight within just two to three hours that you would now spend 10 hours or longer on," Deng said.

Internationally, enterprises in the United States and Europe have been racing to design and construct a new generation of supersonic airliners to meet the potential demand of fast intercontinental travel.

Officials to gather feedback on drug quality

By WANG XIAOYU
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The National Healthcare Security Administration announced Monday that it will dispatch a team of government officials to Shanghai to gather feedback on the quality of drugs included in centralized procurement programs.

The move follows concerns raised during Shanghai's annual legislative and political advisory sessions, where political advisers and medical experts questioned the efficacy of generic medications procured through national and regional bulk-buy programs.

Under these programs, pharmaceutical companies bid for large-volume contracts with public hospitals, leading to price cuts ranging from 50 percent to more than 90 percent. Most of the medications involved are domestically produced generics.

While the mechanism has been praised for reducing financial burdens on patients and public health insurance funds, some political advisers have reported that certain drugs — used to manage high blood pressure, treat constipation and act as anesthetics or antibiotics — have not met efficacy expectations or have performed worse than imported alternatives, according to financial news outlet Yicai.com.

The administration said a team including officials from health, industry, information technology and drug regulation agencies will visit Shanghai on Tuesday to collect suggestions on the procurement policy and the quality of selected medications.

The officials will focus on identifying quality and efficacy issues supported by clinical data, such as statistical differences in cure rates, treatment effectiveness and adverse reactions between original drugs and generic versions. Findings will be submitted to drug regulators.

Discussions will also explore measures to ensure the efficacy and safety of drugs procured through the program, including increasing routine inspections of drug manufacturers, publishing drug evaluation results and establishing feedback channels for medical institutions to report comparisons of drug efficacy.

The administration noted Monday that medications purchased through centralized procurement agreements generally make up 60 percent to 80 percent of the total volume required by medical institutions, which are free to choose brands for the remaining portion.

"There is no one-size-fits-all policy prohibiting hospitals from procuring imported, original drugs," the administration said.

It added that companies winning bids have passed drug efficacy assessments and are subject to random inspections. A real-world study assessing the use of bulk-buy drugs in 80 major hospitals is also underway.

Two men convicted of conducting separate deadly attacks executed

By ZHENG CAIXIONG
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Two men convicted of carrying out two separate deadly attacks that killed dozens in Zhuhai, Guangdong province, and Wuxi, Jiangsu province, in November were executed Monday after China's top court approved their death sentences.

The Zhuhai Intermediate People's Court in Guangdong executed Fan Weiqiu, 62, with approval from the Supreme People's Court.

Fan drove a small SUV through a barrier at a sports center in Zhuhai on Nov 11, ramming people exercising at the venue. The incident left 35 people dead and 43 others injured, authorities said, and caused widespread social alarm.

An investigation revealed Fan had been dissatisfied with the division of financial assets in his divorce and vented his personal anger on society.

In December, the Zhuhai Intermediate People's Court sentenced Fan to death and deprived him of political rights for life for endangering

public safety by dangerous means.

Meanwhile, in Jiangsu, the Wuxi Intermediate People's Court carried out the execution of Xu Jiabin, 21, who was convicted of intentional homicide.

On Nov 16 at around 6:30 pm, Xu killed eight people and injured 17 during a stabbing attack at the Wuxi Vocational Institute of Arts and Technology.

Police said Xu, who was supposed to graduate from the school last year, was angry because he failed his exams and was denied graduation. He was also dissatisfied with his internship pay.

Xu was caught at the scene and confessed, police said. The Wuxi court sentenced him to death on Dec 17.

In China, death sentences handed down by lower courts must be reviewed and approved by the Supreme People's Court before being carried out. The executions were conducted under the supervision of prosecutors in Zhuhai and Wuxi.

The Commission for Political and Legal Affairs of the Communist Party of China Central Com-

mittee responded to the executions Monday.

Liang Genlin, a law professor at Peking University, said on the commission's official WeChat account that Fan's and Xu's actions were motivated by personal anger, and they indiscriminately targeted innocent people.

"Their actions were extremely violent and cruel, with severe consequences and serious harm to society," Liang posted.

Liang emphasized the importance of severely punishing serious crimes in accordance with the law, calling such actions a strong deterrent that helps maintain public safety and stability.

"This timely response addresses public concerns, stabilizes safety expectations, and ensures both substantive and procedural justice," the professor said, adding that the approach integrates legal, policy and social outcomes while reinforcing confidence in the justice system.

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CHINA



Technicians inspect the undercarriage of a train at a maintenance base in Jinan, Shandong province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan
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While many Chinese people prepare themselves for the Spring Festival break, teams of maintenance workers across the country are hard at work ensuring the nation's vast train network runs without a hitch over the busy travel period.

Each evening during the travel rush, which officially began on Jan 14, the six tracks at a train maintenance base operated by China Railway Jinan Group Co host a lineup of high-speed trains awaiting thorough examinations after a day's service. The maintenance base in Jinan, Shandong province, is brightly lit, with technicians bustling around to prepare the trains for their upcoming journeys.

"During the Spring Festival travel rush our workload has surged by 25 percent," said Tian Yu, a technician at the maintenance base.

At around 6 pm, a train rolls into the base, signaling the start of the night shift for the technicians.

"Each train undergoes a three-hour inspection by a team of six ground maintenance technicians," said Tian.

"We check critical components such as anti-skid systems, basic braking devices and electrical installations, ensuring that no potential issues go unnoticed," he said.

The technicians' tasks are coordinated through a central control system at the dispatch center, equipped with 12 high-definition screens for real-time monitoring to streamline operations.

Before moving to the maintenance tracks, the trains undergo an initial check by an intelligent fault diagnosis system.

Any issues identified by the intelligent equipment are manually rechecked by maintenance technicians, who then conduct detailed and thorough inspections of the train components to uphold maintenance quality.

Checks underneath

Within the maintenance site, technicians need to venture into a nearly one-meter-deep inspection passageway, where bright lights illuminate

Technicians keep trains running smoothly during travel rush

Jinan maintenance workers face no break this Spring Festival holiday



From left: Technicians inspect the interior of a train carriage at a maintenance base in Jinan, Shandong province. A technician checks the underside of a train at the maintenance base.

the undercarriage of the train.

"Inspecting components demands careful observation and assessment," said Wu Yingqiang, the Party secretary of the maintenance base. "When it comes to safety, there are no shortcuts, and any hint of negligence is unacceptable," said Wu.

Under auxiliary work platforms situated on each side of inspection passageways, heating devices are installed, easily distinguishable due to the temperature contrast with the ground.

This arrangement plays a critical role in maintaining the trains, particularly during the winter season when they traverse snow-prone cities like Yantai and Weihai in the eastern region of Shandong province.

In these areas, snow can accumulate beneath the trains due to strong air currents, gradually turning into ice as temperatures fall.

This ice can adhere to components such as brake equipment beneath the train. Prior to the routine inspection, a de-icing procedure is essential to thaw the snow and ice buildup, enabling a thorough underside examination.

"In the past, de-icing was a labor-intensive process that involved manual labor using small hammers. It required a delicate touch — too gentle was ineffective, while excessive force posed a risk of damaging the components," said technician Tian.

A team of four people used to spend nearly two hours to complete the de-icing work for a train with eight carriages, he said.

But now, with the introduction

of heating devices, the ice melts into water within a mere 20 minutes, streamlining the process and reducing the labor intensity significantly.

Interior inspection

Inspecting the interiors of train carriages also poses challenges for technicians.

"I need to examine and test numerous components, including those in the restroom, across a minimum of eight carriages," said 24-year-old technician Cheng Yawen.

During the Spring Festival travel rush, the frequent use of electronic devices by passengers can lead to charging sockets loosening. In one carriage that equips all its 56 seats with a charging socket, Cheng uses testing equipment to evaluate each socket's functionality and power supply.

"While assessing the sockets, we also inspect the stability of the seats, the pedals and the window sealing strips," said Cheng.

Due to the nature of overnight operations, physical demands and the diverse range of tasks required, maintenance technicians are predominantly male, with only 9.5 percent of the workforce being female. Cheng, one of the few females in her team, upholds stringent standards in her work.

During an inspection of the restroom, Cheng noticed that the toilet's flush area extended beyond the basin. Taking immediate action, she knelt down and adjusted the angle of the nozzle until the issue was rectified.

"Being a train technician is in no way easy, and I have to overcome numerous challenges to make myself qualified for this job," she said.

To become a maintenance technician, each worker must first acquire a full qualification through a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical assessments. They then need to meet the specified on-duty standards for a particular operation before being authorized to carry it out.

Currently, the team in Jinan has established "on-duty standards" for 37 crucial operations across five maintenance-related categories, encompassing tasks such as de-icing and brake checks.

Regular reviews of qualifications are conducted to ensure that technicians possess the requisite knowledge and skills.

"If a technician has not performed a specific operation within a year, their qualification will be revoked," Party secretary Wu said, underscoring the importance of ongoing proficiency and engagement in the maintenance tasks.

In order to ensure a safe and comfortable travel experience for passengers, a technician accompanies the train while it's in service, conducting inspections every three hours across its eight carriages.

They focus on facilities such as distribution cabinets, faucets and carriage doors, addressing any anomalies promptly. They also adjust carriage temperatures based on passengers' needs.

"To accommodate the high volume of luggage during the Spring Festival travel rush, we ensure that the luggage racks are secure and stable to meet passengers' storage needs," technician Tang Shaokun said.

During the winter season, characterized by frequent inclement weather like rain and snow, train operations are often impacted, resulting in delays to the maintenance schedule. At times, multiple trains may return for inspection simultaneously, leading to a concentration of maintenance tasks.

"In such cases, we need to rearrange the maintenance plans based on train schedules and ensure timely operations," said Wu.

"Our maintenance technicians rely on their expertise to swiftly address any unexpected issues, guaranteeing the safety and comfort of millions of passengers," he said.

Work behind the scenes ensures safe water flow

By ZHAO RUIXUE

As an important railway hub in Shandong province, Jinan West Station regularly experiences substantial influxes in travelers, particularly during peak periods like the Spring Festival travel rush.

Behind a key part of the station's efficient operations are the Jixi Hydropower Section pipeline workers, who inspect the station's water supply pipelines and facilities to ensure the passengers' access to clean water.

On Jan 8, a team of five pipeline workers carried out routine checks on valve equipment. During their work they discovered a leaking valve in the main water supply pipeline to the station, necessitating immediate replacement.

To prevent disruptions to the reg-

ular train services, they waited until the final train service of the night had been completed before commencing the repair work.

"The area around the well is slippery and wet. Everyone must maintain a secure footing for personal and operational safety," said team leader Zhao Liming.

At midnight, the workers, dressed in heavy-duty gear and equipped with headlamps, began their tasks.

Their duties included shutting off the water supply station-wide, depressurizing the system, draining the water, removing the old valve and installing the new valve — a process that took approximately four hours.

After collectively lifting the heavy well cover, they conducted ventilation tests to ensure the air quality

inside the well before descending.

Within the confined space of the well, with water levels reaching 20-30 centimeters deep, the workers loosened the bolts connecting the valve to the pipeline to release water for depressurization.

When the valve suddenly released, water gushed out, prompting a swift evacuation from the well. Seated on the ground, despite the cold night, the workers' faces were glistening with sweat.

They used two water pumps to drain the well, revealing the underground pipeline after about 50 minutes of pumping.

Zhao led two workers back into the well where they attached a hoist hook to the old valve to lift it out.

They then positioned the new valve, weighing over 150 kilograms, into its designated spot, securing

each bolt to ensure a tight connection with the pipeline.

Around four hours later, their tasks were completed.

In addition to ensuring water supply for passenger trains, the pipeline workers also oversee the maintenance of water supply pipelines for freight trains.

Since 1989, Zhao has been dedicated to water supply operations at the Jixi Hydropower Section, and has witnessed the evolution of this field.

"In the early years, we only had rubber shoes for underwater work. Now, we have full-body overalls for such operations," said Zhao.

"Areas once monitored manually now can be monitored by real-time surveillance," he said.

With technological advancements, steam locomotives gave way



Pipeline workers of Jixi Hydropower Section replace a leaking valve in the main water supply pipeline.

to electric locomotives and high-speed trains, prompting upgrades in water supply equipment.

Over his 35-year career, Zhao has personally witnessed the shift from manually operating water cranes for steam locomotives to overseeing

advanced automatic water supply systems.

"Water supply systems have been modernized, incorporating automatic disinfection systems, leak detectors and other cutting-edge equipment," said Zhao.

BUSINESS

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PBOC lending facility helps stabilize mkt

Over 300 listcos have announced plans to use loans for share buybacks

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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The extended capacity of the central bank to finance listed companies' share buybacks and shareholding increases via a lending facility will help to stabilize the stock market and facilitate companies' high-quality development, said experts.

Their comments were in response to a statement released on Sunday by the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, saying that the lending facility for share buybacks and shareholding increases introduced three months ago should be better used to stabilize the capital market.

The decision was reached during a recent symposium jointly held by the PBOC and the China Securities Regulatory Commission, the country's top securities watchdog.

The central bank tool was implemented on Oct 18, providing a total of 300 billion yuan (\$41 billion) of loans to 21 commercial banks for one year at an interest rate of 1.75 percent. These loans are used to fund share buybacks of listed companies or major shareholders. Banks can decide if they should issue such loans.

According to the PBOC's Sunday statement, major revisions have been made to the three-month-old tool. The self-funding ratio for companies' share buybacks has been lowered to 10 percent. In other words, financial institutions can fund up to 90 percent of the listed companies' share repurchases. The maximum loan term has been extended to three years to encourage banks to use the facility.

Over the past three months, more than 300 listed companies have announced plans to use bank loans for share buybacks and shareholding increases, with companies valued at over 10 billion yuan accounting for more than 40 percent of the total, the statement said.

According to market tracker Wind Info, companies from the sectors of biomedicine, electronics, transportation and chemicals made up the bulk of those applying for the lending facility. Integrated pork industry chain company Muyuan Foods Co Ltd has been granted the largest — a 2.4 billion yuan loan for share buybacks — followed by 1.75 billion yuan issued for video surveillance firm Hangzhou Hikvision Digital Technology, and 1.36 billion yuan to COSCO Shipping Energy Transportation Co Ltd for its shareholding increase.

The lending tool has contributed to market stability and boosted investor confidence, according to the PBOC statement.

The benchmark Shanghai Composite Index finished up 0.08 percent on Monday while the Shenzhen Component Index closed 0.94 percent higher. The tech-heavy ChiNext in Shenzhen jumped 1.81 percent. Combined trading value on the Shanghai and Shenzhen exchanges approached 1.2 trillion yuan.

Hu Qimu, deputy director of the strategic emerging industry research center of Tsinghua University, said that the lending facility has played an important role in further stimulating market vitality, improving companies' competitiveness and accelerating industry advancement. It has also consolidated ties between the capital market and the real economy, Hu said.

Data from Wind Info showed that a total of 2,156 A-share companies conducted share repurchases in 2024, up 57.95 percent from a year earlier. The combined repurchase value spiked 81.68 percent year-on-year to 165.9 billion yuan.

Share buybacks and shareholding increases are globally recognized methods for listed companies to manage their valuations. Listed companies actively engaged in market value management are typically high-quality firms with solid operational performance and confident management teams, said the PBOC's Sunday statement.

UBS Securities China equity strategist Meng Lei said returns to shareholders such as share buybacks and dividend payments, indicators regarding corporate governance and prospects of sustained growth are the major criteria for long-term investors to choose their investment targets.

It can be seen that China's top regulators have been advancing reforms in the above three aspects, placing more emphasis on companies' market value management and improving companies' quality, he said.

On the other hand, the A-share market has been undergoing a rebalancing between financing and investment. The size of initial public offerings and refinancing moves have been contracting while stock repurchases and dividend payments have been surging rapidly over the past few years. The investment function of the stock market has been strengthening. This is of much importance to build the stock market into a reservoir for people's wealth, Meng said.



Shoppers check out smartphones at a store in Zaozhuang, Shandong province. As part of support for consumer goods trade-ins this year, subsidies for digital devices will be extended to smartphones and tablets. SUN ZHONGZHE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Special bonds to support consumer goods purchases, stimulate economy

By WANG KEJU
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China will significantly increase the scale of ultralong special treasury bonds to provide greater support for consumer goods trade-ins this year, extending the subsidies to digital devices such as smartphones, tablets and smart wearables to drive economic growth through consumption-boosting initiatives, analysts said.

While the trade-in policies centered on traditional big-ticket items like automobiles and household appliances last year, the latest decision to include digital products signals the country's determination to boost demand in the face of rising global uncertainties, they added.

The National Development and Reform Commission, the country's top economic regulator, said earlier this month that the country will provide consumers with a 15 percent discount on the purchase of such digital gadgets not exceeding 6,000 yuan (\$818.5), with a 500 yuan subsidy cap per item.

The subsidy for digital products will be open to all eligible brands and models, said Li Gang, an official with the Ministry of Commerce, adding that the country will allow equal participation from a diverse range of enterprises, including both online and offline

players, as well as companies of various ownerships and sizes.

Digital devices have become essential tools for communication, entertainment and productivity in modern society. By incentivizing their replacement and upgrading, the government aims to directly stimulate consumer willingness to buy, said Zhu Keli, founding director of the China Institute of New Economy.

Last year, Jiangsu and Guizhou provinces piloted the trade-in program for smartphone purchases, which proved effective in stimulating consumer appetite for device upgrades and encouraging the adoption of higher-priced models, Zhu said.

As the smartphone replacement cycle that began at the end of 2023 gradually gains momentum, International Data Corp, a global market research company, foresees a sustained growth trajectory for China's smartphone market in the coming years, buoyed by the anticipated introduction of government subsidies.

China's smartphone shipments are projected to reach 289 million units by 2025, representing a 1.6 percent year-on-year increase, with the market expected to maintain a stable growth trajectory in the following years, according to a report by IDC.

In addition, the trade-ins can

create a virtuous cycle, where increased consumer demand accelerates product turnover and spurs enterprises to invest in innovation, technological advancement, and supply chain optimization. This can lead to a more dynamic and competitive digital products market, Zhu said.

Honor, a major Chinese phone brand, told China Daily that enterprises in relevant sectors will be able to reap the benefits of trade-in initiatives and fully leverage China's vast consumer market, thereby sustaining the ongoing recovery and driving the next phase of growth in the domestic smartphone market.

It is also providing the impetus for businesses to invest in technological breakthroughs and product differentiation. This can strengthen their long-term competitiveness and market positioning, Honor said.

The funds allocated to support the consumer goods trade-in initiatives are expected to double by the end of 2025, reaching 300 billion yuan, said Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International.

This will drive some 750 billion yuan in new consumption, equivalent to a 1.5 percentage point acceleration in the year-on-year growth rate of total retail sales of consumer goods in 2025, Wang added.

Briefly

Yuan strengthens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, strengthened 3 pips to 7.1886 against the US dollar on Monday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. In China's spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2

percent from the central parity rate each trading day.

Loan prime rates remain unchanged

China's one-year loan prime rate, a market-based benchmark lending rate, came in at 3.1 percent on Monday, unchanged from the previous month. The over-five-year

LPR, on which many lenders base their mortgage rates, also remained unchanged from the previous reading of 3.6 percent, according to the National Interbank Funding Center. The LPR, released once a month, is a key benchmark for loan interest rate pricing.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Standard Chartered a super-connector

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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Positioning itself as a super connector between China and the world's most dynamic markets, UK-based banking group Standard Chartered is committed to supporting China's high-quality development by introducing multinational corporations to the country and assisting Chinese enterprises in exploring overseas business opportunities, said the group's chairman.

"China is the largest generator of income for the Standard Chartered network and it has continued to be so for the last seven years consecutively. So I think that tells you how important China is to the business of Standard Chartered," said Jose Vinals, group chairman of Standard Chartered during an exclusive interview with China Daily.

According to Vinals, Standard

Chartered started operations as early as 167 years ago. So far, China is the banking group's most important market and the company plays a role as a super connector when the global economy is getting fragmented.

"We see a lot of opportunities in both bringing international companies to do business in China, and bringing international investors to business in China ... But at the same time, we bring China to the world, helping Chinese companies further their connectivity and international operations," said Vinals.

At times when there are threats of fragmenting the global trade investment system, a super connector such as Standard Chartered has great value for both clients and markets, he explained.

In Vinals' view, Standard Chartered holds firm confidence toward China's economic outlook.

"We are very much encouraged by the conclusions from the third plenum (of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee), regarding the continuation of reforms and opening-up. I think that the continuing opening-up of China is fundamental for China, is fundamental for its economic prospects over the medium term and the long term. And it's also extremely important for the world," Vinals said.

China's gross domestic product expanded by 5 percent in 2024 to reach 134.9 trillion yuan (\$18.44 trillion), which meets the country's preset annual growth target of around 5 percent, data published by the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Friday.

"China has been the largest driver of growth for the world economy, as it has contributed about 30 percent of the world's economic growth in the past five



The booth of Standard Chartered during an expo in Shanghai. HU XUEBAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

years," said Kang Yi, head of the NBS, during a State Council Information Office news conference in late December.

"Beyond that, let me say, that we are a very strong participant in the Belt and Road Initiative and 75 percent of our markets overlap

with the Belt and Road markets. We have participated in supporting (more than) 700 Belt and Road projects, high-quality projects over the last five years with the total value of these projects of more than \$127 billion," Vinals said.

China to increase data security market size

By FAN FEIFEI
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China's latest move to improve security governance for data circulation is expected to better fully unleash the value of data elements, boost the high-quality development of the data industry and bring about more business opportunities for data security enterprises, experts said.

Highlighting the fact that data has become a new type of production factor, the development of the data industry is crucial for deepening reform related to the market-oriented allocation of data elements, building a digital economy with data as the key element and advancing the construction of a "Digital China", they added.

Their comments came as the National Development and Reform Commission, the National Data Administration and four other government departments recently issued a guideline aimed at elevating data security governance capabilities and bolstering the compliant and efficient circulation and utilization of data elements.

The guideline said that by 2027, a data circulation security governance system with clear rules, prosperous industry and multi-party coordination will be established, the data compliance and efficient circulation mechanism will be further improved and governance efficiency will be significantly enhanced.

It noted that enterprises and public institutions are encouraged to establish the position of chief data officers to strengthen data governance, development and utilization. Data processors should identify and declare important data in accordance with relevant regulations, and accept supervision and inspection by regulatory authorities based on the law, according to the guideline.

"Data plays a vital role in realizing the innovative allocation of production factors, promoting the efficient coordination of industrial and supply chains, and improving total factor productivity," said Zhao Gang, head of CIO Manage, a Beijing-based digital economy market consultancy.

He stressed the need to innovate in data security products and services, and accelerate the building of data infrastructure, which serves as a foundation for the efficient, secure and reliable circulation of data.

"The guideline clarifies the security governance rules for data circulation, providing a solid institutional guarantee for the market-oriented circulation of data elements. It will help standardize the data circulation market and prevent risks of data abuse by stipulating different rules concerning data circulation, including enterprise data, public data and personal information," said Chen Xiaohua, director of China Mobile Communications Association's Blockchain and Data Elements Professional Committee.

Statistics from the National Data Administration show that China's total data output reached 32.85 zettabytes in 2023, up 22.4 percent year-on-year, while the added value of core digital economy industries accounted for 10 percent of GDP.

The guideline also stated that more efforts will be made to crack down on industries that illegally obtain, sell or provide data, strengthen the protection of sensitive personal information and restrict the use of personal information beyond the scope of authorization.

Yuan Shuai, deputy secretary-general of Z-Park Internet of Things Industry Alliance, said with the continuous development of the digital economy, digital security technology will play a crucial role in various links covering data sharing, transaction and storage, and improving the security and traceability of data circulation.

Meanwhile, the demand for data security technology will continue to grow, which will bring about immense opportunities and development space for enterprises engaged in data security technology research, development and application, driven by technological advancement and expansion of application scenarios, Yuan added.

BUSINESS

ACWA Power taps into China's renewables sector

Saudi energy giant secures investment agreements for 1 GW of clean projects

By ZHENG XIN
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ACWA Power, a Riyadh, Saudi Arabia-based energy and water desalination giant, is set to expand its presence in China's burgeoning renewable energy market by securing investment agreements for over 1 gigawatt of renewable energy projects across multiple provinces.

As a formal entry into China's renewable energy market, the company has partnered with two of China's major renewable energy developers, Sungrow Renewables and Mingyang Smart Energy, to jointly develop and invest in solar and wind projects that will contribute to China's ambitious decarbonization targets, said the company.

Marco Arcelli, CEO of ACWA Power, said he believes the agreement is a significant step for ACWA Power in China, establishing operational presence in the renewable energy and water desalination sectors, and demonstrating its commitment to the market.

"We are excited to play a key role in China's clean energy and water transition, working alongside our Chinese partners to achieve shared sustainability goals," Arcelli said.

"We are not just investing in renewable energy projects but in Chinese expertise and building long-term relationships within the country."

Industry experts said the movement signals the company's ambition to capture a larger share of China's green energy transition.

Global energy companies are increasingly focusing on expanding their presence in China due to the country's rapid development of new energy technologies and its commitment to green energy transformation, said Wang Lining, director of

the oil market department under the economics and technology research institute of China National Petroleum Corp.

"China's ambitious goals for carbon neutrality and its significant investments in renewable energy infrastructure, such as solar, wind and electric vehicles, present an attractive opportunity for international players," he said. "By tapping into China's burgeoning green energy sector, global energy companies can not only diversify their portfolios, but also gain access to the world's largest energy market, positioning themselves at the forefront of the global energy transition."

According to ACWA Power, the company's first agreement with Sungrow Renewables will see the development of a 132-megawatt solar photovoltaic portfolio in Guangdong province, while the second agreement with Mingyang Smart Energy established the foundation for both parties to jointly develop and invest in China's wind energy assets, with a starting portfolio of 200 MW.

The combined investment for the two portfolios amounts to \$312 million. These projects are part of an initial batch that will gradually expand to over 1 GW capacity, solidifying ACWA Power's presence in China's renewable energy sector, it said.

"Our entry into China's renewable energy markets is a significant stride toward our global vision of a sustainable future," said Mohammad Abunayyan, founder and chairman of ACWA Power.

"Ultimately, our growth strategy is more than just adding megawatts; it's about building enduring partnerships that accelerate the global energy transition and contribute to a cleaner, more prosperous world for future generations."



A visitor checks out Siemens Healthineers medical equipment during the seventh China International Import Expo in Shanghai in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Siemens Healthineers breaks ground on major base

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai
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Siemens Healthineers broke ground on a new research, development and manufacturing base in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, on Thursday, with an investment exceeding 1 billion yuan (\$136.66 million).

Operations at the site, which cover a land area of 63,000 square meters with 98,000 square meters of floor space, is expected to kick off by 2027, the company said.

The innovative facility will research, develop and manufacture angiography devices and key components of MR (magnetic resonance) systems, including the DryCool superconducting magnet, a newly released blockbuster by Siemens Healthineers globally.

Upon completion, the new facility will run in conjunction with the existing base in Shenzhen, which was established in 2002, to achieve synergy. Their combined size is projected to triple from what it is today.

Situated in Shenzhen's Xili Lake International Science and Education City, the new site is positioned to build on the city's innovation resources and infrastructure to scale up industry-academia collaboration across the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and shape a more vibrant local innovation ecosystem, said the company.

"China has always been a vital source of growth and innovation for Siemens Healthineers. We'll continue to apply our global resources and local advantages to develop an innovative healthcare ecosystem in China and create new opportunities for collaboration," said Elisabeth Staudinger, member of Siemens Healthineers' managing board.

Referring to China's key focuses of work regarding foreign investment this year, Li Yongsha, an official with the Ministry of Commerce, said on Wednesday that the ministry will steadily promote the opening-up of the services industry, especially in the sectors of telecommunications, healthcare and education.

"We'll also revise the Catalogue of Encouraged Industries for Foreign Investment to enhance the attractiveness of investment policies," Li said.

Siemens Healthineers' confidence in the China market has never wavered since entering the market three decades ago, and the new groundbreaking underscores the company's commitment to deepening localization, said Jerry Wang, president of Siemens Healthineers Greater China and a member of Siemens Healthineers' leadership committee.

Accelerated aging and unmet medical needs, such as room for improvement in the number of doctors as well as MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) and CT (computed tomography) machines per capita, in the country were among the factors that drove the company to invest more in China, Wang said.

According to a report on the Chinese medical MRI equipment market by market observer CN Healthcare, the pieces of such

equipment owned per 1 million people in China was 12.6 in 2020, roughly one-fifth of that in Japan and one-third of that in the United States.

Siemens Healthineers' current Shenzhen base is the company's only global facility with a complete MRI value chain and the sole R&D and production site for angiography systems outside Germany. It has shipped over 9,000 units of medical devices, with a localization rate exceeding 80 percent.

In terms of R&D, it has launched multiple innovative products that were groundbreaking in China and the world. Its latest MR platform — MAGNETOM Free — has achieved multi-dimensional technological innovations.

In terms of production, the Shenzhen base locally manufactures Siemens Healthineers' full range of MRI systems, as well as floor-mounted, ceiling-mounted and robotic angiography systems, while continuously introducing global leading technologies to China.

Xiong'an becomes magnet for new biz

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang
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Xiong'an New Area in Hebei province has become a sought-after destination for running a business as authorities in the area are diligently working to streamline tedious license procedures.

Leading coffee chain operator Starbucks recently obtained a new business license and food business operation permit for opening an outlet in the new area, situated

about 100 kilometers southwest of downtown Beijing.

"With efforts in the building of a cross-regional model of joint approval and issuance for business licenses and permits, we didn't need to go to Xiong'an to apply for the licenses. We needed to simply submit the required materials online, after which we successfully obtained the two necessary licenses in Beijing," said Kang Biwei, a senior manager for government affairs and social impact at Beijing Starbucks Coffee Co.

Kang said the innovative policy has simplified many complex procedures and reduced costs for the company.

According to Zhai Yujia, deputy head of the market entity admission department of the area's business environment bureau, this was the first successful attempt by the area to explore such a cross-regional model.

In May, the bureau signed a memorandum on this matter with related bureaus in the Beijing Economic-Technological Development Area and

Tianjin Economic-Technological Development Area, aiming to pioneer pilot initiatives in collaborative business access and operation approval.

"Our goal is to effectively shorten the time and distance for businesses, minimize their costs, and make it more convenient and efficient for them to conduct business and entrepreneurship in Xiong'an," Zhai told China Daily.

In the past, business entities were required to make at least one round-trip to handle these applications, she added.

Xiong'an has introduced 11 measures to provide strong support for the coordinated develop-

ment of market entities in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, including joint reviews and collaborative arrangements with Beijing and Tianjin by enhancing data sharing, Zhai said.

Xiong'an New Area was established in 2017 to advance a national strategy of coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. It shoulders part of the functions that are not essential to Beijing's role as the nation's capital.

Various companies from Beijing spanning different business areas have started operating in Xiong'an, as the modern city is rapidly

emerging as a hub for innovation and entrepreneurship.

To provide better government services to companies and business entities, the area has concentrated on service optimization and innovation promotion in recent years, continuously intensifying efforts in reforming government services as well as innovation.

Notably, it has successfully enabled 3,500 items for remote processing, with 192 matters accessible for local processing.

"We will gradually expand the pilot scope to encompass various types of business entities in the future," Zhai said.

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国际爱护动物基金会

AD

华北豹
North China leopard

**Between heaven and earth,
together with other sentient beings, I live.**

— Zhuangzi, philosopher, late fourth century BC

天地与我并生，而万物与我为一

——《庄子·齐物论》

BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

County more than diamond in the rough

Innovation helps Zhecheng become numero uno in rapidly growing gem industry

By LIU WEIFENG
and CHENG YU in Zhecheng, Henan

Four decades ago, Zhecheng, an agricultural county in Central China's Henan province, was mainly known for its chili peppers and beef cattle.

Today, by churning out an annual production of 6 billion carats of diamond single crystal, 15 billion carats of diamond micro-powder, and more than 10 million carats of lab-grown gems, the county now dazzles as the "diamond capital of China".

Synthetic diamonds, also known as lab-grown or man-made diamonds, are created in controlled laboratory conditions rather than formed naturally. The sector is mainly divided into consumer-grade diamonds and industrial diamonds that include diamond micro-powder and single crystal.

In 2023, China produced over 70 percent of the world's synthetic diamonds, totaling 22 million carats, and Zhecheng was responsible for nearly half of that glittering output. Last year, its share further increased to about 60 percent.

How did a once modest farming county emerge as a powerhouse in the global superhard materials industry — once dominated by giants from the United States and Russia?

Sun Ruomei, Party secretary and director of the management committee of Zhecheng High-Tech Zone, said that the growth of Zhecheng's diamond industry doesn't represent "Rome built in a day".

"Years of unwavering support from pioneering enterprises, visionary policymaking from the county government, and a relentless drive for innovation and digitalization from the younger generation are the reasons," Sun said.

The story began in the 1960s, when China relied heavily on imported diamonds to drive industrial development. Determined to chart its own path, the county embarked on an ambitious quest to produce synthetic diamonds, with Henan emerging as a pivotal player in this high-stakes undertaking.

After years of trials and setbacks, China successfully created its first synthetic diamond in 1963, becoming the fifth country to achieve this technological feat after the US, the former Soviet Union, and others.

But Henan didn't stop there, and designed a groundbreaking six-sided top press that turned soft graphite into glittering diamonds with astonishing efficiency — 20 times faster than two-sided presses used abroad.

The presses not only accelerated production, but also laid the foundation for a revolution in the global superhard materials industry.

Yet these just represented the first step, and scaling up mass production became a game-changer. One of the first to seize the opportunity was Wang Zhanxi, a 70-year-old worker from Zhecheng. He founded the county's first diamond tool factory, aiming to not just produce diamonds, but also to churn them out at scale.

Wang said that technology thrives only with willing markets. Thus, in his early years of enterprise, he often braved frigid winters to promote diamond micro-powder at trade fairs in Beijing to



A customer checks out lab-grown diamond jewelry at a store in Zhecheng, Henan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



expand the market.

"Wherever there was diamond production, the Zhecheng people were there buying raw materials. Wherever there was a diamond fair, the Zhecheng people were there promoting micro-powder," he recalled.

Thanks to Wang and a determined team of Zhecheng entrepreneurs, the county has grown to become the mecca of China's burgeoning superhard materials industry, producing everything from industrial diamonds to lab-grown gems that dazzle in luxury jewelry store displays.

Today, Zhecheng boasts a 12-square-kilometer industrial cluster that links upstream suppliers with downstream manufacturers in the superhard materials industry. It has also created a seamless ecosystem that has drawn over 120 diamond-related enterprises, including two national-level little giant companies celebrated for their innovation and market dominance.

Among the two little giants companies is Huifeng Diamond. Once a humble family workshop, it has evolved into the nation's largest producer of diamond micro-powder, churning out an astonishing 3 billion carats annually.

At Huifeng's ultramodern factory,

the hum of 300 sorting machines and 30 high-speed centrifuges has replaced the din of manual labor.

Workers are a rare sight, thanks to digitalization that governs every stage of the production process. From sourcing raw materials to shipping out finished products, every process is tracked in real time, ensuring precision and efficiency.

"This new equipment is a game-changer," said Bao Siwei, Huifeng's deputy general manager. "What used to require hours of manual work is now fully automated. Our efficiency and quality have skyrocketed."

Huifeng's crowning achievement is the industrial-scale production of 50-nanometer diamond micro-powder — a feat that places it firmly on the global stage. "It's this innovation that cements our position in the

international market," Bao said.

From a modest workshop to a technological powerhouse, Huifeng Diamond exemplifies how digitalization and technological innovation have contributed to Zhecheng's rise as a global leader in the superhard materials industry.

In fact, dating back to 2006, Zhecheng county established an industrial park with support infrastructure to focus on the diamond industry and attracted diamond-related enterprises into the park. In 2009, the county upgraded the industrial park into an industrial cluster zone and established Zhecheng's superhard materials production base.

Sun, from the management committee of Zhecheng High-Tech Zone, said that these initiatives further integrated diamond industry

mass production of 1 to 30-carat diamonds and has exported them to the US, India and elsewhere.

"What's even more exciting is that lab-grown diamonds, with their properties like high thermal conductivity and high energy storage, are expected to drive the next major revolution in the semiconductor industry. We are also working on such technologies," he said.

To make it simple, Chen envisions a future where diamonds are no longer confined to sparkling necklaces, but are also integrated into space stations, cutting-edge semiconductors and lifesaving medical devices — transforming industries and paving the way for a new technological era.

As Zhecheng's superhard materials made sparkling progress, their influence now extends far beyond the county.

Henan, as a whole, now produces more than 80 percent of the world's synthetic diamonds, and hosts the only national-level superhard materials base in China, with its ecosystem spanning research institutes, universities and leading enterprises.

According to Cognitive Market Research, China's superhard materials industry has experienced significant growth, solidifying its position as a global leader in this sector. The market size is estimated to be \$539.77 million this year.

Wang Qingsheng, honorary chairman of the cultured diamonds branch of the Gems and Jewelry Trade Association of China, said: "It's not just about quantity, as Henan has achieved a dominant position in quality and innovation in terms of superhard materials. Henan has contributed the most complete industrial chain of superhard materials to the world."

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Export controls on superhard materials of great significance

By LIU WEIFENG
and CHENG YU in Zhecheng, Henan

China's Ministry of Commerce announced in December new export restrictions targeting dual-use materials, including superhard materials to the United States, four months after Beijing placed restrictions on six-sided top presses, a key technology used in the manufacture of synthetic diamonds.

Industry experts believe that the latest round of export controls is

expected to secure strategic resources and protect national security, so as to better safeguard China's place at the forefront of technological innovation.

"Implementing export controls on superhard material-related products is of great significance," said Sun Zhaoda, secretary-general of the superhard materials branch of the China Machine Tool & Tool Builders' Association.

Sun said superhard materials include synthetic diamonds, cubic boron nitride and composite mate-

rials made primarily from these two substances. The upstream of superhard materials includes raw materials, auxiliary materials and specialized equipment, like six-sided top presses.

"Export controls of superhard materials and related products are important to promoting the rational use of these products and technologies in various fields, especially in ensuring peaceful applications, which is in line with international practices," Sun said.

According to the association, Chi-

na's industrial output of superhard materials has reached the highest level worldwide. The production of abrasive-grade synthetic diamonds has surpassed 20 billion carats, accounting for over 95 percent of the global market.

Along with that, nearly all of the specialized manufacturing equipment, such as six-sided top presses, is supplied by China. Sun said the country has become "the largest exporter of both upstream and downstream superhard materials".

"China's leadership in super-

hard materials is a result of its massive investment in research and development, as well as production," said Liu Jianguo, an expert in material sciences at Tsinghua University.

"This gives the country a competitive edge that many others cannot match. These materials are crucial for high-tech industries, and China's production could reshape global supply chains for the years to come," Liu said.

Alongside these export control measures, another notable development has been the dramatic price plunge in consumer-grade synthetic diamonds.

Since December, stocks related to

consumer-grade synthetic diamonds have seen significant movement, with the price of a one-carat diamond of this category dropping to as low as 3,000 yuan — down 80 percent.

Simultaneously, global diamond giant De Beers, which has long been a dominant force in the sector, said in December that it decided to lower prices of its own products, signaling a broader trend in the diamond market.

The sudden drop in prices is a reflection of the industry's maturation as technology improves and production costs fall, especially from Chinese manufacturers, industry experts said.

WORLD

Truce holding in Gaza amid rebuilding bid

By CUI HAIPEI in Dubai, UAE and MIKE GU in Hong Kong

Israel released 90 Palestinian prisoners on Monday after Hamas handed over three Israeli hostages, completing the first exchange of a truce aimed at pausing 15 months of conflict in Gaza.

The move was hailed by the United Nations, which is urging more much-needed aid to the devastated enclave.

The three female hostages released on Sunday were reunited with their families and will remain in hospital for several days — all in stable conditions, The Times of Israel reported.

Hours later, in the West Bank, the released Palestinian prisoners — 69 women and 21 teenage boys — left Ofer Prison on buses at around 1 a.m. with crowds celebrating their arrival in the nearby town of Beitunia.

As the cease-fire took effect on Sunday morning, thousands of displaced Palestinians, carrying tents, clothes and personal belongings, set off across the Gaza Strip to return home.

In Deir al-Balah central Gaza, Umm Hasan al-Buzom, 70, said she would even "crawl my way back home" if needed. "But we can't return for fear that the (Israeli) occupation forces might shoot at us."

The initial 42-day truce, brokered by Qatar, Egypt and the United States, calls for fighting to stop, aid to be sent into Gaza and 33 of the nearly 100 remaining hostages to go free over the six-week first phase in return for nearly 2,000 Palestinians in Israeli custody. It intends to pave the way for a permanent end to the conflict, but a second phase has yet to be finalized.

Fireworks were launched in celebration as buses carrying the 90 freed Palestinians arrived in Ramallah on the West Bank, where thousands of people were waving the Palestinian flags and filming the scenes on their phones.

Ahmed Abu Ayham, a 40-year-old from Gaza City, said that while the cease-fire may have spared lives, the losses and destruction made it no time for celebration. "We are in pain, deep pain and it is time to hug one another and cry," he said.

There is still no detailed plan in place to govern Gaza after the conflict, much less to rebuild it.

More than 47,000 Palestinians have

since been killed in Israeli attacks. Nearly the entire 2.3 million population of Gaza is homeless. About 400 Israeli soldiers have also died.

China welcomes the Gaza cease-fire agreement coming into effect, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said at a regular news briefing on Monday.

"We hope that the agreement will be fully and continuously implemented, and that a comprehensive and permanent cease-fire in Gaza will be achieved," she said.

"China will continue to work with the international community to promote peace and stability in the Middle East."

Removing obstacles

In a statement, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the cease-fire and hostage release.

"We stand ready to support this implementation and scale up the delivery of sustained humanitarian relief to the countless Palestinians who continue to suffer. It is imperative that this cease-fire removes the significant security and political obstacles to delivering aid," he said.

Until the truce, Israel had complete control over the volume and nature of aid allowed into Gaza.

The UN has said that reconstruction could take more than 350 years if Gaza remains under Israeli blockade.

Using satellite data, it estimated last month that 69 percent of Gazan structures had been damaged or destroyed, including more than 245,000 homes. With more than 100 trucks working full-time, it would take 15 years just to clear the rubble away.

Meanwhile, more than 630 trucks transporting humanitarian supplies entered the Gaza Strip on Sunday, with at least 300 of them traveling to the territory's besieged and bombed north, said Tom Fletcher, the UN's under-secretary-general for humanitarian relief.

However, Fletcher also warned that there is still "no time to lose" in getting aid into Gaza. "After 15 months of relentless war, the humanitarian needs are staggering," he said on social media.

Agencies contributed to this story.

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People wait in the snow to attend a rally of US President-elect Donald Trump at Capital One Arena in Washington on Sunday ahead of his presidential inauguration. VICTOR J. BLUE VIA GETTY IMAGES

Beijing reiterates pledge to develop stable ties with US

China's vice-president voices commitment while in Washington for Trump inauguration

By CAO DESHENG
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Beijing reiterated its commitment to developing a stable, healthy and sustainable relationship with Washington, ahead of the inauguration on Monday of United States President Donald Trump.

Vice-President Han Zheng made the commitment in Washington, DC, on Sunday during separate meetings with Vice-President-elect JD Vance, Tesla CEO Elon Musk and representatives of US business leaders.

Han was in the US capital to attend Trump's inauguration ceremony as the special representative of President Xi Jinping.

The meetings came two days after Xi and Trump talked on the phone, discussing bilateral ties and major international and regional issues of common concern. The two leaders also agreed to set up a channel of strategic communication to keep in regular touch on major issues of shared interest.

While meeting with Vance, Han said that as long as both sides adhere to the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and

win-win cooperation, Beijing and Washington will be able to achieve mutual success, bring benefits to both countries and make important contributions to world peace and development.

China is willing to work with the US to adhere to the strategic guidance of head-of-state diplomacy, implement the important points of consensus reached between the two presidents, and promote the stable, healthy and sustainable development of China-US relations, Han said.

Noting that economic and trade relations are an important issue of common concern for both sides, he said that despite differences and friction between China and the US, there remain enormous common interests and vast room for cooperation between them. He called on both sides to strengthen dialogue and consultation on this matter.

Vance acknowledged that bilateral economic and trade relations are crucial for both the US and China, and highlighted China's increasingly important role in international affairs.

The US is willing to develop a long-term, productive relationship

with China, strengthen dialogue and cooperation with China on international and regional issues, and jointly promote world peace and stability, he said.

During his meeting with Musk, who has been nominated by Trump to co-lead a new Department of Government Efficiency, Han welcomed US companies, including Tesla, to seize opportunities and share in China's development achievements, thereby making greater contributions to the development of China-US economic and trade relations.

Musk expressed Tesla's willingness to deepen investment cooperation with China, and said his company is willing to play an active role in facilitating economic and trade exchanges between the two countries.

On Sunday, Han also met with representatives of the US-China Business Council, the US Chamber of Commerce and other US business leaders. He called on the US business community to actively serve as a bridge to contribute to the healthy, stable and sustainable development of bilateral ties.

Han highlighted the wide range of common interests and vast cooperation opportunities between China and the US, saying that the positive trajectory and stable development of the bilateral relationship

align with the well-being of the people of both countries and the general expectations of the international community.

He noted that the US business community has been a steadfast supporter of China-US relations, and has actively participated in and benefited from the economic and trade cooperation between the two countries as well as China's reform and opening-up.

Han also reiterated China's commitment to advancing reform and opening-up and continuously improving the business environment, and expressed the hope that US companies will continue to invest in and engage with China.

Representatives from the US business community expressed optimism regarding the recent conversation between Trump and Xi, viewing it as a positive and inspiring signal.

They said that as the world's two largest and most dynamic economies with advanced technologies, the US and China should engage in mutually beneficial cooperation and find constructive and stable ways to coexist.

Observers said that as the China-US relationship is at a crossroads, the world's two largest economies could succeed together, provided they are able to find common ground.



Released hostage Romi Gonen embraces loved ones at the Sheba Medical Center in Ramat Gan, Israel, in this handout image obtained by Reuters on Sunday. MAAYAN TOAF VIA REUTERS

China offers unique path of growth, says expert

By XING YI in Davos, Switzerland
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China's development model offers an alternative path for emerging economies and contributes to global collaboration, said Jeremy Jurgens, managing director of the World Economic Forum, at its annual meeting on Monday in Davos, Switzerland.

Over the past decade, China has achieved impressive progress in frontier technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and synthetic biology, as well as green technologies, including renew-

able energy, battery storage and electric vehicles, Jurgens said.

"In almost every one of these areas, China or the United States is in the number one or two position," he said, crediting China's achievements to its strong talent base and forward-looking policies, including its focus on fostering new quality productive forces and the AI Plus initiative.

Many of these advancements benefit not only China but also the world by helping address the challenge of decarbonization, he added.

"China has played a very constructive and productive role in the

global system, and a lot of countries look to China to take an active role there," he said, adding that leading Chinese companies and government delegations are joining the forum to share their insights.

"They will be able to participate in discussions with their peers, whether at the business level, (among) academics (or with) government leaders, and have an informal exchange on future areas of potential cooperation," he said.

This kind of dialogue contributes to the forum's discussion of collaboration in the intelligent age, he said. Regarding geopolitical tensions

that hinder global collaboration, Jurgens expressed his hope for a "healthy global ecosystem" that enables collaboration on climate change, alignment of trade policy and governance of emerging technologies.

Having worked in China for three years and attended the annual "Summer Davos" in Tianjin and Dalian, Jurgens visited more than 50 cities and hundreds of leading companies in the country. He said he noticed significant developments in China's infrastructure and improvements in the quality of tools and capabilities of its manufacturing sector.

As the world's second-largest economy, Jurgens said, China is a very important contributor and leader in the global economy. China offers a development path for emerging market countries that are in a similar position to where China was 15, 20, or 30 years ago.

"This means that they don't have to follow the model that was maybe working in the 1800s or 1900s, but they can have more modern approaches, use the benefits of new technologies, advanced policy tools, business strategies and so on," he said.

"So I think these are kind of really positive contributions that China can make in enhancing global development and global prosperity."

China has played a very constructive and productive role in the global system, and a lot of countries look to China to take an active role there."

Jeremy Jurgens, managing director of the World Economic Forum



WORLD

Investigators consider force to bring Yoon in

President evades questioning again as team formed to probe violent protests

By YANG HAN in Hong Kong
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South Korean prosecutors and investigators visited the Seoul Detention Center where President Yoon is being held on Monday, after he repeatedly resisted orders to appear for questioning.

The purpose of the visit has not been confirmed, but Shin Yong-hae, chief of the Ministry of Justice's correctional agency, said prosecutors and investigators from the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials, or CIO, arrived at the Seoul Detention Center on Monday afternoon, according to Yonhap News Agency.

Shin said he had not been informed whether the visit was for an on-site investigation or forcibly bringing Yoon in for further questioning, but believes that "it will be one or the other."

Earlier in the day, a CIO official said the agency is "strongly considering" bringing Yoon in by force and will not rule out a visit to the detention center for questioning after Yoon refused to appear for the second day in a row.

Yoon will attend the constitutional court hearing of his impeachment trial, scheduled for Tuesday, multiple media outlets said on Monday citing Yoon's defense counsel.

The president has been held in a detention center since Wednesday. He remained silent during 10 hours of questioning by the CIO immediately after being taken into custody that day.

Yoon made a short-lived declara-

tion of martial law on Dec 3. He was impeached by the National Assembly over his martial law decree on Dec 14 and suspended from his presidential duties.

He became the first sitting president to be formally arrested on Sunday. This followed a Seoul court issuing a warrant to detain Yoon for an extended period over his failed martial law bid, citing risks of evidence tampering.

Yoon was moved to a solitary cell at the Seoul Detention Center after his formal arrest. He was also banned from meeting visitors other than his lawyers.

The president will remain in custody until Jan 28 and the detention period can be extended until Feb 7 with court approval, according to the CIO.

Kwon Young-se, chairman of the ruling People Power Party's Emergency Response Committee, said a president should not enjoy special privileges but should also not be unfairly deprived of even the most basic right to defense.

"When making an unprecedented decision in the constitutional history of arresting a sitting president, the reason for the arrest should be fully explained so that the public could understand it," Kwon said on Monday.

Kwon said the court's issuance of the pretrial detention warrant citing the sole reason for evidence tampering was not acceptable.

"How can a president who has been suspended from office and is virtually inactive in the presidential office destroy evidence?" Kwon asked.

Also on Monday, South Korean police made another attempt to raid the Presidential Security Service, or PSS, and a presidential safe house to seize documents and surveillance camera footage.

Yet, the raid once again failed after being blocked by the PSS.

Police also detained 90 people who were involved in the violence that occurred at the Seoul Western District Court and the Constitutional Court on Jan 18-19 during protests against the formal arrest of Yoon.

Protesters smashed windows, threw objects into the building, and injured police officers during the protest.

The prosecution will form a task force to investigate the case in cooperation with the police.

Serious crime

In a statement, the Supreme Prosecutors' Office said the "illegal and violent protests" at the courts represent a very serious crime that completely defied the rule of law and the judicial system.

The main opposition Democratic Party floor leader Park Chan-dae said the acts of the violent protesters were a serious crime that should never be tolerated.

"Not only participants in the illegal violence but also those who instigated violence behind the scenes should be punished severely with the principle of zero tolerance," said Park, whose party has accused the ruling party of inciting violence by denying the validity of the court ruling.

The political turmoil is taking a toll on South Korea's economy. The country's central bank, the Bank of Korea, hinted that it may cut its economic growth outlook for 2025 to 1.6-1.7 percent from the previous projection of 1.9 percent.

Seeking shade



People through the Barra de Guaratiba beach amid a heat wave in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Sunday.

TERCIO TEIXEIRA / AFP

Briefly

NIGERIA

Mass funeral held after tanker explosion kills 86

A mass funeral has been held for the victims of Saturday's gasoline tanker explosion in Nigeria's north-central state of Niger, local authorities said on Sunday, while confirming that the death toll has risen from 80 to 86. A total of 80 bodies were buried in a mass grave in the Gurara local government area after the tanker, laden with gasoline, exploded when it overturned, spilling its contents on a busy road in the Dikko area of the state on Saturday morning, Abdulhali Baba-Arah, head of the Niger State Emergency Management Agency, told reporters on Sunday. A further 55 people were injured.

UNITED STATES

Biden pardons late civil rights leader Garvey

US President Joe Biden pardoned five people on Sunday, including the late civil rights leader Marcus Garvey, the White House said in a statement. Garvey, who died in 1940, was a civil rights leader who was convicted of mail fraud in 1923 and sentenced to five years imprisonment, a sentence that was commuted by president Calvin Coolidge in 1927. Human rights organizations credit Garvey as the first man to organize a mass movement among African Americans. The White House said he created the Black Star Line shipping company and founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association, which celebrated African history and culture.

LA firefighters brace for 'last' strong winds

Exhausted Los Angeles firefighters on Sunday braced for the return of yet more dangerously strong gusts, after wildfires killed 27 people. The two largest fires, which have obliterated almost 16,000 hectares and razed entire neighborhoods of the second biggest US city, were both now more than half contained, officials announced. However, the National Weather Service warned that powerful winds and very low humidity would again bring "dangerous high-end red flag fire weather conditions" from Monday, with potential gusts of up to 130 kilometers per hour.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

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TALK TO THE ANIMALS

As our lives continue to improve and we become more prosperous, remember that true happiness can be found in nature. Our four-legged and feathered friends, our cute and cuddly compadres, our shelled and slippery side-kicks are our shared partners on this Earth.



CHINADAILY

COMMENT

Editorials

Trump's second term offers opportunity to give the relationship a fresh beginning

With Spring Festival fast approaching, Chinese people are preparing to ring out the old year and ring in the new, hoping for the best in the year ahead. Likewise, they hope that with the United States ringing in a change of administration, better prospects are in store for the Sino-US relationship, which has been strained by the bad deeds belying the good words of the Joe Biden administration.

It is the hope of many that the inauguration of Donald Trump as US president on Monday presents the opportunity for China and the US to reset their relations and alter the trajectory, which due to their intensifying — but needless — rivalry over the past four years has put the two countries on a bumpy course.

By acting in good faith to demonstrate the two countries can be friends and partners, as many people from the two sides are already doing, the expectations that new vistas for mutually beneficial cooperation can open up will prove to be well-founded.

The telephone conversation between the two countries' top leaders on Friday, during which President Xi Jinping said he and Trump both value interaction with each other and hope for a good start to the China-US relationship during the new US presidency, reinforced anticipation and confidence that a new chapter will unfold for bilateral relations.

Trump has already promised that among his first acts on taking office will be the repealing of many of Biden's executive orders on his first day in office. "Every radical and foolish executive order of the Biden administration will be repealed within hours of when I take the oath of office," Trump told his supporters at a rally held in Washington on the eve of his inauguration on Sunday.

Trump has also promised a host of new executive orders of his own on "Day One" although these reportedly cover mostly domestic issues, such as border security, mass deportations of illegal immigrants, rolling back government diversity initiatives, and boosting oil and gas production, among other policy items. It is still unclear how much China would be involved or affected by the revoking of Biden's executive orders and the issuing of new ones by Trump.

But given that many of the orders Biden signed were by no means China-friendly, such as the one in August 2023 that blocks high-tech US-based investments going toward the country, and the one issued shortly before he stepped down meant to bolster US security and sanction authority against China for alleged cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, any avenues the new president opens up for both sides to further stabilize their already heavily strained relationship would be constructive, and send a positive signal of intent.

One positive development in that direction is related to the fate of TikTok, the hugely popular video-sharing app that has been banned in the US for its alleged threat to national security. After the app went dark for users this weekend, Trump said on his social media site that he would issue an executive order after he is sworn in on Monday delaying the TikTok ban "so that we can make a deal" to keep it operating and protect the US' national security. Hours later, the app service was restored with the company thanking Trump for his "efforts".

That China and the US can be friends and partners, rather than competitors and even adversaries, is based on the truth of experience.

Despite the differences that exist between them, the two countries share many common interests and huge space for cooperation. Whenever the two countries have treated each other as partners and seek common ground while shelving differences, their relationship has made considerable progress.

But when they have regarded each other as rivals, it has provoked vicious competition, setting relations back, engendering confrontation. So long as the two sides uphold the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation, they can push ahead together, as Vice-President Han Zheng, President Xi's special representative to attend Trump's inauguration ceremony, told J. D. Vance, the incoming US vice-president-elect, in a meeting in Washington on Sunday.

As Trump has previously said, China and the US could collaborate to "solve all of the problems of the world". There is no reason why the "two great nations" should not shelve their differences and work together for the benefit of themselves and rest of the world.

A new starting point has been established, but how much progress will be achieved in the development of China-US relations depends on their maintaining communication and making mutual efforts to that end.

Fragile truce rests on new US administration

After 15 months of fighting that has claimed tens of thousands of lives, a long-awaited ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas came into force on Sunday.

The tranquility of the sky above Gaza and Israel for the first time in more than a year and the arrival of hundreds of lorries in the Palestinian enclave carrying aid have undoubtedly further spurred hopes that an end to the Israel-Hamas conflict is in sight.

But these hopes may be premature. The necessary conditions to realize a permanent end to the hostilities are still not in place. What has been achieved so far is only the beginning of the first phase of a three-phase temporary truce, and the reason why it could happen is primarily due to the power transition in Washington rather than a solution that appeases the animosity between the two conflicting parties.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said recently that Israel retains the right to resume military action against Hamas, with renewed strength and "in new ways", should the ceasefire deal collapse. Israel has held the initiative on the battlefield throughout the conflict, and the Netanyahu government has never changed its goal of eliminating Hamas from Gaza and then turning the strip into an Israel-controlled buffer zone.

Notably, the Israeli leader outlined three "principles" that guided the negotiations for the ceasefire deal with Hamas, which are presumably also the conditions that the US promised Israel it would support in exchange for Tel Aviv's inking of the first phase of the ceasefire deal and cooperation to implement it at least during the critical juncture of the new US president's inauguration.

The three principles are Israel's right to return to war if the negotiations in the second phase, which are due to start on the 16th day after the ceasefire commences, prove a failure; securing the release of a greater number of hostages, although apart from the 33 hostages Hamas agreed to release in the first stage, it remains unknown how many more hostages it holds are still alive; and Israel's continued control over the Philadelphi Corridor along the Gaza-Egypt border and the security buffer zone surrounding Gaza.

That means Israeli forces' withdrawal from areas in Gaza's Rafah to the Philadelphi Corridor on Sunday does not necessarily represent its moves to honor the terms of the ceasefire deal, according to which, Israeli troops should pull out of all populated areas of Gaza. Instead, Israeli forces are technically preparing for the ceasefire deal to collapse after the first stage, if not for having long-term control of Gaza.

In the first stage of the deal, Hamas has agreed to return 33 hostages in exchange for the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, with the remaining living hostages to be released in the second phase. Although Hamas wants a complete end to the war before it releases all the hostages, that's something unacceptable to Israel, and the ceasefire deal will automatically collapse the moment Hamas fails to hand over living hostages to move the negotiations forward.

That means if Hamas does not return more living hostages in the second stage, which is very likely as that is the only bargaining chip it has got, Tel Aviv will not have any scruples about realizing its objective by resuming its offensive.

It is also not known whether Israel will agree to pull out of the buffer zone between it and Gaza by a certain date, or whether its presence there will be open-ended, as some Western observers say. Not to mention that the truce can be broken any time if either side makes a reckless move while passing the buck to the other side. Ceasefires between Israel and Hamas which have halted previous wars have eventually broken down because of skirmishes.

So the present ceasefire is fragile. Whether it can move the situation in the direction of a permanent end to the war and then a "two-state solution" depends on whether the new US administration will continue to allow the tail to wag the dog.

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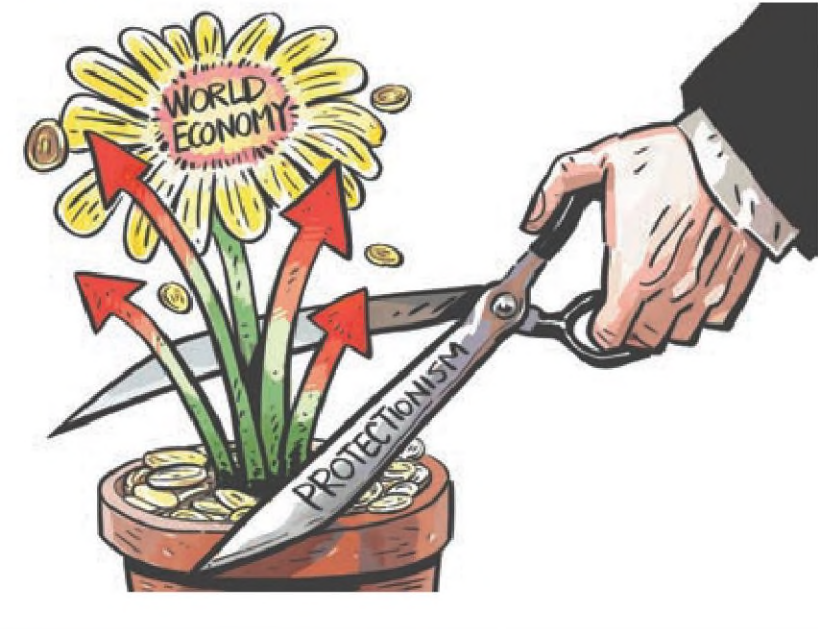
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Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Open, resilient market effective way to attract foreign investment

China knows full well that foreign investment is an important force driving its economic development and modernization. Therefore, it is going all out to create a market-oriented, law-based transparent business environment to attract foreign investment and strengthen foreign investors' confidence.

China also knows full well that in order to promote high-level opening-up in the new era, it must make greater efforts to attract and utilize foreign investment, introduce overseas capital and management know-how, maintain order in its securities market, and protect the legitimate rights and interests of investors, including foreign investors. This is why it has completely removed restrictions on foreign investment access in the manufacturing sector.

In order to optimize the policy of attracting foreign investment, the country is also accelerating the opening-up of its telecommunications, education, medical and other service sectors, and introducing or planning to introduce more practical measures to optimize the business environment and improve service guarantee. The Ministry of Commerce and multiple other departments have also revised the regulations, further lowering the threshold for foreign investors to invest in listed companies, and encouraging foreign investors to carry out long-term investment.

A package of incremental policies has continued to take effect, and countercyclical adjustment of fiscal and monetary policies has been further strengthened, sending a positive

signal that China's economic recovery is on a solid footing, improving the international market's expectations of its economic prospects, and boosting foreign investors' confidence in its value investment.

China's opening-up to the outside world will never stop, as it is determined to continue promoting the all-round institutional opening-up of its market, institutions and products, achieve the compatibility of its rules, regulations, management and standards with global ones, and create a good investment environment for international investors. The country is also determined to further enhance policy stability, transparency and predictability, to establish a standardized, transparent, open, dynamic and resilient capital market.

— WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

Education blueprint lays ground for modernization

The new educational blueprint, jointly issued by the central authorities recently promises to build China into a leading country in education by 2035.

In 2022, a timeline was established to achieve this aspiration by 2035. The new educational blueprint offers a detailed, realistic guidance on how the goal will be achieved. It outlines the necessary steps for both basic and higher education, such as "strengthen and optimize basic education to consolidate the foundational strategy for comprehensively enhancing national quality and enhance the comprehensive strength of higher education to create a strategically leading force".

China will also improve the system of imparting lessons in morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics and labor skills for primary and secondary schools, and accelerate the development of advanced research institutions for higher education.

Other measures include building a high-quality professional teaching team, thus laying a solid foundation for a powerful educated nation and building a learning society with the help of digital education technologies. There is also a plan to deepen comprehensive educational reform to improve the strategy of opening up the education sector in order to build an educational center with global

influence. This is the right move as education cannot be improved behind closed doors; global interaction and academic exchanges among nations are crucial.

To make this goal more achievable, the blueprint encourages reputable foreign universities in science and engineering to offer programs in China.

Realizing the education dream will help in cultivating and strengthening the country's strategic science and technology capabilities, thus providing strong support for high-level self-reliance and strength in science and technology.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Opportunity for ASEAN to reassert its autonomy

The 2025 ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Retreat was convened on Sunday in Langkawi, Malaysia. The Retreat, with the theme "Inclusivity and Sustainability", is the first major meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations this year.

Under the chairmanship of Malaysia, the ASEAN foreign ministers had candid and in-depth discussions on ASEAN's priorities in 2025. Their wide-ranging joint statement issued after the meeting conveyed the ASEAN members' common stance on many issues, ranging from the South China Sea maritime disputes to the Ukraine crisis.

Over the past four years, the Joe Biden administration of the United States has exerted tremendous pressure on ASEAN in a bid to coerce it to jump onto its anti-China bandwagon, and the Philippines under the Ferdinand Marcos Jr government has sought to leverage an advantage by acting as a proxy of the US in the region. Portraying itself as a victim of China's "bullying", the Philippines tried to drive a wedge between the regional organization and China.

These external and internal factors have to some extent taken a toll on regional solidarity, stability and cooperation.

With a new US administration taking office on Monday, the organization will hopefully have the opportunity to better exercise its strategic autonomy in foreign affairs and uphold an independent stance on many burning issues of regional and international concern.

In the document, the ASEAN foreign ministers reiterated their strong commitment to upholding regionalism and multilateralism, welcomed the progress of the negotiations on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, vowed to play a greater role in fostering a stable and predictable environment through adherence to the principles of international law, mutual respect, and the peaceful resolution of maritime disputes, and underscored the importance of the full and effective implementation of the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea in its entirety.

The ASEAN stance accords with that of China, and, if acted upon, will be conducive to promoting the orga-

nization's cooperation with China to seek proper solutions on the South China Sea issues.

Besides, the ASEAN foreign ministers vowed to deepen cooperation under the ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan and the Republic of Korea) cooperation framework, and welcomed substantive progress in the implementation of the ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation Work Plan (2023-27).

While China, Japan and the ROK have been accelerating their efforts to mend ties in recent months, the ASEAN's strong support for a closer regional cooperation will help unleash the potential of the ASEAN Plus Three cooperation framework that is based on their structural complementarity and shared Asian values and culture.

Standing at a new starting point, ASEAN is now in a better position to understand that it has no reason not to keep good relations with its neighbors, including China, and that no external forces should be allowed to assume the center of the stage in Southeast Asia except the regional countries themselves.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Mu Guangzong

Sweet home needs more support policies

By the end of 2024, the Chinese mainland's population was 1.408 billion, a decrease of 1.39 million compared with the end of the previous year. This marks the third consecutive year of population decline since 2022. In 2024, the total number of births was 9.54 million, an increase of 520,000 compared with 2023, marking the first rise since the continuous decline since 2017.

China is grappling with a serious demographic challenge as young people are more focused on earning a living and less interested in marriage. Because economic pressure mounts and the cost of raising children rises, many couples view having children as a luxury rather than a necessity.

Available statistics paint a sobering picture. In 2020, the marriage rate in the country fell to 5.8 per 1,000 people, with only 12.29 million people registering their first marriage. The same year the total fertility rate dropped to 1.3, much below the replacement level of 2.1. By 2024, the total fertility rate had dropped to an alarming 1.0, with Shanghai registering a rate as low as 0.6. These figures highlight a stark reality: young people in China are increasingly reluctant to embrace family life.

Moreover, the young face huge employment pressure. In 2024, 11.79 million university graduates entered an already saturated labor market. The mismatch between the demand for and creation of jobs is stark. Stories such as that of students from top universities working as delivery personnel or struggling to find stable employment have become common. This economic insecurity is fueling delayed or abandonment of parenthood.

Raising a child requires substantial financial resources — something many young people feel they can't afford given the unstable job market. But economic pressure is only part of the story. Attitudes toward relationships and family have undergone significant changes. And late marriage, live-in and remaining single have become increasingly common. Many young people prioritize personal (career) growth and freedom over traditional life milestones like marriage and having children.

Marriage has also become increasingly materialistic. Rising dowries and the desire to own property have commercialized relationships, eroding trust between couples. As a result, many young people view marriage as an optional, rather than essential, life choice. This sentiment is compounded by a broader cultural shift toward individualism, where self-fulfillment often takes precedence over family obligations.

Similarly, parenthood is no longer a universal aspiration. Many young people prefer to have just one child or no children at all, with single-individual households and single-child families becoming more common, signaling a fundamental shift in how the younger generation perceives family life.

Addressing China's fertility rate crisis requires more than financial incentives. While policies such as subsidies and tax breaks can alleviate some of the economic pressure young people face, such policies are not enough to address the deeper cultural and structural issues at play. For



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

For that, we have to redevelop the culture that values not only marriage and parenthood but also career-building. Encouraging young people to embrace family life while building their career and achieving their other personal goals is essential.

instance, countries such as Japan and the Republic of Korea have been struggling to reverse the trend of low birthrate despite aggressive policy measures, reflecting the limitations of government action.

Therefore, we need to create a society that genuinely supports marriage and childbearing. For that, we have to redevelop the culture that values not only marriage and parenthood but also career-building. Encouraging young people to embrace family life while building their career and achieving their other personal goals is essential.

The impact of China's low fertility rate extends far beyond individual families. A shrinking population could undermine the ability to support a rapidly aging population. While long-term labor shortages could hinder innovation, an overburdened pension system may struggle to meet the needs of a growing elderly population.

However, China's falling fertility rate reflects a broader global trend. In a world in which economic uncertainties, urban-

ization and shifting social norms reshape family structures, many countries have been grappling with similar challenges.

Yet China's falling fertility rate problem is not insurmountable. It can be addressed, somewhat, through swift and comprehensive action. Policymakers must go beyond offering economic incentives to young people in order to ensure more and more young people formally enter conjugal life and embrace parenthood.

This is not just about reversing demographic trends; it's also about fostering a society where young people feel secure, valued and empowered to build their lives the way they want. By balancing personal aspirations with collective needs, China can address its demographic challenges and create a brighter future for generations to come.

The author is a professor of demography at the Institute of Population Research, Peking University. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.



Kang Bing

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Traditional dresses become new fashion

It took me quite a while to search my cupboard and shoe racks to find the right suit and shoes to wear to the wedding of a friend's daughter. The invitation made it clear that guests should be dressed in formal attire, which I understood to be a dark-colored suit, a tie and black leather shoes.

Not having attended a formal gathering since I retired a few years ago, I realized I had no idea what kind of dress and shoes were in vogue after having spread out my suits on the bed and laying my shoes on the floor. Should the suit have two buttons, or three or four buttons? Are shoes with a pointed toe, or semi-pointed toe or round toe in fashion?

After arriving at the wedding venue in my formal attire, I was surprised to find that I was one of the few wearing a Western suit and leather shoes. Many of the guests were wearing jeans, jackets and sneakers. Even my friend and his wife were clad in traditional Chinese dresses called *tangzhuang*.

I realized that fashion in China had changed, yet again. Five decades ago, when we were young, people throughout the country wore the same type of dress — the suits that were gray, blue or military green in color. Leather shoes were then a luxury for most people who were struggling to make ends meet.

While Western suits and leather shoes, including high-heel shoes, help make people look elegant, the trouble they cause is lost on nobody.

It was only after the launch of reform and opening-up that Western fashion was introduced to China. Soon Western suits, ties and leather shoes became popular.

Western fashion dominated China for decades, with people wearing Western suits and leather shoes, which were seen as symbols of social status. It's another matter that many felt uncomfortable wearing them. Even some shopkeepers and vendors wore Western suits, ties and leather shoes to attract customers.

Things began to change about a decade ago. Of late, in shopping malls shops selling Western suits and leather shoes have been making way for outlets selling jackets, sportswear and sneakers. Plus, people no longer send each other ties as gifts.

From TV programs, we can see that only when the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee meet for their annual session or when State leaders meet foreign guests that the leaders are dressed in Western suits, ties and leather shoes. On almost all other occasions, they wear shirts and trousers, and, if need be, jackets.

According to available data, after reaching its peak of producing about 4.62 billion pairs of leather shoes in 2016, China's leather shoe production dropped to 3.59 billion pairs last year, with only 2.9 billion pairs being consumed in China and the rest either exported or stockpiled in warehouses.

Observers cite two reasons for the decline in the sales of Western suits and leather shoes in China: people's need for comfort and their rising awareness about and confidence in traditional Chinese culture.

While Western suits and leather shoes, including high-heel shoes, help make people look elegant, the trouble they cause is lost on nobody. At a time when many people take walking at least 10,000 steps a day as a necessary health requirement, wearing sneakers makes much more sense. That's why while the production of leather shoes has been going down and that of sneakers is going up by 15 percent a year over the past four years. In fact, attending important events in jackets and sneakers is regarded by many nowadays as formal.

On many important occasions, especially while visiting some tourist destinations, we see more and more people, especially women, wearing traditional dresses called *hanfu* or *tangzhuang* — Han refers to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) and Tang refers to the Tang Dynasty (618-907), meaning they were popular during the two periods, respectively. The two dynasties are considered the golden periods in Chinese history.

In many cities, shops selling or renting out such dresses have been doing brisk business. Made of silk and being colorful, traditional dresses are becoming increasingly popular among young women, who are showing that traditional dresses can be fashionable, too.

Guo Yi

A journey from TikTok to RedNote is a story of talks

The recent surge of American "TikTok refugees" flooding into China's social media app RedNote presents a fascinating case of how fundamental human needs for social connection can transcend political boundaries.

Due to fears of a ban on TikTok services in the US, an unprecedented phenomenon has emerged: Although the app restored service hours after a temporary disruption on Sunday, thousands of TikTok users in the United States have found "refuge" on another Chinese social media platform, often considered the Asian counterpart of Instagram.

This migration challenges the conventional assumption of how political forces shape media consumption patterns. Traditionally, the media choices of people have been heavily influenced by political considerations, often unconsciously guided by invisible political forces and calculations. But the current exodus of netizens from TikTok to RedNote reveals a more profound fact: basic human desire for social connection and self-expression can override political constraints.

The phenomenon becomes particularly intriguing when considering the historical context of US-China relations. At

Their concerns are more practical, as they have to maintain their audience base, preserve their revenue sources and continue their content creation business.

a time when tensions between the two countries are running high, and when US consumers are generally expected to shy away from Chinese platforms, exactly the opposite has been happening. This paradox highlights the gap between high-level political maneuvering and ground-level human behavior. Users have shown that their social media choices stem primarily from a desire to maintain established patterns of online social interactions and content consumption.

What makes this migration especially significant is its organic nature. Unlike orchestrated campaigns or politically motivated movements, this shift appears to be purely user-driven, sparked by a genuine need to find an alternative plat-

form that offers functions similar to TikTok. The users' primary concern is not the political orientation of the country where the app was developed, but rather its ability to meet their social media needs — whether the app shares lifestyle content, allows them to engage with like-minded individuals or simply stay connected with their online communities.

For many creative individuals who have turned their social media presence on TikTok into full-time careers, the ban on the platform represents not just social inconvenience but a direct threat to their livelihood. Their concerns are more practical, as they have to maintain their audience base, preserve their revenue sources and continue their content creation business.

This migration demonstrates the growing disconnect between state-level political actions and individual consumers' behavior. While political entities may view social media platforms as tools of influence or potential security threats, users see them primarily as essential utilities for modern life — as basic as telephone services or email. This disconnect highlights the limitations of using political measures to control social media usage in an increasingly interconnected world.

The implications extend beyond the immediate context of TikTok and RedNote. It suggests that in an increasingly digitalized world, the power of human connection might be stronger than previously recognized.

While political forces can influence media consumption patterns, they cannot entirely override the fundamental human need for digital connection and expression. As "TikTok refugees" enthusiastically engage in cross-cultural interactions with Chinese users on RedNote, creating genuine moments of human connection that transcend national boundaries, it is time for those playing the political card to reconsider people's fundamental needs in the digital age.

The flourishing digital cultural exchanges taking place on RedNote serve as a powerful reminder that in an era where online platforms have become integral to both people's social lives and economic survival, policy decisions need to reflect this new reality rather than being dictated purely by political calculations.

The author is a professor at the School of Journalism, Chongqing University. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

GLOBAL VIEWS

FAJAR HIRAWAN

The future of cooperation

Indonesia may face amplified challenges from the new US government, but it can take them as an opportunity to deepen ties with China and expand South-South partnerships

Donald Trump's return to the White House as the 47th president of the United States introduces significant uncertainties to the global economic landscape. His "America First" doctrine, characterized by aggressive inward-looking policies, could disrupt international trade, elevate inflation and constrain global monetary policies. For Indonesia, these shifts present both challenges and opportunities in navigating bilateral ties with China and broader South-South cooperation amid escalating major-power competition.



Amid the challenges posed by Trump's new administration, Indonesia sees opportunities to deepen its economic and strategic ties with China. This cooperation can serve as a counterbalance to US protectionism and contribute to Indonesia's long-term development goals.

One avenue for strengthening this relationship lies in infrastructure development through the Belt and Road Initiative. China's Belt and Road projects in Indonesia, such as the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway and the Morowali Industrial Park, exemplify the potential for high-impact investments. These projects enhance connectivity across Indonesia, create jobs and stimulate local economies, providing a buffer against external economic pressures. By leveraging such initiatives, Indonesia can drive infrastructure modernization and foster regional growth.

Trade and investment between Indonesia and China have also seen significant growth. As of 2023, the bilateral trade volume reached \$139.26 billion. This substantial increase underscores the robust economic ties and mutual strategic interests. Furthermore, Chinese investment in Indonesia is noteworthy, with many Chinese companies operating across various sectors, including manufacturing, agriculture and minerals. In 2023, China's total investment in Indonesia exceeded \$7 billion, making it one of the top foreign investors in the country.



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

digital infrastructure development, R&D centers and capacity-building initiatives can enhance local innovation, improve competitiveness and position Indonesia as a leader in the region's digital economy.

Beyond its bilateral ties with China, Indonesia can leverage South-South cooperation to diversify its economic partnerships

and reduce its dependency on major powers. Regional integration through the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership offers Indonesia a platform for strengthening trade and investment ties with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea and other key partners. As Southeast Asia's largest economy, Indonesia is well-positioned to benefit from streamlined tariffs and enhanced regional supply chain integration.

Collaboration with other emerging economies, such as India, Brazil and South Africa, also presents valuable opportunities. These partnerships enable trade expansion, technology sharing and collective action in global governance reforms. Initiatives such as the BRICS+ framework can further enhance Indonesia's economic and geopolitical influence, ensuring its voice is heard on the international stage.

Issue-based cooperation within the South-South framework adds another layer of opportunity. In addressing climate change, joint efforts with China and other emerging economies in renewable energy, sustainable finance and forest conservation can support Indonesia's green growth agenda. Similarly, Indonesia can build on its successful vaccine partnerships to spearhead South-South collaborations in enhancing health security across the Global South. In the realm of food security, agricultural technology transfers and knowledge sharing can bolster resilience against climate impacts and improve food production.

Indonesia's leadership role within ASEAN also provides a platform for advancing regional stability and inclusive growth. Strengthening ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Regional Forum ensures major powers engage constructively with the region. By promoting rules-based cooperation, Indonesia can uphold ASEAN's centrality, preventing the region from becoming a theater for major-power rivalry.

Balancing major-power competition is another critical aspect of Indonesia's strategy. Its "independent and active" foreign policy allows it to maintain strategic autonomy while fostering productive relationships with both the US and China. Additionally, enhancing ties with developed economies such as Japan, the ROK and the European Union further diversifies Indonesia's diplomatic and economic options, strengthening its position in an increasingly multipolar world.

Through these efforts, Indonesia can not only navigate the challenges of heightened major-power competition but also position itself as a resilient and influential player on the global stage. By leveraging opportunities in infrastructure, trade, technology and regional cooperation, Indonesia has the potential to achieve sustainable growth and stability while reinforcing its strategic importance in the "Indo-Pacific" region.

The Trump administration's "America First" policies could amplify global economic challenges, especially for emerging markets such as Indonesia. Nonetheless, these hurdles also provide opportunities for Indonesia to enhance its economic resilience, solidify ties with China and expand South-South partnerships. By leveraging regional mechanisms such as the RCEP, promoting technological cooperation, and upholding ASEAN centrality, Indonesia can adeptly navigate the shifting geopolitical landscape while fostering sustainable growth and stability.

Amid intensified major-power competition, Indonesia's capacity to maintain balanced relationships, diversify its economic partners and reinforce domestic capabilities will be vital for shaping its future. Strategic foresight, proactive diplomacy and inclusive development are key pillars that can position Indonesia as a robust and influential global player.

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GERT GROBLER

Not to be missed this time

While Africa wasn't on the earlier Trump administration's radar, its rising importance could have significant implications for the continent in the coming four years

The inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47th president of the United States on Jan 20 is fraught with apprehension among world leaders, especially in the West, the G20 and Global South countries. The implications of the second Trump presidency are being intensely debated across the world.

On the campaign trail, Trump promised to prioritize a range of domestic issues, including immigration, inflation and the introduction of higher trade tariffs. He also emphasized a return to his "America First" foreign policy, which unfortunately will mean a turn toward greater isolationism, protectionism and less international as well as multilateral collaboration.

Unfortunately, one of the focal points of this strategy could include continued efforts by the US to counter China's commercial, security and political influence in Africa, which is regarded as counterproductive and senseless by the continent. These malicious attacks are aimed at deliberately misleading and manipulating public opinion on China's true intentions in Africa and globally.

In the second Trump administration, the economic relationship between the US and African countries is likely to be driven by a focus on bilateral trade agreements that prioritize US interests. Trump's "America First" philosophy, which seeks to reduce trade deficits and protect jobs, will likely result in a push for one-on-one trade deals with African countries. While African nations are interested in broader initiatives such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act, the Trump administration may also opt for more targeted negotiations, seeking deals that directly benefit US industries and investors.

To realize the benefits of its development and integration agenda, Africa and China are committed to calling on the international community to support the

Amid major changes going on in the world, the booming development of the Global South, such as China and Africa, has a profound impact on global historical progress.

efforts by African countries to make progress with the African Union's Agenda 2063, Africa's blueprint and master plan for transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future and for the full implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area.

The growing friendship between Africa and China is defined by the three major characteristics of being strategic, multidimensional and mutually beneficial. This growing relationship is underpinned by four important cooperation platforms, namely the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, BRICS, the Belt and Road Initiative and South-South cooperation.

There are many reasons why Africa could be the growth capital of the world. For a start, the continent's competitive advantages include a young population, abundant mineral wealth, fertile land and a growing renewable- and distributed-energy sector. As a result, the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria, South Africa, recently argued that the new Trump administration could possibly present "African countries with an opportunity to take a proactive stance in shaping their political and economic relations with the US and developing resilient strategies instead of reacting to shifting US policies".

Furthermore, despite concerns expressed, the second coming of Trump could offer opportunities for self-development as Africa may be forced to depend less on US aid. Instead, it could increasingly look to harness its vast human and material

resources for its own development. African leaders will need to decide how to navigate partnerships to secure investment, maintain political stability, and address the continent's long-term development needs through inward-looking strategies. This bodes well for the continent in the long run.

The outlook for Africa's economies appears bright, but it hinges to a large extent on how well the continent can leverage its potential.

Given the recent decline of US economic engagement in Africa, it is to Chinese and African leaders' credit that the comprehensive, measurable, practical and forward-looking outcome of the FOCAC meeting in Beijing last year was generally viewed as an unqualified success.

This has given significant momentum to the flourishing friendship, solidarity and cooperation between Africa and China. The FOCAC has, in fact, become a vital and central platform for Africa and China friendship and cooperation.

In his speech at the FOCAC Beijing summit in 2024, Chinese President Xi Jinping said China-Africa relationship was at its "best in history" and he pledged to elevate the relationship to an "all-weather China-Africa community with a shared future for the new era".

Another recent positive development was Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's productive visit to Namibia, the Republic of Congo, Chad and Nigeria. It is much appreciated by African leaders as it is indicative of the profound friendship between China and Africa and the continuity of China's friendly cooperation as the visit continued the 35-year tradition of beginning Beijing's diplomatic calendar with stops across Africa, underlining China's commitment to take cooperation with the continent to the next level.

Consistent with South Africa's history it has opted for a non-aligned position in its international relations, the South African government has deliberately avoided aligning the country with any of the major powers or blocs. Rather, South Africa has



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

sought to forge cordial relations with all countries. While South Africa has adopted a non-aligned position, its government continues to pursue positions that are in keeping with the United Nations Charter, seeking to advance an inclusive and representative world order, to strengthen multilateralism and to promote the resolution of conflict through dialogue.

It is in pursuit of this approach that South Africa has worked to strengthen relations with countries around the world. China has been South Africa's largest trading partner over the past decade and similarly it has also been China's number one import and export destination among African countries. People-to-people exchanges have grown by leaps and bounds.

While Africa was not a major focus of the previous Trump administration, the continent's rising geopolitical importance and economic potential could mean significant implications for US-Africa relations over

the next few years. The second Trump administration may have to find a delicate balance between fostering economic ties, securing US interests, and not alienating African governments that see China as a valuable partner.

Amid major changes going on in the world, the booming development of the Global South, such as China and Africa, has a profound impact on global historical progress. A stronger and more developed Africa will surely make greater contribution to world peace and development.

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CULTURE

A *chiwen*, an ornamental tile that decorates both ends of the ridgepole on the roof, on display.
WANG KAIHAO / CHINA DAILY



TEMPLE IS IMMORTAL LEGACY OF TIME

Exhibition gives Yongle Palace a new lease of life amid growing public interest in famous centuries-old complex, Wang Kaihao reports.



A Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) glazed deity statue, which would have been placed on a wooden structure at the Yongle Palace, on show.

For 700 years, Yongle Palace, a Taoist temple in Ruicheng, Shanxi province, stood near the Yellow River, where it witnessed the seasons wax and wane.

As its glory faded over time, it was abandoned following the decline of the Quanzhen School of Taoism ("School of All Authenticity"). By 1952, the name of this temple dedicated to the Chinese belief system, had been forgotten, even by nearby villagers.

That year, during the first national cultural relic census conducted by the People's Republic of China, which had been founded three years earlier, researchers were overjoyed to "rediscover" this large Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) temple complex, which covers an area of 24.8 hectares. They were even more overjoyed to discover that its exquisite murals of Taoist deities still had the power to amaze.

Since then, the temple's extraordinary past has gradually come to light, and the cultural landmark — the only surviving national-level official architectural complex from the Yuan Dynasty discovered to date — has risen again in memory.

The Glory Within Authenticity, an exhibition that opened at the National Library of China in Beijing last week, and which will run through to the end of August, is currently exploring the beauty of Yongle Palace through 150 precious cultural artifacts, including architectural components, murals and documents, as well as digitized images that bring history back to life.

"The wealth of Yongle Palace artifacts reflects a mix of different cultures in creative ways," says An Hai, curator of the exhibition and deputy director of Shanxi provincial institute for protection and research of ancient architecture, painted sculptures and murals.

"They demonstrate features of their era and the latest fruits of research. Studies in recent years also highlight the remarkable value of this temple," he adds.

Witness to history

Begun in 1247, it took a decade for Yongle Palace to achieve the layout visible today. It cost artisans another century to complete the massive murals.

The 13th century was an era of great upheaval, as the Mongol army swept across the Eurasian continent. The Quanzhen School, which advocates a mixture of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, was formed during the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234), and grew in influence as people sought comfort from chaos.

In 1220, famous Taoist monk Qiu Chuji led his disciples on a two-year



Above: A visitor to the ongoing exhibition at the National Library of China in Beijing, *The Glory Within Authenticity*, examines a digital representation of a mural from the Sanqing Hall in the Yongle Palace, a Taoist temple in Ruicheng, Shanxi province. **Below:** Part of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) mural *Wu Long Peng Sheng* from the temple on show. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

westward trek to meet Genghis Khan near the Hindu Kush Mountains at the ruler's invitation.

Whether his doctrine about governing through benevolence and peace really changed the Khan's mind, Qiu's theory about protecting life at least persuaded the Mongol leader to give the Quanzhen School official support. It flourished across North China and in Ruicheng, where Lyu Dongbin, a legendary 9th-century Taoist guru was born, Yongle Palace was built by imperial edict, and Qiu's disciples oversaw construction.

"Records say Genghis Khan waived taxes for Quanzhen Taoists," An explains. "And this matches our new findings."

An is referring to an exhibit from Yongle Palace collection, a Taoist certificate from 1245 that confirms this key policy.

"As the certificate shows, he waived the taxes for Taoist monks and wanted them to focus on praying for his family," An says. "Yongle Palace functioned as an important ceremonial center for securing an auspicious destiny for the dynasty."

In a roof decoration from Chongyang Hall, one of the buildings in the Yongle Palace compound, researchers found a roll bearing the words "royal order." After being unpacked, it turned out to be a precious Quanzhen Taoist sutra, known as *The Scripture of the Mar-*

velous Treasure of the Highest Mystery of the Numinous Void, Inconceivable Salvation of Living Beings, and Supreme Excellence, and is listed among China's highest-level national cultural artifacts.

"It further proves the high status of Yongle Palace at its peak," An says.

The scroll is on display with other Quanzhen scriptures in a gallery in the national library, and offers visitors a glimpse into the age when Yongle Palace was a place of high-ranking pilgrims.

"Genghis Khan's westward expedition also resulted in cultural exchange, and Yongle Palace may be one example," the curator says, referring to the exhibited *chiwen*, an ornamental tile that decorates both ends of the ridgepole on the roof.

In ancient Chinese architecture, *chiwen* were mostly made of pottery or wood before the time of Yongle Palace, but the ones at the temple used a colored glaze, known as *liuli*, that has not faded even centuries later. The technique for manufacturing them is thought to have been imported from West Asia.

"As lintels in ancient Chinese architecture were usually decorated with colorful paintings, Yongle Palace provided something new, as sculptures were also used," An adds.

"Traditional Chinese decorative patterns are still prevalent, but these new forms tell us about the inclusive nature of Chinese civilization," he



explains. "Cultural exchange and learning was never blocked, despite wars."

A relocated wonder

Many visitors may wonder why the Yongle Palace relics were moved to museums. The short and simple answer may be protection.

The rediscovery of this architectural trove in the 1950s soon led to a dilemma, as the temple was located within the planned reservoir area of the Sanmenxia Dam on the Yellow River. Experts from across the country gathered to draft relocation plans.

As the curator recalls, different spots were considered, including the provincial capital Taiyuan where conditions were better, but the final decision was to minimize disturbance. One brick after another, the temple and its murals were carefully moved and rebuilt about 20 kilometers from its original position.

Not all of the architectural components and murals were sturdy enough to be put back, and so some original pieces were stored in warehouses and replaced by replicas.

"Yongle Palace was one of the earliest major cultural heritage conservation projects of New China," An says. "Back then, people finished the job in challenging conditions. They didn't have sufficient electricity, and much of the work was done by bare hand."

In 1961, Yongle Palace became one of 180 spots included in China's first list of cultural heritage sites under national-level key protection.

"Against all odds, the temple survives to this date," An says. "Not only the architecture, but also the relocation became a marvel."

Today, visitors can enjoy a close-up view of some Taoist murals and the entire glazed ridgepole with a pair of 3-meter-high *chiwen*, that was originally set on the roof of Sanqing Hall, the main building at the Yongle Palace.

Decades after they were removed from a wall, parts of the Ming

Dynasty (1368-1644) mural *Wu Long Peng Sheng* ("five dragons surround Xuanwu god") have been pieced together to be exhibited for the first time.

In 2019, researchers began to intensively research documents and artifacts from the palace to prepare for exhibitions. Numerous artifacts, like the aforementioned Taoist certificate and sutra, emerged from the inventory.

For An, the 20,000-odd pages of detailed records about the relocation have also become precious artifacts.

"That's why we are also displaying digitized pages at the exhibition to remind people of this crucial episode in the past," he says.

Visually reborn

The video game phenomenon *Black Myth: Wukong* re-creates many important ancient sites in Shanxi, including Yongle Palace, in its design. This has led to a surge in visitors to this place originally designed for inner tranquility.

"Unfortunately, many historical details have gradually faded with the flow of time," says Wang Yun, head of the exhibition's technical team. "Tourists flocking there may also find that the light in the temple is too dim to fully appreciate its beauty."

Based on digitized materials, Wang's team used artificial intelligence to present a virtual re-creation of the temple's architectural layout and murals in high definition. Through the use of motion-capture, AI has helped to make the Taoist deities in the murals "move" naturally on-screen.

In the gallery, museumgoers can visit dome theaters and virtual reality facilities to experience the temple as it was seven centuries ago.

"To some extent, technology is redefining the relationship between cultural artifacts and the public, and breaks the restrictions of space and time," says Sun Xiaobing, deputy director of Art Exhibitions China, co-organizer of the exhibition. "People can be inspired to explore the beauty of civilization and understand the stories behind the artifacts."

Screens have been set up behind the glazed ridge of the Sanqing Hall, and light projected on the ancient tiles demonstrates the circle of the seasons.

On the roof of an aged temple built by ancient people in the name of immortals, visitors may experience an epiphany, namely that what is really "immortal" is people's awe of time, and love for their preserved history.

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Henan television's Spring Festival gala blends tech and tradition

By XU LIN
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It's a tradition in China for people to gather with their families to watch star-studded Spring Festival television galas.

With the festival falling on Jan 29 this year, one good choice is Henan Satellite TV's 2025 Spring Festival gala, which will air at 7:30 pm on Sunday on both Henan Satellite TV and the multimedia platform Elephant News.

"The theme revolves around deep-rooted family culture in China, and is infused with elements of tra-

ditional Henan culture," says the show's chief director Li Weijia.

A performance from the station's 2021 Spring Festival gala, *Night Banquet in Tang Dynasty Palace*, went viral on Chinese social media. Taking inspiration from Henan Museum's glazed pottery figurines, female performers dressed in Tang Dynasty (618-907) costumes and in traditional makeup danced elegantly.

The gala is part of Chinese Festivals, an annual series produced by Henan Broadcasting System, which has a reputation for being popular with the young.

The opening of this year's gala features a virtual band consisting of four three-dimensional animated humanlike characters based on the weapons of the Four Heavenly Kings, whose statues are often seen at Buddhist temples.

Li Ziqi, one of the country's most popular influencers, will interact with artists at an intangible cultural heritage fair set against a picturesque Henan backdrop.

Another program will be of young celebrities performing pop songs with elements of *quyi* (a collection of storytelling, cross-talk and other spoken art forms) in tribute to the

Majie Quyi fair, which has been celebrated for over 700 years.

The fair is held on the 13th day of the first month of the Chinese calendar in Majie village, Baofeng county, in Henan's Pingdingshan city.

Named a national intangible cultural heritage in 2006, it attracts folk artists from across the country, including those specializing in singing ballads and cross-talk.

Henan is known for its archaeological discoveries, including YinXu Ruins and Erlitou site that are evidence of the early stages of Chinese civilization.

The gala will feature songs dedi-

cated to bronze objects from the Erlitou site, which is believed to be a late capital of the Xia Dynasty (c. 21st century-16th century BC), and to oracle bones excavated from the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC) YinXu Ruins.

"It's like an interaction between the present and the past in which young celebrities engage with ancient people," Li says. "These programs are likely to resonate with young audience members because of the modern design of the stage and visuals."

Another much-anticipated program will be a snake-themed dance by

dancer-choreographer Yang Liping and her team, as 2025 is the Year of the Snake according to the Chinese zodiac.

"Henan's Spring Festival galas have successfully created an IP (intellectual property) series in recent years, combining traditional culture with modern technology and attracting the attention of younger viewers," says Wu Xinying, an audience member from Zhengzhou, Henan. "It's not only about giving traditional Chinese culture contemporary vitality, but also about boosting our national pride and cultural confidence."

LIFE

CULTURAL JOURNEY

A success story held by a stitch

By overcoming challenges, national-level inheritor merges traditional embroidery techniques with innovation, teaching others and attracting international brands, **Huang Zhiling** and **Peng Chao** report in Chengdu.



Yang Huazhen, 67, a national-level inheritor of Tibetan weaving and cross-stitch embroidery techniques, vividly recalls how she created her first embroidery piece.

"When I was 8, my father took me to visit a friend whose daughter had a lovely doll bought in Chengdu, the provincial capital of Sichuan," she says. "I couldn't help thinking about that doll and had dreams about it smiling at me."

She found some fabric that her mother set aside to make new clothes, cut it into pieces and sewed herself a doll with a needle and thread.

"My mother was angry that I took the fabric and, that Chinese New Year, I had no new clothes to wear. However, looking at my doll, whose smile was crooked and eyes were mismatched, I felt very happy," she says.

Yang was born in a village in Xiaojin county of the Aba Tibetan and Qiang autonomous prefecture in Sichuan province, where Tibetan and Qiang people live together.

In her village, girls are expected to master the thousand-year-old Tibetan and Qiang weaving and embroidery techniques, a fusion of Tibetan weaving, cross stitching and Qiang embroidery, along with tea and meal preparation skills after the age of 10.

"Unlike the four famous Chinese embroidery styles, which are known for their ornamental value, Tibetan and Qiang embroideries are more practical as they are meant to be worn," she says.

The four famous Chinese embroideries are the Shu embroidery in Sichuan, Xiang embroidery in Hunan province, Yue embroidery in Guangdong province and Su embroidery in Jiangsu province.

Yang gained a reputation in the village for her exceptional needlework skills, with many soon-to-be brides turning to her for assistance in creating their dowries.

As an adult, Yang opened the first local photography studio, worked as a private school teacher, and later became a photojournalist for a newspaper. Embroidery became a hobby and she often used her spare time to visit skilled artisans in Tibetan and Qiang villages to study their techniques.

A major turning point for Yang came in May 2008, when a devastating magnitude 8.0 earthquake struck Wenchuan county in Aba prefecture and left over 87,000 people dead or missing.

"I pondered what I, a soon-to-be-retired person, could do to help my fellow villagers, and I thought of my embroidery skills," she says.

In August of that year, Yang took a group of 18 women with an average age of 60, half from Qiang and half from Tibetan ethnic groups, to Chengdu, hoping to turn their embroidery skills into a thriving business. However, it turned out to be much harder than she imagined.

Lacking money, they had to live in a rented two-bedroom apartment, using the living room as their workspace. They designed and made embroidery products to sell at street stalls, but made no profit in half a year and were almost broke.

"I cried quietly at night. The next morning I announced my decision



From top: Yang Huazhen, a national-level inheritor of Tibetan weaving and cross-stitch embroidery techniques, works on a piece. Yang shows the traditional techniques, and instructs a trainee. **Below:** A Qiang embroidery created by Yang in collaboration with Universal Pictures for *Jurassic World*. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



"The key is that we must learn to innovate because that is the best form of inheritance and the best way to give the past a future."

Yang Huazhen,
national-level inheritor



Online
Watch the video
by scanning
the code.

to give up. But no one would accept it," Yang says.

While they were at a loss about what to do next, the local government, upon learning that they were from the earthquake-stricken area, provided them with a 100-square-meter business space rent-free in the city's Wenshufang cultural block.

More good news came when a businessman offered to donate 600,000 yuan (\$81,845) to their business.

"Despite desperately needing money, we turned the donation down, hoping to replace it with orders," says Yang.

The businessman accepted their proposal and commissioned Yang's team to design and produce all the bedding and interior decorations for a hotel he runs.

The embroidery products specially designed for the hotel by Yang's team became a hit, paving their way to the market.

In 2014, Yang's distinct embroidery products began to gain global reputation, and caught the eye of international brands which contacted her for authorization to use her creations.

Her artistic presentation combines legacies from the two ethnic groups and is flexible in creating

new patterns, which draws wider attention.

The first global brand she cooperated with was a famous Japanese cosmetics company. Yang and her team spent three days creating packaging designs for its two makeup removers, earning a copyright authorization fee of 200,000 yuan.

"Oh my, what an incredible way to make a fortune, my team members said to each other," Yang says, adding that the experience made her realize the importance of intellectual property rights.

Over the past decade, Yang has cooperated with the Van Gogh Museum and over a dozen established brands, covering fields in cars, high fashion, dining and express business.

Yang attributes the popularity of her work to the unique charm of Chinese ethnic culture and China's status as one of the world's largest markets.

"What belongs to the nation belongs to the world, and what is traditional can become fashionable. The key is that we must learn to innovate because that is the best form of inheritance and the best way to give the past a future," she says.

In recent years, Yang has attached great importance to cultivating inheritors. She now has 58 apprentices from diverse backgrounds, including rural women, the physically challenged, university teachers and nuns.

She also established workshops in several locations, including Chengdu, and Jiuzhaigou and Wenchuan counties in Sichuan, where she has taught embroidery skills to thousands of women for free, including hundreds with disabilities.

Tang Suhua, 55 and physically limited due to polio, learned embroidery from Yang seven years ago and is now the deputy curator of the Chengdu Huazhen Tibetan and Qiang Culture Museum.

"I thank Yang for her great love. She is like family to me," Tang says.

"Before meeting her, my family was struggling to make ends meet. Now, a stable job has given me the confidence to face life."

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Racing against time for heritage

By **HUANG ZHILING**
and **PENG CHAO** in Chengdu

Zhang Juyue, a 34-year-old from the Qiang ethnic group who has dedicated her life to preserving and reviving Qiang embroidery, feels she is racing against time.

"In another 10 years, it might be difficult to find enough embroiderers to carry on this work," she says.

The Qiang group, with a population of about 310,000, is one of China's oldest, and is called "the ethnic group on clouds" as they usually live in high altitudes shrouded in mist and clouds.

Qiang embroidery, a national intangible cultural heritage passed down through generations of Qiang women, is essential for making clothing and an important carrier of the Qiang people's history, culture and customs, as they do not have a written language.

"The patterns in Qiang embroidery hold many hidden stories. For instance, the 'square flower' mentioned by local women is derived from the bricks of ancient city walls, symbolizing their memories of wars," Zhang says.

"These outward-pointing arrows represent the women's desire to protect their husbands," she says, pointing to the design on a shoe.

Over the past decade, the Qiang embroidery cooperative Zhang founded in her hometown

in Lixian county of the Aba Tibetan and Qiang autonomous prefecture in Sichuan province, has expanded to over 20 full-time employees. At its peak, it employed more than 300 Qiang women in part-time embroidery production.

Her workshop in the Taoping Qiang village in Lixian has developed more than 1,000 Qiang embroidery cultural and creative products, attracting over 10,000 university students each year for study tours.

Zhang was born and raised in the Jiaochang village in Lixian. In her generation, few girls in the village could do Qiang embroidery.

"My mother's generation began prioritizing education over embroidery," she recalls. "Since I was a child, people started to wear factory-made modern clothes. Now, traditional Qiang embroidered garments are only worn during festivals."

Zhang's renewed understanding of Qiang embroidery came after the magnitude 8.0 Wenchuan earthquake in 2008, which led to the permanent loss of numerous Qiang buildings, artifacts and cultural inheritors.

Following the earthquake, the Aba prefecture government launched a Qiang embroidery support program in cooperation with a charitable foundation, bringing in orders of Qiang embroidery products to the women to help increase their income.

"It made me realize that Qiang embroidery could be transformed into a variety of products and integrated into modern life," she says.

While studying at a university in Chengdu, the provincial capital, Zhang began selling Qiang-embroidery shoes, insoles and sachets at a street stall near the

entrance to a downtown tourist spot. She also opened an online store on Taobao to sell Qiang-embroidery products and specialties from her hometown.

After graduating from university, Zhang returned to her village and invited the local women to help fulfill the surging orders. However, she soon found the task challenging — lacking expertise in Qiang embroidery, it was difficult to gain their trust and provide them with proper training.

In 2013, Zhang attended a training class hosted by Li Xingdi, a national inheritor of Qiang embroidery, where she systematically learned the needlework techniques.

"With the skills I acquired, I would embroider a sample for each product and provide training to the other embroiderers to ensure that they met the standards required for selling," she says.

Li Bi, her mother, recalls that during the early stage of entrepreneurship, Zhang often stayed in her room all day designing embroidery patterns.

With the country's increasing emphasis on the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, Zhang gained more opportunities for advanced studies.

Over the years, she attended free training courses at eight universities under a national intangible cultural heritage research and training program initiated by the Ministry of Cul-

ture and Tourism and the Ministry of Education in 2015, which aims to help inheritors combine traditional craftsmanship with modern designs in their creations.

"These courses not only helped me improve my design concepts but also gave me access to many resources," Zhang says.

What excites Zhang the most is that, with the support of the Shanghai-based Public Art Coordination Center, one of the hosts of the training courses, she had the opportunity to collaborate with international fashion designers to create high-end dresses.

The Qiang embroidery dresses she participated in designing, named *Entrusted by the Mountains* and *Above the Colored Clouds*, were showcased at the 2015 Paris Fashion Week.

"That was beyond my wildest dreams. The experience really broadened my horizons," she says.

Zhang says her primary focus in the past decade was to ensure the survival of her cooperative. Looking ahead, she aspires to create more profound works to explore wider possibilities and present the art in new ways.

The major problem she currently faces is the lack of participation from young people.

"People my age either lack embroidery skills or prefer more stable or easier professions," Zhang says.

She frequently visits local schools to carry out promotional activities for Qiang embroidery, aiming to cultivate individuals willing to inherit this traditional craft.

"My 5-year-old daughter is interested in Qiang embroidery. I'm not saying that she must take it up but if she chooses to, I will support her," she says.



Zhang Juyue dressed in traditional Qiang ethnic attire. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



The Qiang embroidery design, *Above the Colored Clouds* by Zhang, showcased at the 2015 Paris Fashion Week. Zhang is a provincial-level inheritor of Qiang embroidery.

LIFE

Honoring courage in the line of duty

Acclaimed TV series chronicles three decades of China's criminal police history, **Xu Fan** reports.

Over four years ago, director Hui Kaidong first laid eyes on the script of the TV series *We Are Criminal Police*, and was immediately drawn to its authentic and unembellished storytelling.

Commissioned by the News Media Center of the Ministry of Public Security, the program stirred his memories of a critically acclaimed 1999 drama based on a real-life case — which involved a police officer's tragic death in a car crash — leading to the theft of his service pistol and triggering a gripping sequence of events in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, in 1997.

Hui, a seasoned veteran with over two decades in the television industry, previously worked as a cinematographer on the series. Since then, he nurtured a long-held aspiration to direct his own crime series.

"When I was filming the 1990s drama, I lived with the police officers who solved the case in Xi'an for several months. This experience left a deep impression on me regarding their dedication to safeguarding our people and society, sometimes risking their own lives," recalls Hui.

As an example, Hui recounts how the officers would often mention that they were on call even at night. "Whenever the phone rang, they would promptly get up and inform their wives or families, 'I need to go.' However, they never knew when they would return or if they would make it back home at all," he adds.

Taking up the new drama as homage to the 160,000 Chinese police officers combating crime on the front lines, Hui set aside other projects and committed one-and-a-half years to leading his team across the country for preparations. They meticulously observed the daily work and life of officers in various cities and scouted for the most suitable filming locations, ranging from Hegang in Northeast China's Heilongjiang province to Chongqing in Southwest China.

One of the moments he found most impressive was visiting Cui Daozhi, a 91-year-old expert revered



We Are Criminal Police, a popular TV series inspired by real-life events, recounts 15 infamous cases, including one where police officers investigate the rape and murder of a teenage girl in the snowy wilderness. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

as China's Sherlock Holmes. As a trailblazer among the country's first-generation forensic policemen, Cui participated in the on-site investigations of over 1,000 cases and identified more than 7,000 pieces of trace and physical evidence without a single error.

"Under rudimentary conditions at that time, Cui provided crucial evidence for many cases with exceptional dedication and professionalism," says Hui.

Scriptwriter Xu Meng interviewed over 200 police officers and gathered materials totaling 2 million words in eight months, creating 15 representative cases — all inspired by real-life stories.

Consisting of 38 episodes, the ensemble-cast drama intertwines the process of hunting and identifying criminals in these cases with the

career trajectory of Qin Chuan, a committed police officer portrayed by Yu Hewei.

Beginning in the early 1990s, a small city immersed in the excitement of Spring Festival is shaken by a horrific event — four masked gunmen invade a mine with a well-planned scheme to steal over 1 million yuan (\$136,395) in cash. During the clash with security personnel, they fatally shoot nine individuals, including a young boy who unintentionally follows his father back to the mine's factory.

Qin, the protagonist, a recent graduate from a police academy, unexpectedly finds himself among the first group of police officers to arrive at the scene, along with two colleagues. The brave officers risk their lives to enter the factory, not sure whether the ruthless criminals

"We made authenticity our top priority, promoting natural dialogue. In conference scenes, I told the actors not to worry about memorizing lines."

Hui Kaidong, director

are still inside as the force lacked technical support at that time.

Demonstrating his sharp wit and keen observation skills, Qin, despite

being a novice at the time, uncovers crucial clues and apprehends the criminals. This marks the beginning of his decades-long pursuit of solving increasingly complex cases, from capturing a serial robber responsible for 11 deaths across multiple cities to unraveling a series of brutal rape and murder cases.

Spanning 35 years, the show also reflects China's progress in criminal investigation technology, transitioning from relying on visual evidence and extensive police investigations into all households related to the case to utilizing DNA analysis and surveillance cameras for swift case resolution.

"We made authenticity our top priority, promoting natural dialogue. In conference scenes, I told the actors not to worry about memorizing lines. Stuttering or repeat-

ing words is fine; it reflects real meetings, especially when police officers are working all night and getting only a few hours of sleep," Hui reveals about the behind-the-scenes stories.

Interestingly, in the first several episodes, the story takes place in snowy northeastern China, depicting scenes from the daily lives and work of police officers. One scene shows a police captain cooking pork bone soup in his office.

"During scriptwriter Xu's research, she discovered that many police officers often have to stake out suspects for long periods during investigations, resulting in irregular meal times. Struggling with digestive issues, they need to eat warm food," explains the director. "These scenes are inspired by real-life situations. However, with the implementation of standardized management in recent years, cooking in offices is no longer a common practice."

Due to the cases occurring in various cities across the country, Hui led the crew in overcoming a variety of natural challenges, including placing heaters under cameras to ensure they functioned in -40 C in Hegang, as well as enduring hot and humid conditions exceeding 40 C in Chongqing.

The drama concluded its initial run on China Central Television's CCTV-8 in late December and was subsequently broadcast on Beijing Satellite TV and Shanghai's Dragon TV, setting a record by reaching over 1.1 billion program subscribers.

With a rating of 7.7 out of 10 on the popular review aggregator Douban, the show has garnered acclaim from both critics and industry insiders. Wang Yichuan, vice-chairman of the China Literature and Art Critics Association, remarks that the drama offers viewers a vivid experience, immersing them in the process of solving mysteries alongside the officers, thus setting a good reference for the future creation of Chinese crime investigation dramas.

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Scenes from the series' inaugural case depict police officers in a small city in northeastern China investigating four masked gunmen committing a mine robbery (center), with actress Ma Su (left) portraying the wife of one of the criminals, and actor Yu Hewei (right) playing the protagonist, Qin Chuan, a dedicated and skilled officer.

FROM THE GRASSROOTS

Gala spices up Kunming-Vientiane train ride

By YANG FEIYUE and LI YINGQING

Passengers on board train D87 connecting China and Laos were blown away by a special gala during their ride.

More than 50 vibrant performances including singing and dancing, musical instruments, magic shows and acrobatics added a great deal of spice to the rail ride from Kunming of Southwest China's Yunnan province to Vientiane of Laos on Jan 14.

The gala was hosted by the publicity department of Yunnan and kicked off a series of Spring Festival cultural events from China to Laos and Thailand, which lasted until Saturday.

The four-hour-long gala elicited continuous applause and laughter from passengers.

Pongdong Paxaphacdy, consul general of the Consulate General of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in Kunming, says he already felt like celebrating Spring Festival on the train with other passengers.

"It's a very meaningful event," Paxaphacdy says.

The day marked the start of the Spring Festival travel rush, with a high influx of passengers on the China-Laos Railway. This surge is driven by Chinese nationals returning home, family short trips and group tours from Southeast Asia.

In December, the UNESCO inscribed Spring Festival — the social practices of the Chinese people in celebration of their traditional New Year — on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Paxaphacdy says he could feel the grand sense of the occasion during the festival, which impresses him with "very distinct Chinese characteristics".

"Chinese New Year is not only celebrated within China, but also in Laos and across the entire ASEAN region, with many people participating and feeling its warm festive atmosphere," he says.

On Dec 3, the China-Laos Railway celebrated its third anniversary of operation, delivering an impressive performance.

The railway has handled over 43 million passenger trips and more than 48.3 million metric tons of cargo,



Singers from Yunnan province interact with passengers onboard train D87 from Kunming to Vientiane on Jan 14, the start of the Spring Festival travel rush. CHEN FEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

with safe operations.

It has significantly enhanced regional connectivity, boosted regional economic growth, facilitated people-to-people and cultural exchanges, and demonstrated great development potential as a golden

transport corridor, experts say.

To meet the travel demands of passengers during the Spring Festival holiday, railway authorities have made elaborate arrangements for transport capacity, increased the number of passenger trains on the

siastically taking pictures, fueled the energy of his performance.

"Through the lyrics and melody, we hope that people gain a better understanding of Mojiang, and better appreciate the unique charm of its twin culture (marked by its high twin birth rate) and the local customs of the Hani people," Huang says.

As a representative of the Lao government working in Kunming, Paxaphacdy says he has long enjoyed the excitement of Spring Festival.

"Every year brings different experiences," he notes, adding that this year's train ride with the gala is a case in point.

"I have seen a lot of cultures (in the gala performance), especially those of our ethnic groups. We noticed that some languages are quite similar, and we also saw performances from the Miao and Dai ethnic groups, which resemble the cultural practices in some cities in Laos," he says. "We can see that the friendship between China and Laos has a long and deep history."

Deng Yingchuan contributed to this story.

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