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XI'S VISION | WTO REFORM

30 years on, WTO continues to drive growth

Long-term, gradual reform of global trade body needed for multilateral cooperation, experts say

By ZHONG NAN
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When Hexagon AB, a Swedish company for metrology and geo-analytics, first entered the Chinese market in 1993, all its coordinate measuring machines — devices used to gauge the precise geometrical characteristics of objects — had to be imported from Europe.

More than 30 years on, the company sees 90 percent of its machines manufactured locally in China. The Stockholm-based company currently operates its globally largest CMM production facility in terms of output in Qingdao, Shandong province.

While providing products and equipment for business clients in China, the production base also serves as a key source of supply for overseas markets such as Southeast Asia, said Josh Weiss, president of Hexagon's manufacturing intelligence division.

"We have built a local supply chain to gain access to higher-quality products at lower costs. Through this process, Chinese suppliers are incorporated into our global supply chain to support other factories," Weiss said.

This is one of many examples of how global trade and investment have driven growth of the corporate sector and the economy of host countries, and the World Trade Organization has played a significant role in that process since its establishment on Jan 1, 1995.

Bridging the gap

With 166 members, the global trade body has made major contributions to the strength and stability

of global trade and economy over the past 30 years, helping drive trade and investment growth, resolving trade disputes, and facilitating the integration of developing economies into the global trading system, said Tu Xinquan, dean of the China Institute for WTO Studies at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing.

A WTO report released in September noted that trade has contributed to reducing the gap between developed and developing economies. From 1995 to 2023, for example, the global per capita income increased around 65 percent — from \$7,050 to \$11,570 — while in low- and middle-income economies, it almost tripled — from \$1,835 to \$5,337.

About one-third of the income convergence can be attributed to the openness of trade in low- and middle-income economies, the report said.

After joining the WTO as its 143rd member on Dec 11, 2001, China has grown into the world's second-largest economy, with about 800 million people lifted out of poverty thanks to a large extent to the indispensable role of trade, which facilitated the flow of a wide range of products the country manufactures, from clothing and furniture to bullet trains and liquefied natural gas carriers.

Other developing economies have benefited from the WTO, too. For example, WTO members have implemented a broad range of agreements, decisions and technical assistance programs to foster the economic transformation of Africa.

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Festive visit



Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, chats with residents in Zhujiagou village in Huludao, Liaoning province, on Wednesday, ahead of Spring Festival, the most important festival for the Chinese people, which falls on Jan 29 this year. Xi, who is also Chinese president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, learned about local post-disaster reconstruction and people's daily livelihoods during the visit to the village. Huludao experienced record flooding caused by heavy rainfall in August, affecting more than 188,700 people and destroying over 5,400 houses. XINHUA

Xi-Trump dialogue: Seizing opportunity for intl peace

Donald Trump was sworn in as the 47th president of the United States on Monday. Chinese President Xi Jinping dispatched Vice-President Han Zheng as his special representative to attend Trump's inauguration, signaling a readiness for constructive dialogue despite long-standing tensions between the two countries.

This gesture, paired with a reportedly productive phone call between the two leaders, offers a glimmer of hope in an otherwise problematic geopolitical situation. Trump's declaration that he and Xi could work together to "solve many problems" is ambitious but not implausible. As the leaders of the world's two largest economies, their collaboration — or lack thereof — will undoubtedly have an

WORLD WATCH
By Wilson Lee Flores

impact on global stability and prosperity.

Trump has always been a pragmatist and not a political ideologue, as well as a bold dealmaker unafraid to rewrite the rules. His past presidency, marked by a fierce trade war with China, showed that antagonistic strategies have limits. The escalating of tariffs and sanctions hurt not only China but also US farmers, manufacturers and consumers. Now Trump seems to signal a pivot toward engagement, recognizing that zero-sum rivalries are coun-

terproductive in a world of interconnected economies.

Trump's willingness to reach out to Xi, despite years of mutual distrust between both countries, reflects his understanding that the US and China must coexist. Reforming US foreign policy on China, which has in recent years tragically leaned heavily on containment and confrontation, is a wise and calculated move. Shared challenges — climate change, public health crises, geopolitical instability and supply-chain disruptions — demand collaboration, not division.

Xi's decision to send a high-ranking representative to Trump's inauguration signals a willingness to engage. While symbolic, this move reflects Beijing's interest in

stabilizing relations. A global trade power that thrives in times of robust international stability, China benefits from cooperation rather than confrontation with the US.

Xi's response demonstrates pragmatic leadership. By opting for high-level dialogue over escalation of tensions, he again reiterates China's stance on being a willing partner in addressing global challenges. His recent emphasis on mutual respect and collaboration aligns with Beijing's long-term and consistent vision of "peaceful development".

The potential for US-China collaboration is immense, especially in areas where their interests align.

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Global solidarity highlighted at Davos

By CAO DESHENG in Beijing and XING YI in Davos, Switzerland

Vice-Premier Ding Xuexiang has warned of "unimaginable" consequences if the world becomes divided, and he emphasized the need for the international community to work together to oppose a Cold War mentality and zero-sum game, and build a more equitable international order.

"If the world becomes divided, it will be difficult for humanity to address common challenges together, and the world could relapse into confrontation and even wars, and no country could remain unaffected," Ding said on Tuesday during the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2025 in Davos, Switzerland.

Ding's appearance at the Davos event made him the first senior leader from China to address global concerns about the country's economic prospects and foreign policy priorities since US President Donald Trump assumed office for his non-consecutive second term on Monday. Ding told the attendees at the event that global governance is undergoing profound adjustments, with imminent tariff wars and trade wars, an ongoing tug-of-war between the forces for and against economic globalization, and intense rivalry between multilateralism and unilateralism.

He underlined the need for the international community to jointly promote universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization, saying that "protectionism leads



Intangible cultural heritage artists from Tianjin present Fu, a Chinese character representing happiness and good luck, to guests on Tuesday at the Congress Centre, the venue for the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2025 in Davos, Switzerland. XING YI / CHINA DAILY

nowhere" and that a trade war "has no winners".

Ding called for upholding and practicing true multilateralism, pursuing the vision of global governance featuring extensive consultation and joint contribution for shared benefit, and ensuring equal rights, opportunities and rules for all countries in international affairs.

This year's WEF annual meeting, running from Monday to Friday, is themed "Collaboration for the Intelligent Age".

While highlighting the importance of leveraging artificial intelligence and emerging technologies to bridge global divides and drive inclusive, sustainable economic growth, Ding called for improving global govern-

ance on AI development to ensure that AI becomes an "Ali Baba's cave" filled with treasure, rather than a "Pandora's box" of uncontrollable risk.

He urged global cooperation under the United Nations to create strong governance frameworks to ensure that AI benefits humanity while avoiding risks.

China will collaborate with countries from around the world in AI development, especially when it comes to sharing new technologies with countries in the Global South, he added.

Regarding the Chinese economy, the vice-premier underscored China's high-quality development, noting its 5 percent GDP growth last year despite external and structural challenges.

He said that the difficulties faced by the Chinese economy stem not only from the impact of the external environment, but also from the growing pains associated with its own economic structural adjustments.

China will further intensify macro policies, and adopt a more proactive fiscal policy and an appropriately accommodative monetary policy, Ding said, adding that the country will promote the sound and stable development of the capital market, stabilize the real estate market, and effectively prevent and defuse local government debt risks to effectively pursue higher-quality economic growth.

Ding reaffirmed China's unwavering commitment to peak its carbon emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.

He also said the country welcomes more foreign companies to invest and do business in China and share in its opportunities. "China's door of opening-up will not be closed and will only open even wider, and our business environment will only get better."

Fabrice Megarbane, chief global growth officer of the French cosmetics company L'Oréal Group, said with its presence in China for almost 27 years, L'Oréal has witnessed the development and opening-up of China.

"We've been investing in China. We've been growing with China. And even recently we have increased our investment to our center in Suzhou. We've been introducing more brands to the market. We've been also extremely determined to contribute to China's rebound in domestic consumption," Megarbane said.

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WOMEN RAISE THE HAIRDRESSING BAR

Once the domain of male barbers, hair salons today are being redefined by female stylists

By CHEN NAN
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In-depth

The buzz of clippers, the fragrance of hair products, and the chatter of eager customers: A week before Spring Festival — the biggest traditional Chinese holiday — a hair salon nestled in the heart of Beijing's vibrant Sanlitun neighborhood is a hive of activity.

Known for its cosmopolitan atmosphere and eclectic mix of shops, restaurants and nightlife, Sanlitun is the go-to place for people wanting to look their best ahead of the festivities.

Among the hairdressers, one young woman stands out. Her movements swift and purposeful, she works tirelessly in front of the mirrors. Whether giving stylish trims to young professionals or

classic cuts to elderly clients, her hands are always in motion, creating that perfect look.

"The pressure is on, with everyone hoping to leave with a fresh, new look just in time for the festival," says Yan Yan, the 32-year-old hairdresser. She works at least 10 hours a day, with some of her customers even having to line up outside the salon due to the heavy rush. "I want to give my customers the haircut they expect, but I also offer suggestions that go beyond their expectations. It's a rewarding experience when they leave looking and feeling great," she adds.

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PAGE TWO

Hairdressers: Salon queens crafting aesthetics

From page 1

One of the first things you notice about Yan Yan is her platinum blonde hair — sleek and short, complementing her sharp features and effortlessly chic sense of fashion. Her look exudes a modern, edgy aesthetic that's hard to miss.

Yan Yan isn't just another salon employee; she's one of the most sought-after hairdressers in the area. Every day, she carefully selects a wardrobe that includes tailored trousers, oversized skirts, and unique accessories, each piece reflecting her bold and stylish personality.

Inside the salon, her workstation is always immaculate, with her tools — clippers, razors, and combs — arranged with precision. But it's not just her look that draws people in; it's her magnetic personality and the relaxed yet professional atmosphere she creates for her customers. Whether performing an elaborate haircut or a simple trim, every visit feels like an experience, not just a service.

Her clientele ranges from young professionals and fashion-forward trendsetters to older clients who return not only for her skills but also her warmth and attentiveness. She doesn't just cut hair; she listens. Many customers are surprised by how much they enjoy the conversation, whether it's about fashion trends, local events, or personal stories. Yan Yan has the natural ability to make people feel at ease, as though they have been friends for years.

"I often use the method of elimination to understand what my customers want," she says, explaining her step-by-step process of narrowing down choices by asking targeted questions and eliminating options based on their preferences. "What kind of look are you going for today? How do you usually like your hair cut?" These questions help me understand my clients' general preferences."

After the initial response, she narrows it further by asking more specific questions such as, "Are you looking for a sharp style or a more natural look?" and "Would you like a trim, or are you looking for something new?"

"If clients indicate they don't like certain styles, textures, or lengths, or give me clear instructions, I always confirm with them to ensure I'm on the right track," Yan Yan adds. "I want to deliver the look they desire, avoiding confusion or miscommunication."

Yan Yan's real name is Guo Yanyan, but to her customers, she's simply known as Yan Yan. Born and raised in Hebei province, she discovered her passion for cutting hair in her late teens while attending beauty school.

Creating experiences

Her initial attraction to the profession was purely aesthetic; she admired the precision and artistry involved in shaping someone's appearance. But she quickly realized that her interest went beyond just styling hair. Hairdressing, she discovered, was about connection. It was about creating an experience — a space where customers felt heard, valued and respected.

"What really sets her apart is her ability to win the hearts of her customers. From the moment someone sits in her chair, there's an unspoken understanding that they'll leave not just with a great haircut, but with a sense of connection and personal attention," says one of Yan Yan's regular customers, 26-year-old Lu Wei, who has been visiting her for nearly two years.

Lu shares her previous disappointing experience before she met Yan Yan.

It was a hot summer afternoon when Lu, on a day off in Beijing, decided to get a haircut. Although it wasn't planned, she felt ready for a new look and confidently strolled into a nearby hair salon. "I wanted a chic, butterfly cut that ended just below the chin — something that says, 'she's effortlessly stylish,'" Lu explains. "I was excited, expecting to leave with a haircut that would make me selfie-ready."

But things quickly went downhill. The young male barber assigned to her seemed confused about what a butterfly cut was and didn't ask any questions about how she usually styled her hair. Instead, he reassured her, "I got this, don't worry. You're going to love it," with a confidence that made Lu feel uneasy.

"Despite my doubts, I went along with it. I reiterated the length and style I wanted. As the minutes passed, an uncomfortable silence settled in," she recalls. "When he said, 'I think we're done,' I was in shock. The result? A haircut that was nothing like what I had envisioned."

Trying to mask her surprise with a tight smile, Lu paid and left the shop, avoiding eye contact with anyone. "I passed a storefront window and had a brief existential crisis. Who was this woman? My hair was much shorter than I expected, and there was no butterfly cut at all," she laughs. By the time she got home, she seriously contemplated putting on a hat and crying.

"I shared my experience with my friends, and they totally understood how frustrating it was," Lu says. "Sometimes hairdressers get stuck in their own groove, cutting hair the way they think looks best, without fully listening to what the customer wants."

Ren Mingwei, the owner of My Hair — a chain of about 100 hair salons nationwide — says the hair industry has long been domi-



Above: Yan Yan cuts hair for a customer at a salon in Beijing on Dec 26.

ZHOU HONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Right: A female hairdresser gives a haircut to an elderly customer at an open-air rural market in Qingdao, Shandong province, on Jan 12, 2024.

ZHOU HONG / FOR CHINA DAILY



nated by men, but a quiet revolution is taking place behind the barber's chair. The number of female hairdressers is on the rise, not just for their skill with clippers, but for their refreshing, communicative approach to the art of grooming.

"No longer confined to beauty or salon industries, women are stepping into the male-dominated world of barbering, transforming it along the way," Ren explains. "They are redefining what it means to sit in the barber's chair. They offer more than just a haircut. They create an environment where customers not only leave looking good but also feeling heard and understood."

Ren, 37, moved to Beijing in 2006 from his hometown in Shanxi province and started as a barber's assistant. After gaining hands-on experience, he opened his own outlet in 2010.

"Since 2018, the number of female hairdressers has been growing. As much as 85 percent of our customers are women. The unique approach of female hairdressers — often based on empathy and effective communication — has allowed them to make a significant impact in the industry," Ren says. "Today, 40 percent of the hairdressers working under my label are women."

He also notes that barbershops are evolving. "They're no longer just places for a quick trim. They're becoming spaces where men can relax, open up, and engage in meaningful conversations with their barbers."

The rise of female hairdressers highlights an often-overlooked aspect of the trade: the power of communication.

"Women tend to possess high emotional intelligence, which allows them to connect with clients on a deeper level, making the experience more personal and fulfilling," says Ren. "At the same time, their skills are just as good as male barbers'. Their ability to create a space where clients feel seen and heard provides an extra benefit."

"The rise of women hairdressers has raised the bar in the industry, making the competition fiercer, and that's a good thing."

Growing tribe

Despite their growing presence, women hairdressers still face challenges and even bias in a male-dominated industry. From overcoming skepticism to proving their worth, women in the hair trade must often go the extra mile.

Yan Yan recalls how she faced resistance when she first entered the industry. Some even doubted her professionalism and questioned her skills, simply assuming that the profession was reserved for men.

"At first, some clients would be unsure when they were assigned to me. They'd see me, a woman with a razor, and wonder if I could handle it. But I didn't let that discourage me. I kept working on my craft, and now, my clients trust me for both my skills and the environment I create," she says.

The trend is expanding beyond Beijing. In 2024, a female hairdresser from Huaihua, Hunan province, named "Hairstylist Xiaohua", went viral for her exceptional skills and humble, attentive approach. Her meticulous attention to detail and ability to perfectly fulfill client requests have made her a favorite among netizens. During her livestreams, Xiaohua regularly attracts over 100,000 viewers, including professional barbers eager to learn from her technique.

What makes her stand out? It's not just her technique but her deep understanding of client needs, her ability to listen attentively, and her remarkable attention to detail.

Xiaohua's rise to fame began with a viral video that showed her giving a client a haircut while carefully adhering to every specific request. Dressed simply and professionally, she communicates with her customers with patience, asking them exactly what they want and carefully following their instructions. For example, when a client asked for bangs to sit "just above the eyes, but a little below the eyebrows," she executed the request flawlessly, a testament to her precision.

What truly sets her apart is her ability to handle both very specific and more abstract requests. A client might say, "Don't cut it too short," and Xiaohua knows exactly what that means, without needing further clarification. Her skill in reading and interpreting these nuances has led her to be affectionately dubbed as "The People's Hairstylist" by netizens, with many expressing admiration for her dedication to delivering exactly what the customer asks for, no more and no less.

During peak times, her live broadcasts have 100,000 viewers tuning in. But it isn't just everyday people watching—professional barbers from all over the country started joining her live sessions in groups to "steal



Below: Hairdresser Ge Ge dyes a customer's hair at a hair salon in Beijing on Dec 26.

ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

skills" and learn from her technique.

Dai Zhaolei traveled to Huaihua to visit Xiaohua last December. Owning a barbershop in Kunming, Yunnan province, 35-year-old Dai let Xiaohua give him a haircut, which cost him 30 yuan. He was overwhelmed by the crowds waiting in front of Xiaohua's shop for their turn.

"Compared to bigger cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, the price is very reasonable and just like Xiaohua's humble and down-to-earth style," says Dai, who trained to become a barber in 2007 and later worked in barbershops in Shanghai and Beijing before launching his own barbershop in Kunming in May 2024.

"In the fashion world dominated by flashy trends and over-the-top personalities, Xiaohua's simplicity, attention to detail, and commitment to her clients stand out as a refreshing reminder of what it means to truly listen and serve," says Dai. "I also worked with some women hair-

dressers in Beijing and Shanghai, who combine skills with emotional intelligence and keen attention to detail."

Thanks to social media platforms, female hairdressers have been gaining a wide fan base by posting their works and sharing their ideas about fashion, Dai notes.

"Some customers come to hair salons just for the experience of getting a cut by a female hairdresser," he says. "As far as I know, the women are better at their work than the men."

As an owner of a barber shop, Dai also looks for female hairdressers to join him. He says that traditional barbershops often have a masculine vibe, while female hairdressers help the hair salons feel more inclusive and genteel.

"As more clients seek personalized experiences, the role of the female hairdressers will continue to grow, offering a refreshing, customer-centered alternative to the traditional barbershop experience," he says.

TOP NEWS

Spring Festival to record surge in foreign tourists

By ZHU WENQIAN
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With Spring Festival around the corner, China's tourism market is heating up and a rush of international visitors is expected during the holiday period, industry players said.

As of Wednesday, the booking volume of inbound tours for the eight-day holiday, starting on Jan 28, the eve of Chinese New Year, surged over 200 percent year-on-year, according to Trip.com Group, China's largest online travel agency.

Most of these bookings have been made by travelers from South Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and the United States, the agency noted. The top destinations include Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Guangzhou in Guangdong province, Harbin in Heilongjiang province, and Chengdu in Sichuan province.

Addressing a news conference in Beijing last week, Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said this year's Spring Festival celebrations will be the first after the festival was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.

"We welcome foreign travelers visiting China to celebrate Chinese New Year together and experience the strong festive mood," he added.

China has been continuously optimizing its visa-free and visa-on-arrival policies to facilitate foreign travel to the country. It recently extended the duration of visa-free transit to 240 hours and increased the number of eligible ports of entry to 60, opening the door to more international travelers.

In 2024, the number of inbound and outbound foreign travelers at all Chinese ports reached 64.88 million, up 82.9 percent year-on-year. This included over 20 million visa-free entries, up 112.3 percent compared with 2023, according to the National Immigration Administration.

During the recently concluded New Year holiday, the number of foreigners entering the country increased nearly 34 percent year-on-year, data from the NIA showed.

Currently, international visitors transferring flights in Beijing can experience a half-day complimentary tour of the Chinese capital. The tourism promotion initiative, launched by Trip.com on Dec 27, is the first of its kind in Beijing.

Visitors can apply for participation in the tour at Terminal 3 of Beijing Capital International Airport. The tour includes complimentary shuttle services, foreign language tour guides, admission tickets to attractions and Wi-Fi services.

Those interested can choose to visit either the Badaling section of the Great Wall or the Beijing Central Axis, which includes visits to the Temple of Heaven, Qianmen Street and Tian'anmen Square.

So far, travelers from nearly 50 countries, including Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Singapore, have participated in the complimentary Beijing tour, according to Trip.com.

The agency also found that the top five favorite attractions in the Chinese capital for foreign travelers are Universal Studios, the Badaling Great Wall, the Mutianyu Great Wall, the Palace Museum and the Summer Palace.

In April, Trip.com launched a similar half-day complimentary tour service for foreigners transferring flights at Shanghai Pudong International Airport.

Li Xinjian, a professor at Beijing International Studies University, said that China has adopted preferential travel policies to provide more opportunities for foreigners to visit the country. "Various innovative measures have been taken across China to promote the deep integration of culture and tourism development," Li said.

Sensory delight



A worker arranges dried incense sticks on Tuesday in a courtyard in Quang Phu Cau, a village on the outskirts of Hanoi, Vietnam, known as a sensory wonderland for its vibrant colors and aromatic scents, ahead of new year celebrations in Vietnam. NHAC NGUYEN / AFP

China completes testing of Fukushima seawater

No abnormalities detected in concentration of hazardous elements

By MO JINGXI
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China's research institutions have recently completed the testing and analysis of seawater samples collected near the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant and no abnormalities were detected in the concentration of hazardous elements such as tritium, cesium-137 and strontium-90, according to the China Atomic Energy Authority.

The specific data will be compiled and published by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the authority told Global Times on Wednesday.

The tested samples, which arrived in China around December, were independently collected by Chinese experts who traveled to waters near the ocean discharge outlet of the Fukushima nuclear plant in mid-October.

It was the first time that China independently collected the samples since the Japanese government unilaterally started discharging nuclear-contaminated water from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant into the ocean on Aug 24, 2023, disregarding serious doubts and strong opposition from the international community.

The collection came after Japan agreed in September to fully cooperate in the establishment of an independent and effective long-term international monitoring arrangement in which stakeholders can participate substantively, and to accept independent sampling and monitoring by China.

The Global Times report cited experts saying that the independent sampling by stakeholders will help the international community obtain authentic and effective data and be informed in a timely manner of any impact of the discharge.

The data, which can be compared and verified with the results of independent monitoring conducted by the IAEA and Japan, is an important part of the international monitoring arrangement, they said.

They also said that based on various monitoring data that had been collected so far, there is no evidence yet indicating that the ocean discharge has had an impact on marine life in the relevant area.

Given that the ocean discharge of Fukushima nuclear-contaminated water has no precedent and Japan's unilateral decision to proceed with the ocean discharge lacks legitimacy and legality, it is necessary to remain cautious on this issue from the scientific perspective, the experts said.

Noting that the results of a single test are limited, China and other stakeholders will continue to participate in the long-term international monitoring arrangement under the IAEA framework and carry out sampling and monitoring independently.



A foreigner visiting China goes through immigration formalities at Beijing Daxing International Airport on Dec 27. JU HUANZONG / XINHUA

WTO: Patience urged to tackle challenges ahead

From page 1

Since the launch of the Aid for Trade initiative in 2005, donors have disbursed \$451 billion in official development assistance to help developing economies build trade capacity and infrastructure, and \$163 billion has gone to African countries, the report said.

Crucial role

As a responsible member of the WTO, China has, together with other members, actively participated in the reform of the organization.

During a study session of the country's senior officials in September 2023, President Xi Jinping said the WTO is an important pillar of multilateralism and an important stage for global economic governance, and that it is a common consensus and a general trend to implement necessary reforms of the WTO.

"We should press ahead with reforming the WTO, oppose unilateralism and protectionism, and restore the normal functioning of the dispute settlement mechanism as soon as possible," Xi said, while attending the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Nov 18.

Challenges the WTO faces include interlinked agricultural and non-agricultural issues, divergent interests among developing economies, the rise of unilateralism and protectionism, the diminishing role of multilateral negotiation mechanisms,

and the lack of strong leadership in reform. The US' long-standing blockages of the WTO's appeal body have also substantially damaged the organization's operational efficiency, analysts said.

While the WTO has made notable progress in areas such as investment facilitation and e-commerce, it has yet to achieve significant breakthroughs in reform, according to experts.

Li Rulin, vice-president of Beijing-based China Law Society, said it is urgent for developed, developing and least-developed economies to make breakthroughs in WTO reforms to ensure multilateral cooperation, fair and free trade, and the normalization of dispute settlement mechanisms, in order to give full play to the WTO's role.

The WTO reform is expected to be a long-term, gradual process that demands broad participation from its members. A recent study released by the University of International Business and Economics noted that major differences of WTO members include disagreements between the US and the European Union over the dispute settlement mechanism, as well as differing stances between developed and developing economies on the creation of new rules and the application of differential treatment.

Given the current complex and rapidly evolving international landscape, Su Qingyi, a senior fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sci-

ences' Institute of World Economics and Politics, said that while efforts are needed to solve those problems, the WTO remains a crucial anchor for global trade development and the stability of trade rules and order.

For example, the trade-led economic growth of the past 30 years has made significant contributions to reducing extreme poverty, as the percentage of individuals living in extreme poverty in low- and middle-income countries decreased to less than 11 percent in 2022 from 40 percent in 1995, according to the WTO report.

"What we can do is to continue pushing for negotiations and ensure the effective operation of alternative mechanisms. At the same time, we need to seek more innovative solutions in order to break the current deadlock," said Zhang Xiangchen, deputy director-general of the WTO.

Though the WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference, held in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, in March, adopted a ministerial declaration setting out a forward-looking reform agenda for the organization, Zhang said that China needs to persuade other countries to resolve issues through negotiations to advance the WTO reform.

"As the reform progresses into a more challenging phase, it requires us to move forward with patience, gradually tackling the complex and difficult issues that lie ahead," he added.

Rebeca Grynspan, secretary-general of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, said she believes in the contribution of open trade and investment to global development and noted that China has set an admirable example of such practices in recent years.

Ties: Long-term stability prioritized

From page 1

Both nations have a stake in addressing climate change, stabilizing financial markets, tackling global conflicts such as the Ukraine war, combating terrorism, and advancing innovation in artificial intelligence and space exploration.

Trade remains a critical area for breakthroughs. While Trump's grievances about trade imbalances are legitimate, they can be addressed through negotiation rather than confrontation. Xi has already signaled China's willingness to continue opening its markets further and strengthen protection for foreign investors.

Joint efforts in green technology and renewable energy could not only curb climate change but also set a powerful example for other nations. Such cooperation would demonstrate that even the fiercest competitors can unite for the greater good.

Despite exciting opportunities, significant obstacles remain. Trump's Cabinet appointments, such as China hawk Marco Rubio as US secretary of state, reveal seemingly intractable internal divisions on how to approach Beijing. Rubio's undiplomatic rhetoric contrasts sharply with Trump's statesmanlike overtures, reflecting Washington's ideological split between those advocating engagement and those favoring containment.

China, too, has strong national-

Let us dare to envision an extraordinary partnership between these two giants, the US and China — a bold, transformative legacy of collaboration and peace that reshapes our world and inspires generations to come.

ist sentiment, fueled by years of unilateral US sanctions and non-stop perceived slights. The Taiwan question remains a particularly volatile flashpoint, where I believe any missteps by the US could lead to a military escalation.

For Trump and Xi to succeed in resetting troubled relations, both leaders need to prioritize long-term stability over short-term political gain. Trump needs to resist pressure from neocon hardliners and irresponsible political demagogues who wish to escalate tensions, so that Xi can reciprocate with positive diplomatic, trade and other responses.

This historic moment of Trump's return to power offers a rare chance to normalize and depoliticize US-China relations. By shifting from past destructive and

adversarial posturing to constructive collaboration, the two nations can rewrite the global narrative and human history. Trump and Xi must work together on shared lofty goals.

As Trump aptly said, "President Xi and I will do everything possible to make the world more peaceful and safe." This is not merely rhetoric; it is a call for action for two of the most influential leaders of our time to rise above past divisions and proactively pursue common solutions.

In a world plagued by dizzying uncertainty, their high-level dialogue and willingness to cooperate inspire hope for Asia and the rest of the world. While the grim challenges are immense, the opportunities for cooperation and mutual benefit are limitless.

Let us dare to envision an extraordinary partnership between these two giants, the US and China — a bold, transformative legacy of collaboration and peace that reshapes our world and inspires generations to come. This pivotal moment could mark the beginning of a new era of real global stability, faster economic growth and shared prosperity.

The author is an economics and politics analyst, an award-winning columnist for the Philippine Star and Abante newspapers, a book author, and a moderator of the Pandesal Forum. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

At your service

Seniors and children interact with a robot named Benben at a community in Xiaoying sub-district in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on Wednesday. The robot dog was added to the community volunteer team recently. Carrying a bamboo basket filled with steamed buns, Benben, along with the volunteers, went door-to-door to deliver the treats and warm greetings to elderly people living at home. Along the way, the robot also broadcasted information on fire safety and fraud prevention.

LI ZHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY



FROM THE GRASSROOTS

Xinjiang set record for grain output in 2024

Improvement of autonomous region's soil enables growing farming activity

By CUI JIA and MAO WEIHUA in Urumqi

The Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region has been transformed from having terrain dominated by desert into being a "granary on the frontier", officials said, citing efforts to improve saline-alkali soil and increase high-standard farmland to bolster national food security.

Last year, Xinjiang's total grain output reached a record 23.3 million metric tons, elevating the region to 13th place in China's grain production rankings. Grain yield per hectare rose to 7,875 kilograms, earning Xinjiang the top national ranking for the first time, Erkin Tuniyaz, chairman of the regional government, said on Sunday while delivering the work report at the annual session of the 14th Xinjiang Regional People's Congress.

The region aims to increase its grain output by an extra 500,000 tons this year, Xie Yingzhou, deputy director of the Xinjiang Regional Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, said on Monday at a news conference elaborating on the work report.

To meet this goal, Xinjiang will continue improving saline-alkali land and increasing high-standard farmland. Modern agricultural water-saving irrigation technology will be further promoted, alongside strict enforcement of water resource protection, Xie added.

Buwajian Abula, a member of the 13th Xinjiang Regional Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and director of the Economic and Social Development Research Center at Xinjiang Agricultural University, said the region has achieved significant breakthroughs in high-standard farmland development and agricultural mechanization in recent years.

"Besides providing a stable grain supply to people in the

region, Xinjiang is now making significant contributions to national food security," Buwajian Abula said.

She noted that while Xinjiang has abundant land, water scarcity has been a limiting factor for grain production. "The use of modern agricultural technologies in water-saving irrigation and improving saline-alkali land has significantly alleviated the water shortage problem, leading to an increase in the grain planting area," she said.

In addition to grain, the region aims to maintain its cotton output at more than 5 million tons this year and solidify its position as a premium national cotton yarn producer, Xie said.

Despite facing international sanctions, Xinjiang produced 5.69 million tons of cotton last year, accounting for 92.2 percent of China's total. Some Western countries, particularly the United States, have imposed sanctions and accused Xinjiang of using "forced labor." The US has also sought to restrict businesses sourcing materials, including cotton, from Xinjiang.

The region's cotton and textile industry generated an output value of 220 billion yuan (\$33.6 billion) last year and provided employment for more than 1 million people, according to the work report.

In August, the Standing Committee of the Xinjiang Regional People's Congress passed a resolution to counter US sanctions and support the development of sanctioned enterprises, including those in textiles and clothing.

"The resolution marks a strong step in using legal means to defy US hegemony and power politics while advancing domestic and foreign-related legal frameworks," Zhao Wenquan, a spokesman for the congress, said on Saturday at a news conference.

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Heavy rain caused Guangdong landslide, report finds

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou qiuquanlin@chinadaily.com.cn

A monthslong investigation into the landslide that killed 52 people and injured 30 on an expressway in Guangdong province in May last year, has determined that the cause of the serious disaster was prolonged heavy rain combined with multiple factors.

The landslide occurred early on May 1 at the Chayang section of the Meizhou-Dabu Expressway, sending 23 vehicles tumbling and causing widespread devastation, the Emergency Management Department of Guangdong Province said in a report released on Wednesday.

Rainfall in April last year was unusually concentrated in most parts of Guangdong, with the Meilin weather station, about 700 meters from the disaster site, recording 740.5 millimeters for the month. It was the highest amount since records began at the weather station in January 2021, the report said.

The disaster site had a raised section of road alongside and above a steep embankment. Prolonged heavy rain caused underground water to accumulate, leading to rising water levels and increased pressure. The soil at the bottom of the embankment softened, reducing its holding strength.

The embankment's lower and middle sections, along with a retaining wall, suddenly deformed and slid, triggering the collapse of soil on the upper section, the report said.

The collapse occurred in poor visibility during light rain, while an unusual spike in traffic added to the danger. Some of the fallen vehicles caught fire, exacerbating the disaster's impact.

All 30 injured individuals have since been treated successfully, and efforts to mitigate losses have been praised, the report noted.

The eastern extension of the Meizhou-Dabu Expressway reopened in September, with traffic

flow now comparable to levels before the incident.

Disciplinary authorities in Guangdong have punished 32 officials for dereliction of duty.

Wang Xiaotian, a former Party committee member and deputy director of the Guangdong Provincial Highway Administration Center, is under investigation for alleged violations of discipline and laws. Other officials have faced disciplinary actions or been admonished under Party and government regulations.

Related enterprises and individuals have received administrative penalties from regulatory authorities, the report said.

US student in awe of 'welcoming, fascinating' China

By LIU KUN in Wuhan and ZOU SHUO

It is hard to imagine that Aaron Schrag-Toso from the United States has only spent half a year in China, yet he speaks proficient Mandarin and understands key Chinese political concepts such as "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets" and "building a community with a shared future for mankind".

Schrag-Toso, 34, is a first-year postgraduate student at Wuhan University's School of Journalism and Communication. He came to China as a participant in the Luoia Global Summer School Program last year and began his postgraduate studies in September.

"The learning process isn't magic. I've actually spent a lot of time and energy learning Mandarin, which is beautiful but difficult, and I still have a long way to go," he said.

Schrag-Toso's undergraduate major was Spanish translation. He initially attempted to study Mandarin during his undergraduate years but found it intimidating. However, after graduation, meeting new Chinese friends reignited his interest in learning the language and his hope of visiting China.

Before arriving in China, Schrag-Toso worked as an English teacher in Spain and later as a translator. He's also worked for the US Census Bureau, and as a truck driver. Despite existing bias against China in the US, his determination to cross the Pacific never wavered, and his parents supported his decision.

Over the past six months at Wuhan University, he has experienced a significant

"The concept of 'lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets' is both romantic and reflective of collectivism."

Aaron Schrag-Toso, postgraduate student from the US studying at Wuhan University



change in mind-set and deeply believes that communication can dissolve prejudice, and understanding can transform perceptions.

Unlike many foreigners who develop an interest in China through films featuring Bruce Lee or Jackie Chan, Schrag-Toso said his fascination with the country began through friendships with Chinese international students, visiting scholars and immigrants. He continues to find Chinese people and culture exceptionally welcoming and fascinating.

He also recognized that China's global influence is increasing, and making Mandarin learning a practical investment. After taking two semesters of Chinese courses, he supplemented his studies with language-learning apps and flashcards.

"Nonetheless, learning the language and understanding China's long history and captivating culture is no easy task," he said.

He is particularly impressed with China's ecological protection efforts such as the conservation of migratory birds at Poyang Lake and finless porpoises in the Yangtze River.

He noted that China not only focuses on improving the environment but also prioritizes people's

livelihoods in the process such as helping former fishermen find new jobs after the Yangtze River fishing ban.

"The concept of 'lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets' is both romantic and reflective of collectivism," he said.

Schrag-Toso expressed pessimism about US foreign policy and media bias but emphasized that he hopes China refrains from being provoked by the West, as it would only exacerbate tensions rather than foster understanding.

A staunch supporter of China-US cooperation, he believes that improving bilateral relations lies in people-to-people exchanges, especially among younger generations.

"Young people in the US are very interested in China, as shown by the recent spike in downloads of the Chinese social media platform Xiaohongshu," he said. "This kind of online interaction can hopefully lead to more face-to-face interactions and friendships."

He praised China's recent introduction of a 10-day visa-free travel policy, which he believes will help more Americans visit and break stereotypes while fostering understanding.

Professor Ji noted that Schrag-Toso is dedicated to his studies and has set a goal of introducing Chinese culture and philosophy to the world in a clear and concise way.

Schrag-Toso often shares his daily life and photos with his parents and relatives in the US, and plans to invite them to travel to China this year.

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Engineering marvel



A cutterhead is hoisted and awaits assembly at the construction site of the Haimen-Taicang Yangtze River Tunnel in Nantong city, Jiangsu province, on Wednesday. The tunnel runs 39.07 kilometers and starts in Haimen district of Nantong and ends in Taicang city. XU CONGJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Consumers reminded to exercise caution while making online bookings

By CAO YIN caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

Beijing Internet Court has recorded a significant increase in online culture and tourism consumption disputes in recent years, with many involving hotel and flight ticket reservations or cancellations.

According to data released by the court on Wednesday, the number of such cases soared to 813 last year, up from 135 in 2022. Over 90 percent of the lawsuits were related to online information inquiries, bookings and after-sales services.

The rise in cases has been attributed

to the rapid development of the culture and tourism market and the growth of online service users, Sun Mingxi, a senior judge at the court, told a news conference.

Previous data from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism showed that during last year's Spring Festival holiday, 474 million domestic trips were made nationwide, contributing a staggering 630 billion yuan (\$86.5 billion) to the domestic culture and tourism market.

"More consumers are turning to the internet to obtain service information and select products, benefiting from the convenience and

diversity of online services," Sun said. "However, this trend has also led to a rise in complaints and disputes with service providers and online platforms."

She cited examples of consumers complaining that the online services they purchased did not match the actual content, with some even claiming that the prices of their online bookings were fraudulent.

In a recent case, a consumer named Wang took an internet platform to court after finding the price of a flight ticket he purchased on the platform was higher than that on the airline's official website. Wang

claimed that he had been deceived by the platform and demanded a refund and compensation.

Upon investigation, the court discovered that the platform had bundled additional services with the flight ticket without clearly informing Wang at the time of purchase, causing him to pay a higher price than he expected.

The court ultimately ruled in favor of the consumer, identifying that the platform's actions constituted fraud, and ordered it to refund Wang's ticket and pay him compensation.

Zhang Qian, another judge from the court, said some online plat-

forms have been found to use their technological and informational advantages to create fake discounts, thereby infringing on consumers' legitimate rights and interests.

She underscored the importance of transparency and consumer protection in the digital marketplace, adding that Chinese law requires internet platforms to clearly alert users to any additional items and inform them of their total costs when purchasing services or products in cyberspace.

While advising consumers to exercise caution when purchasing online services and to properly

retain evidence of online transactions, the judges also called on internet platforms to enhance the supervision of information content and streamline their dispute resolution processes by issuing notices or guidelines.

Culture and tourism service providers should fully, truthfully and accurately disclose their service information, including details on when services are unavailable and under what circumstances refunds can be obtained, they said, emphasizing that fake content and those misleading consumers must be prohibited.

CHINA



From left: A worker packs Chinese knots at a factory in Honghua town, Linyi city, Shandong province. A visitor chooses various kinds of Chinese knots displayed in a showroom in Honghua town. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Shandong town's Chinese knots weave a path to global recognition

Honghua is nation's major production hub for the traditional ornaments

By ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan
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As Chinese New Year draws near, villagers in a town in Shandong province are busy making traditional Chinese knot ornaments to meet the rising demand for the upcoming holiday market.

In the serene family courtyards of Honghua town, Linyi city, women weave traditional Chinese knots by hand. Meanwhile, in factory workshops, workers package and box them. Over 40 million Chinese knots are produced and distributed from this town to domestic and international markets every year, said the town government.

"From my earliest memories, nearly every household in our village would create Chinese knots. The women I've known are all adept weavers, incredibly skilled," said

76-year-old Zheng Xihua, a resident of Xicang village.

Historically, Chinese knot production in the town was predominantly a domestic endeavor. During lulls in agricultural activities, women would handcraft Chinese knots at home, with the products primarily sold at nearby markets.

"In the past, our product range was limited. We relied heavily on outsourced processing, leading to modest profits and a fluctuating number of orders," said Wang Tingxiang, a local producer of Chinese knots and general manager of Xuanran Jieyi Arts and Crafts.

"We used to buy materials from distant cities, incurring substantial transportation costs due to the long distances," he added.

To cater to diverse market demands, the city has established a Chinese knot industrial park, a com-

prehensive venue that integrates trade, exhibition and handicraft exchange. The park was officially inaugurated in November.

"This year, we have started to bridge the gaps in the supply chain for raw materials and packaging boxes," said Zheng Qingyong, the town's Party secretary.

Annually, the town requires approximately 100,000 metric tons of fine thread to produce Chinese knots, as well as over 18 million boxes, with a significant portion sourced from other cities.

In May, the town established factories to produce fine thread and paper boxes, forming a complete industry chain from raw material production, product manufacturing to market sales.

"In the past, most of the Chinese knots produced in the town were simple processed products without

their own brands," Zheng said.

Local companies previously emulated popular products from other regions, often struggling to keep pace with evolving trends.

"By the time their products were ready for market, they were often already outdated," he said.

This year, the town has introduced professional design teams and created many popular products.

Currently, Chinese knot products crafted in the town span various categories, including indoor decorations, car ornaments, festival items and wedding embellishments, boasting over 600 color variations and more than 1,500 distinctive styles.

"Our Chinese knot products are not only favored by domestic consumers but exported to Southeast Asian countries where they are highly sought after by local Chinese communities," Wang said.

Solar panels, shrubs combat desertification in Inner Mongolia

HOHHOT — Deep in the Kubuqi desert in North China's Inner Mongolia autonomous region, rows of blue solar panels glisten under the winter sun, converting sunlight into electricity that flows to thousands of households.

Beneath the panels, different types of shrubs stand tall despite their dormant yellowed leaves, shielding the land from wind and sand.

"By the end of 2023, this one-gigawatt solar power project was successfully connected to the grid, transforming about 2,000 hectares of desert into a sea of solar blue, with thriving vegetation flourishing beneath the panels," said Na Guiting, who is responsible for the project.

The project Na is working on is the first phase of the Kubuqi Desert Northern Ordos New Energy Base.

As one of China's first large-scale renewable energy bases with a capacity exceeding 10 gigawatts, the base is set to develop eight gigawatts of solar power, four gigawatts of wind power, and four gigawatts of supporting coal power.

The electricity generated will be transmitted to the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region through an integrated system combining solar, wind, coal, and energy storage, with 230,000 mu dedicated to photovoltaic sand control.

Once the project is completed, it will deliver approximately 40 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually to the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, with over 50 percent coming from clean energy sources, according to Na.

It is equivalent to saving about 6 million tonnes of standard coal

and reducing carbon dioxide emissions by around 16 million tonnes each year, Na added.

The Kubuqi project exemplifies China's broader effort to integrate renewable energy with ecological restoration. In the arid expanses of northern China, advanced technology is reshaping the battle against desertification, turning it into a narrative of resilience and renewal.

In Northwest China's Gansu province, solar energy projects are being combined with afforestation programs at the southeastern edge of the Tengger Desert, creating a synergy that not only restores ecosystems but also boosts local economic development.

Local villagers are also finding employment in these initiatives, blending green technology with grassroots participation.

"I never would have imagined that as a farmer, I could find work in the sand dunes," said Qin Zhaoping, a resident of Hengliang township in Gansu's Gulang county. His job involves adjusting the sprinkler irrigation systems beneath photovoltaic panels and tending to the thriving sand plants.

For Qin, photovoltaic-based desert control is a meaningful effort that benefits future generations. "It generates electricity, combats desertification, and provides me with an income from working here," he said.

According to official data, 53 percent of China's treatable desertified land has been restored, leading to a net reduction of approximately 4.33 million hectares of degraded land.

XINHUA



Achieving balance in our lives

As we embrace nature's revitalizing energy, let's also absorb and appreciate the majesty that surrounds us and nurtures our common desire to create an environment for the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature.

PUBLIC INTEREST AD-0113

CHINA

By CHEN LIANG

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Since deciding to focus on capturing wildlife on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, particularly the elusive snow leopard, amateur photographer Luo Xiaoyun has evolved into the “best snow leopard photographer in the world” in just a few years.

The praise comes from China's most renowned wildlife photographer, Xi Zhinong. As a judge for the 2021 China Wildlife Image and Video Competition, Xi endorsed one of Luo's stunning snow leopard photos, which won in the competition's mammal category.

It was not the first time that the photographer had won awards for his photos of snow leopards, a species under first-class national protection in China and listed as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. During his debut at the Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition in 2021, two of Luo's photos clinched awards in the prestigious international wildlife photography event.

“The pictures provided a fresh portrait of the snow leopard and the dark and light of its mountain-top world,” Rosamund Kidman Cox, who was editor of *Wildlife Magazine* (subsequently *BBC Wildlife Magazine*) for 24 years and has been a *Wildlife Photographer of the Year* judge since 1981, wrote on her foreword to Luo's photo album.

The album, published last year, has a collection of his excellent photos on wildlife on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, including more than 100 snow leopards. “Luo Xiaoyun, his superb photographs and new information about the life of snow leopards raise our knowledge about the species to a unique new and high level,” wrote Luo's idol and renowned wildlife biologist and conservationist George Schaller.

Early attempts

Born in 1964 in Chongqing, then a major city in Sichuan province, Luo studied at prestigious Tsinghua University in Beijing for eight years and was trained as an engineer and an enterprise manager. He founded his own company in Chengdu, capital of Sichuan, and has a successful career as an entrepreneur.

Prior to 2008, he enjoyed photography as a hobby. That year, a local newspaper reported that a monk in Shiqu county had captured a blurry video of a snow leopard using a home video camera. Experts confirmed it was the first video record of a wild snow leopard in China. Intrigued by the news, Luo's interest in the mammal was sparked.

Years later, after reading *The Snow Leopard*, a nonfiction book by Peter Matthiessen, an author from the United States, that recounts his journey with Schaller to find the elusive creature in the Himalayan region, Luo was captivated by the mystical animal and thought of searching for it in China.

In August 2017, Luo met Lyu Linglong, a photographer well-known for his captivating landscape photos in western Sichuan. Lyu mentioned his upcoming expedition to Shiqu in pursuit of snow leopards scheduled for the following year. Their encounter ignited a fervent resolve within Luo to accompany Lyu on his expedition. “To express my determination, I bought a new Toyota Landcruiser and lent it to Lyu for his use in Shiqu,” Luo told *China Daily*. “The four-wheel drive has remained in Shiqu ever since and has already accompanied us on hundreds of trips. Its mileage has exceeded 350,000 kilometers.”

In June 2018, Luo joined Lyu in Shiqu along with three Tibetan assistants. They ventured to a desolate mountain ridge at an altitude of 5,000 meters above sea level, where they set up camp. On the morning of their second day, two guides set out to search for snow leopards.

Half an hour later, the third guide, who stayed with Luo and Lyu, gestured to them that he had found



PASSION FOR SNOW LEOPARDS SHINES THROUGH LENS

Award-winning images increase knowledge, awareness of rare species

something on the ridge they faced. “He couldn't speak Mandarin and we couldn't understand Tibetan,” Luo said. “Searching the ridge through our cameras, we saw nothing.”

It wasn't until Derin Drondrup, a Mandarin-speaking Tibetan guide, returned that they were informed that a snow leopard had appeared on the ridge about 150 meters from their position, but had walked to another side of the ridge. To catch a glimpse of the elusive animal, they would have to ascend further up the slope. By then, the snow leopard was long gone, probably disturbed by their presence. After spending six nights and seven days on the mountain, Luo failed to see the animal.

Undeterred, he returned to Shiqu in July, where he camped on the mountain and had his initial encounter with a snow leopard. “The cat was probably 600 meters from me, and I only had five seconds to snap some pictures,” he said. “The sighting left me very excited.”

In September, he succeeded in capturing the animals twice in Shiqu. “But the encounters were still distant and brief,” he said.

He later came across a report detailing how a few people had the fortune of sighting five snow leopards on several occasions while bird-watching along a winding mountain road in Qinghai province. “I realized that the leopards might always be there but simply challenging to spot,” Luo said. “The collective effort of more people actively searching with multiple sets of eyes heightened the likelihood of such sightings.”

He decided to change his strategy. “I concluded that the best way to find the animals was by hiring experienced guides with sharp eyes and searching for the leopards in a car,” he said.

He was soon rewarded by the shift.

Award-winning photo

In May 2020, a Tibetan official from a township in Shiqu told Lyu that he had captured images of four snow leopards in an isolated valley, and Lyu relayed the news to Luo.

Luo went to Shiqu again. As the sighting happened just two days

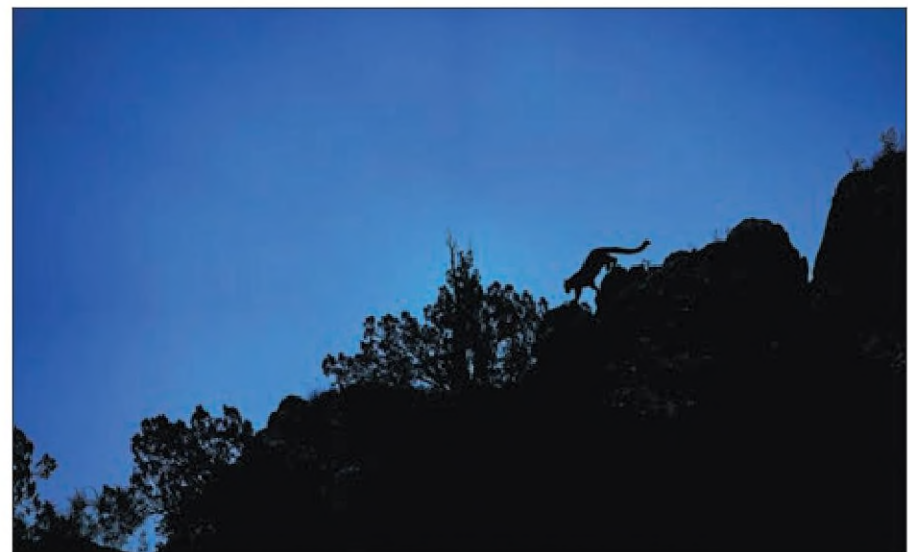
“Snow Leopard Summer” won a highly commended award in the Animals in their Environment category of the 2021 *Wildlife Photographer of the Year*.

PHOTOS BY LUO XIAOYUN / FOR CHINA DAILY



“Many scientists' research on the animals have relied on indirect methods, such as infrared cameras. By witnessing and recording the complete life cycle of the Drolma (a female snow leopard) family, I think that my efforts will be more meaningful.”

Luo Xiaoyun, wildlife photographer



A snow leopard walks along a rocky ridgeline in Shiqu county, Sichuan province.

before his arrival, he believed that the leopards were still there and he committed to staying until he spotted them. Seven days passed with no sign of the majestic creatures, leading some disillusioned photographers to depart. Positioning themselves at the site of the recent sighting, they settled in for a patient wait.

While Luo rested in the car, his guide and driver, Nyima Drakpa, roused him with news of three snow leopards atop the mountain ridge. Luo captured footage of the leopards descending the ridge and later photographed the fourth leopard. “It was a thrilling breakthrough,” he said.

Returning the next morning, they located the leopard family again. Using a drone to observe the animals from a distance, Luo found them feeding on a blue sheep on a slope. Opting not to disturb the leopards, he stationed himself a little further down the hill.

In the afternoon, the satiated leopards leisurely approached Luo's position, pausing on a slope 300 meters away to rest. Maneuvering his drone closer, Luo captured a striking image

of the leopards relaxing on the verdant alpine meadow.

The photo, titled “Snow Leopard Summer”, garnered a highly commended award in the Animals in their Environment category of the 2021 *Wildlife Photographer of the Year* in London.

Luo embarked on tracking the Drolma family — named after the family's female adult — ever since. His dedicated efforts have seen him visit the valley 35 times, typically spending a week per trip.

“After my first snow leopard sighting in 2018, I set a goal for myself to complete 99 ‘encounters’ with them in the wild — that seemed unachievable at the time,” he said. “Through years of effort, finding snow leopards has become much easier for me. The count of my encounters with them may well exceed 200, but I haven't counted for quite some time.”

Documenting life cycle

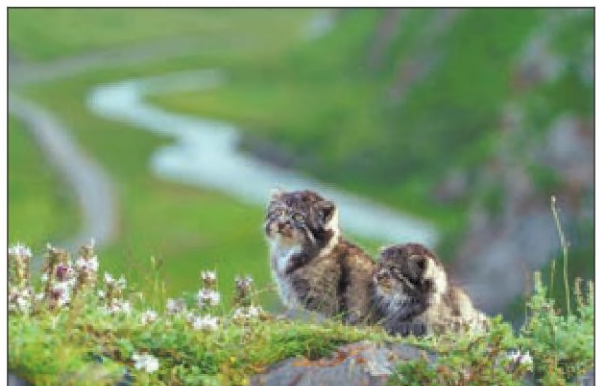
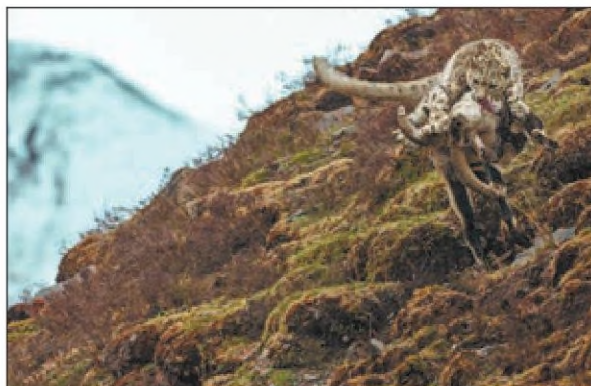
Luo expressed his commitment to observing and documenting snow leopards. “We humans are still short of direct observations of enigmatic

species like snow leopards,” Luo said. “Many scientists' research on the animals have relied on indirect methods, such as infrared cameras. By witnessing and recording the complete life cycle of the Drolma family, I think that my efforts will be more meaningful.”

He explained that a snow leopard's life cycle lasts 12 to 13 years in its natural habitat. Drolma, believed to have been born in 2015, mated with Dawa, an adult male, producing six offspring across three births. Remarkably, her eldest daughter, Lhamo, gave birth to three cubs in a single litter in June 2023. “I want to answer questions like when Dawa will lose his mating privileges and the maximum number of offspring that Drolma can potentially bear,” he said.

After reading part of his field logbook, an editor from a nature magazine recommended it to a publishing house in Beijing, which plans to release it in the next month.

“I think it's not comprehensive,” Luo said. “But they considered it sufficient as a periodic compilation of my fieldwork.”



From left: A snow leopard kills a blue sheep in Shiqu. The photo won top award of the 2021 China Wildlife Image and Video Competition's mammal category. A snow leopard hides in a cave in Shiqu. Two Pal-las's cats rest in an alpine meadow in Shiqu.

ACROSS ASIA

Editor's note:

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



A view of the dried part of Indus River as the water level decreases, on June 29, 2024. SAJJAD ZAIDI VIA NEWSCOM

Fish out of water

Human activities put lives of Indus River dolphins at risk in Pakistan

The endangered Indus River dolphin is more than a victim of environmental destruction — it is a symbol of the profound ecological crisis that threatens us all.

"Dolphins are our friends," said Mai Soomeri, hailing from Guddu town in Pakistan's Sindh Province. "When we are out here fishing or washing dishes, they are always there."

She insisted these creatures were more than just part of the Indus River ecosystem; they were their constant companions, offering playful company and solace.

Soomeri is a member of the Bhulan Dost Programme, a citizen initiative led by World Wide Fund for Nature Pakistan, or WWF-P, to empower fisher communities to protect the Indus River dolphin and its habitat.

The Indus River dolphin, also known as the "blind dolphin" which depends on sound waves for communication, is one of the world's rarest mammals and the second most endangered freshwater river dolphin. In 1969, the species was feared to be on the brink of extinction, with only 100 dolphins remaining by 1972.

According to WWF-P, with decades of collaborative efforts involving fisher communities, forest and wildlife department of Sindh and conservationists, its population has rebounded to 2,000 today.

Yet, the species is listed as "endangered" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's red list and with 60 percent of these dolphins clustered in Sindh, their survival is far from certain.

"I can't understand why anyone wouldn't wholeheartedly support this cause," Soomeri said.

Toheed Ghani Mahesar, manager of the Food and Agriculture Programme of WWF-P, said the issue transcends the creatures themselves, pointing to a far larger problem.

"These dolphins are vital bioindicators, reflecting the deteriorating health of our rivers and signaling our march toward climate change."

"The steady decline of plants, animals, marine life, and entire ecosystems is a glaring wake-up call. It's our responsibility to raise awareness, sensitize others and play our part in the preservation of the environment," he added.

Mahesar said that to truly grasp the severity of the species' decline, it's crucial to observe their past and present distribution.

Shrinking numbers

Once spanning 3,400 kilometers from the estuary to the Karakoram foothills, the Indus River dolphins are now confined to a fraction of their former territory. Their current range has shrunk by 70 percent, leaving them restricted to less than 1,000 km of the river.

According to Mahesar, the decline in the Indus River dolphin



A local resident carries an endangered female Indus River dolphin after it died while stranded in the shallow waters in Sukkur, Pakistan, on Dec 27, 2022. SHAHID ALI / AFP

These dolphins are vital bioindicators, reflecting the deteriorating health of our rivers and signaling our march toward climate change. ... It's our responsibility to raise awareness, sensitize others and play our part in the preservation of the environment."

Toheed Ghani Mahesar, manager of the Food and Agriculture Programme of World Wide Fund for Nature Pakistan

population can be attributed to several factors, beginning with "the construction of irrigation systems, barrages, and dams since the 1930s that has disrupted their natural habitat into isolated fragments — each piece smaller and less inhabitable than the last — preventing them from migrating freely within the river to find food and shelter."

As a result, the dolphins became stranded in the shrinking sections of the river, he said, adding their inability to move across the river also disrupted their breeding patterns, further reducing their numbers, with young dolphins struggling to survive.

On Jan 13, 2024, a blind dolphin was found dead in the Bago-Jango section of a canal in Sukkur district. It had been forced to flee shallow waters in search of deeper ones as a result of water level reductions caused by annual maintenance at the Guddu and Sukkur barrages.

In a similar vein, the carcass of a female dolphin was found in the Dadu Canal in December 2022, likely a victim of a drop in water levels which trapped it in canals, leaving it vulnerable.

Similar concerns were recently echoed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Jr, an environmentalist and founder of the Bulhan Bachao initiative which aims at wildlife conservation through community engagement.

In a podcast, he shed light on the controversial plans of the government of Pakistan to divert six canals from the Indus and Sutlej rivers.

The Sutlej River is already dry, he

said, adding there isn't sufficient water beyond the Sukkur Barrage built in the 1930s during the British Raj to irrigate the 1.62 million hectares of land targeted by a government scheme.

Instead, the land is being leased to affluent individuals, raising serious concerns about the project's feasibility. If implemented, Zulfikar Jr warned, this plan would lead to mass starvation in Sindh, drain the rivers, and spell disaster for the already endangered Indus River dolphins.

Further, these dolphins often get entangled in fishing gear such as gillnets and longlines set up in the river. "These dolphins are particularly vulnerable in side channels of the Indus River, where fishing activity is more concentrated due to the higher density of fish. As the dolphins navigate these areas, they accidentally get caught in the gear, which results in their injury or death," said Mahesar.

The pollution has contributed to degradation of the dolphin habitat, he added. "The release of industrial effluents and waste from settlements along the river — stemming from human activities, fishing communities, and local industries — has led to significant pollution."

In 2012, then Sindh's Wildlife Minister Daya Ram Essarani revealed that out of the 24 Indus River dolphins found dead, 18 had allegedly died from poisoning. In 2015, it was reported that fishermen had released poisonous chemicals into the Rice and Nara canals

to maximize their catch during the closure of the Sukkur Barrage for annual maintenance.

Mahesar said that cultural myths and misconceptions have also led to their depleting population. "One such legend tells of a woman who was transformed into a dolphin after she was cursed by a holy man whom she refused to feed," he said.

According to him, another troubling belief among some communities is that the melon, the rounded region on a dolphin's forehead, which is made of fatty tissue and plays a key role in echolocation, can be used as oil. Echolocation is a process by which animals find their way in the dark by producing sound waves that echo off objects.

He warned that such myths, combined with a general lack of understanding about the dolphin's role in the ecosystem, have led to the exploitation of dolphins for their body parts, compounding the threats they face. "This makes it all the more important to educate communities about the importance of this magnificent creature in our ecosystem," Mahesar said.

Conservation efforts

In light of the growing concerns over the survival of the Indus River dolphin, WWF-P's conservation coordinator Muhammad Imran Malik shared a series of initiatives aimed at protecting them while involving the local communities and fostering international recognition for their habitat.

He mentioned that a unique solution being encouraged by WWF-P involved the use of pingers, small electronic devices that emit sounds that are annoying to dolphins and keeping them 10 to 20 meters away from the fishing nets. "This simple device prevents dolphins from getting entangled in nets while allowing them to feed in their favorite areas," Malik said.

However, the high cost of pingers — around 25,000 Pakistani rupee (\$90) each — remains a challenge. Funding for the pingers is a difficult task, but their potential to save dolphins from accidental deaths makes them a worthwhile investment, he added.

"The Bhulan Dost Programme directly engages fisher communities, encouraging them to monitor dolphin population, report habitat conditions, and flag potential threats," Malik said, highlighting the importance of creating a sustainable coexistence model.

"We're also training 200 fishermen to document dolphin sightings and identify threats, strengthening our data collection efforts," Malik noted. This has been made possible by using pictorial representations and images that assist the locals who can't read or write.

While various other efforts are underway, there is a longer way to go.

DAWN, PAKISTAN

Vietnamese eye travel despite economic uncertainties in 2025

While there have been concerns about discretionary spending challenges in Vietnam for 2024 and beyond, a new study by digital travel platform Agoda indicates the desire for travel among Vietnamese tourists is expected to persist into 2025.

Vietnamese tourists continue to have a strong passion for travel, valuing precious time spent with friends and family, according to the study.

A recent study from Cimigo, a market research company in the Asia-Pacific region, revealed that Vietnamese consumers are focusing on savings as their optimism wanes in the face of household economic uncertainty. The report highlighted a reduction in discretionary spending as consumers delayed or halted major purchases and shifted to value-based purchases.

Against this backdrop, Agoda's study on Vietnamese travel trends, conducted in October 2024 and joined by 1,081 respondents from 11 markets, including Vietnam, has shown that 90 percent of Vietnamese travelers are spending as much on travel this year as they spent in 2024.

Some 29 percent of respondents plan to increase the spending this year, while 61 percent have set aside the same amount for travel in 2025 as last year.

"Despite the financial constraints, Vietnamese travelers continue to prioritize meaningful experiences with family and friends over and above other discretionary spend," said Lam Vu, country director of Agoda Vietnam.

"The desire to explore new destinations, both locally and internationally, reflects a growing demand for adventure and value-driven choices."

About 86 percent of respondents reported they planned to take the same number of trips in 2025 as they did in 2024, with only 14 percent reporting they are planning to take fewer trips in the year ahead.

Almost 40 percent of respondents revealed an intention to head abroad in the coming year as Vietnamese travelers continue to spread their wings to new and unexplored territories. And 94 percent of Vietnamese travelers said 2025 would be the year of the new frontier — with tourists planning to head to new destinations, either at home or abroad.

Mirroring Cimigo's findings about a market seeking budget-friendly options, Vietnamese have proved themselves astute value-hunters when it comes to accommodation choices.

Just over half, about 55 percent, of travelers said their available budget was one of the primary drivers of their travel decisions, with 64 percent of respondents looking to spend under \$250 per night for their accommodation.

Most travelers, about 88 percent, would prefer to stay in hotels while other respondents expressed inter-

est in luxury resorts or boutique accommodations.

Booking.com, another tourism service provider, has identified that for Generation Z, travel is an essential aspect of life. The modern-day travelers prioritize value for money by traveling during off-peak seasons and seek unique, once-in-a-lifetime experiences during their trips.

Booking.com found that in 2024, 62 percent of Vietnamese Gen Z travelers opted to travel during off-peak season to save money. About 63 percent looked for travel discounts through loyalty programs to save as much as possible.

It said 69 percent of Gen Z wanted to try one-of-a-kind destination experiences such as skydiving and hot air balloon rides.

Boosting tourism

Ho Chi Minh City's tourism sector has set an ambitious target of welcoming 45 million domestic visitors and 8.5 million international tourists in 2025 to achieve a total tourism revenue of 260 trillion Vietnamese dong (\$10.2 billion), a significant increase compared with 2024.

Nguyen Thi Anh Hoa, director of the city's Department of Tourism, highlighted the sector's positive results in 2024. The city attracted approximately 6 million foreign visitors and 38 million domestic tourists, up 20 percent and 8.6 percent, respectively, compared to 2023, she said.

The total tourism revenue in 2024 was estimated at 190 trillion Vietnamese dong, 19 percent higher than 2023. Both in terms of the total number of tourists and the tourism revenue, the 2024 target had been met, said Hoa.

Hoa said that to achieve the goals set for 2025, the department will advise the city authorities on devising plans to mobilize resources for tourism development, as well as establish mechanisms and policies for developing the tourism workforce.

The department, she said, will also develop a plan for managing and promoting a shared economy model in the tourism accommodation sector, as well as a medical tourism development plan from now until 2030, with a vision toward 2045.

Additionally, it would continue to implement administrative reforms and digital transformation in management activities to better serve local residents and businesses, she said.

She also said that in 2025, the tourism sector would continue with its publicity campaign "Welcome to Ho Chi Minh City" with innovative content.

The tourism sector will also collaborate with domestic and international media outlets, enhancing promotion on online channels, and producing songs and films to promote the city as a global destination, she said.

VIET NAM NEWS, VIETNAM



Tourists take photos at Bui Vien walking street in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

WORLDUS

Musk causes stir over US AI project

The X.com owner and Trump confidant questions finances of Stargate's backers

By HENG WEILI in New York
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Elon Musk stepped up a clash of billionaires after expressing skepticism about the finances of the backers of Stargate, an AI infrastructure plan announced on Tuesday by US President Donald Trump and three business executives.

Representatives of Oracle, OpenAI and Japan's SoftBank stood with Trump at the White House during the announcement. Their companies will invest \$100 billion in total for the project to start, with plans to eventually put up to \$500 billion into Stargate, CNN reported.

But just before midnight on Tuesday, Musk wrote on his social media platform X.com, where he has nearly 214 million followers, "They don't actually have the money."

Early Wednesday morning, he added: "SoftBank has well under \$10B secured. I have that on good authority."

Billionaire OpenAI CEO Sam Altman replied on Wednesday to Musk's comments, writing on X, "wrong, as you surely know, want to come visit the first site already under way? this is great for the country. I realize what is great for the country isn't always what's optimal for your companies, but in your new role I hope you'll mostly put (America) first."

The two men have traded barbs in the past. Musk, who has sued Altman, called him a "swindler" and "someone who is not trustworthy", while Altman has accused Musk of "clearly being a bully".

While Stargate plans to bring on more investors, the three main partners have restrictions on their cash, The Wall Street Journal reported.

OpenAI raised nearly \$7 billion in October but is losing money. Oracle has about \$11 billion in cash and marketable securities but more in debt, while SoftBank has about \$30 billion of cash handy, the Journal reported.

In December, SoftBank CEO Masayoshi Son committed to invest at least \$100 billion in American projects over the next four years, at an event at Mar-a-Lago, Trump's resort in Florida.

Son, Altman and Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison attended the Stargate news conference with Trump on Tuesday.

What made the comments noteworthy by Musk, the Tesla CEO, is that the president has picked him to lead the new Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE as it is called, and he has been a frequent visitor at Mar-a-Lago.

Musk co-founded OpenAI and gave the company its name, but left its board in 2018. He has said it was intended to be open-source software.

"Altman assured Musk that the nonprofit structure guaranteed neutrality and a focus on safety and openness for the benefit of humanity, not shareholder value," the complaint filed in August in US District Court in Northern California said. "But as it turns

out, this was all hot-air philanthropy — the hook for Altman's long con."

Musk filed a similar lawsuit against OpenAI in March 2024, claiming that it had not followed its founding agreement by emphasizing "profit over the technology's potential benefit to humanity", the Journal reported. But Musk withdrew the complaint in June.

Musk also has claimed that ChatGPT, a generative artificial intelligence chatbot developed by OpenAI, has abandoned its original nonprofit mission by keeping some of its most advanced AI technology for private customers, CNN reported.

Karoline Leavitt, the White House press secretary, told Fox News that "the American people should take President Trump and those CEOs' words for it".

Musk, the world's richest man, whose companies also include SpaceX, which owns Starlink, a satellite internet constellation, last year started his own AI company, xAI, which is building a data center in Memphis, Tennessee.

Musk says xAI faces unfair competition from OpenAI and its business partner Microsoft, which has supplied the massive computing resources needed to build AI systems such as ChatGPT.

Forbes reported that UBS analyst Karl Keirstead, in a note to clients on Wednesday, wrote, "OpenAI is in a race against Elon Musk-backed xAI, Google, Meta and Anthropic (funded by Amazon) among others" and "this puts OpenAI in a better position long-term to win the model war."

Of Musk's comments about Stargate's financing, Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft, said on CNBC on Wednesday, "All I know is, I'm good for my \$80 billion."

Shares of Oracle and Microsoft rose 6.8 percent and 4.1 percent, respectively, in Nasdaq Stock Market trading on Wednesday.

Trump said Tuesday that Stargate would create 100,000 jobs and would counter China by helping keep "the future of technology" in the US.

"This will include the construction of colossal data centers, massive structures," he said. "These buildings, big, beautiful buildings, are going to employ a lot of people."

The Information, a tech news website, first reported on an OpenAI data center project called Stargate in March 2024, suggesting that it's been in the works almost a year before Trump announced it.

Another company — Crusoe Energy Systems — announced in July that it was building a large and "specially designed AI data center" outside Abilene, Texas, at a site run by energy technology company Lancium.

Crusoe and Lancium said in a joint statement at the time that the project was "supported by a multibillion-dollar investment" but didn't disclose its backers.

Agencies contributed to this story.



Icicles formed in a fountain draw the attention of onlookers at Bryant Park in Manhattan, New York, on Tuesday, as a cold wave hit the city with daytime temperatures dropping to -10 C. LIAO PAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Rare winter storm hits large parts of US

HOUSTON — A rare frigid storm charged through Texas and the northern Gulf Coast on Tuesday, blanketing New Orleans and Houston with snow that closed highways, grounded nearly all flights and canceled school for more than a million students.

Up to 235 million people in the US were affected by the storm, which the National Weather Service, or NWS, described as "a generational winter storm event".

For the first time, the NWS issued a blizzard warning for parts of southern Louisiana and far eastern Texas where heavy snow and strong wind gusts combined to create "white out" conditions.

Schools, government offices, as

well as many shops and restaurants were closed across the region on Tuesday.

Numerous roads were covered with snow and some with ice mix. Wind chills on Tuesday morning made temperatures drop below -5 C for much of the Gulf Coast with single-digit values in northern Texas.

Nearly 2,000 flights to, from or within the US were canceled Tuesday, with about 10,000 others delayed, according to online tracker FlightAware.com. A number of airports in Mississippi, Alabama and Florida also suspended operations due to the storm.

Large sections of Interstate 10 in Texas and Louisiana, the Gulf Coast states' major thoroughfare, were

closed on Tuesday due to treacherous conditions.

Houston, the biggest city in Texas, recorded widespread snow while more than 15 centimeters of snow had fallen by Tuesday afternoon in parts of southern Louisiana.

In one location just north of Rayne, Louisiana, 27 cm of snow had been recorded before noon, said a CNN report, adding that snow even covered sandy beaches along the Texas coast on Tuesday morning.

The governors of Gulf Coast states including Louisiana, Georgia, Alabama, Florida and Mississippi have declared a state of emergency to address the once-in-a-generation storm.

"Our infrastructure is designed

differently than states that are used to this (winter weather)," Florida Governor Ron DeSantis said at a news conference on Tuesday, warning that driving in icy conditions "can be very, very hazardous".

This latest cold snap comes from a disruption in the polar vortex, the ring of cold air usually trapped at the North Pole.

Frigid cold persisted across the eastern two-thirds of the country as the East Coast was blanketed in snow, while people from the Northern Plains to the tip of Maine shivered in bitter cold.

A state of emergency was also declared in at least a dozen New York counties with up to 60 cm of lake-effect snow and extreme cold expected around Lake Ontario and Lake Erie through Wednesday.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

Wildfires impact LA real estate market, says expert

By RENA LI in Los Angeles
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The devastating wildfires in Los Angeles County have profoundly affected the commercial real estate market, including office buildings, hotels and industrial properties, according to a business expert.

Wang Lei, executive vice-president of strategic management and operations at Gemdale USA, a real estate investment and development company, told China Daily that the fallout extends far beyond immediate physical damage, influencing insurance costs, tenant behavior, regulatory landscapes and investor confidence.

"The biggest potential impact is on investor confidence and insurance availability, which could fundamentally reshape the market," Wang said.

The physical destruction caused by the wildfires, which broke out on Jan 7, is extensive.

CoreLogic, a property data and analytics provider, estimates that the Eaton and Palisades fires alone have resulted in property damages between \$35 billion and \$45 billion. Approximately 1.1 million square meters of commercial real estate is at risk, including multifamily units, retail space and office buildings.

Experts believe the already expensive Los Angeles housing market is likely to face even greater price hikes in the aftermath of the wildfires that continue to ravage the county.

"Los Angeles is already the least affordable housing market in the



A woman searches through the rubble of her home that burned in the Eaton Fire in Altadena, California, on Tuesday.

KATIE MCTIERNAN / GETTY IMAGES

country. People making near the local median income are being priced out, and that trend will worsen unless we see an acceleration in new construction," Daryl Fairweather, chief economist of the US real estate service provider Redfin, told Newsweek magazine.

However, reconstruction in affected areas is "particularly challenging," according to Wang. "Stricter fire-resistant building requirements and rising construction costs will further delay projects," he said.

Meanwhile, the fires have caused structural damage to office buildings, leading to a reduced supply of leasable space.

"Some hotels and resorts in scenic but high-risk areas have had to close

due to safety concerns, and industrial facilities, including warehouses and manufacturing plants, have experienced operational disruptions," Wang said.

Insurance problem

Insurance premiums for properties in high-risk areas have reportedly surged as insurers reassess their exposure to wildfire risks. In some cases, companies have declined to renew policies, leaving property owners with fewer options for adequate coverage. As a result, many have turned to the California FAIR Plan, a last-resort insurance program that provides limited coverage compared with traditional policies.

"This directly impacts property values and profitability," Wang explained.

The wildfires have prompted businesses to reconsider leasing properties in high-risk areas. Office tenants may opt for hybrid work models or relocate to safer regions, while tourism-dependent hospitality sectors face declining occupancy rates, Wang said.

"Industrial tenants are now favoring warehouses and logistics centers in low-risk areas, which could disrupt the existing industrial market," Wang added.

Regulatory challenges compound the issues. New building codes mandate fire-resistant materials and designs, increasing construction costs for new projects and renovations.

"These regulations aim to enhance safety but make construction and renovations in wildfire-prone areas significantly more expensive and time-consuming," Wang said.

The heightened perception of risk has negatively impacted investor sentiment. This has resulted in reduced capital flows into high-risk areas and a decline in property values, even in regions that were not directly affected by the wildfires, according to Wang.

"Investor confidence in Southern California's wildfire zones is one of the biggest challenges," Wang continued. "It's not just about the immediate damage but the long-term willingness of insurers and investors to engage in these markets."

Trump confirms tariffs on China, Mexico, Canada

By BELINDA ROBINSON
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US President Donald Trump has confirmed plans to enact an additional 10 percent tariff on products from China and 25 percent on those from Canada and Mexico starting next month after he accused China of sending fentanyl to the two countries, saying it ends up in the United States.

The tariffs on all three countries — key trading partners of the US — will begin on Feb 1, the president announced on his first day back in

office. He squarely blamed Canada and Mexico for allowing "mass numbers of people and fentanyl" to come into the US.

He told reporters on Monday in the Oval Office that he "may" impose a universal tariff on all imports because "essentially all countries take advantage of the US." He announced the new levies on Tuesday.

The tariffs are predicted to impact the global supply chain, as Mexico, China and Canada account for a third of the trade in goods with the US.

Altogether, the three countries purchased more than \$1 trillion of goods

from the US and sent \$1.5 trillion in exports to the US in 2023, US government data shows.

In 2023, of nearly \$4 trillion in US imports from international sources, \$448 billion was from China, according to US Census Bureau data. That was down \$109.1 billion from 2022, when the US imported \$536.3 billion in goods from China.

Trump positioned tariffs as one of his first priorities in office in his inauguration speech after he was sworn in as the 47th US president on Monday inside the Capitol building in Washington DC.

The president declared that he wants to "tariff and tax" foreign countries to "enrich our citizens" and overhaul the trade system in his second term. His aim is to lessen illegal drugs and migrants flowing into the US.

He also vowed to establish an External Revenue Service to collect the proposed tariffs and has created the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, led by billionaire Tesla CEO Elon Musk.

"I will work immediately to begin the overhaul of our trade system to protect American workers and families," Trump said in his inaugural

address. "Instead of taxing citizens to enrich other countries, we will tariff and tax foreign countries to enrich our citizens."

"We are establishing the External Revenue Service to collect all tariffs, duties and revenues," he added. "It will be massive amounts of money pouring into our Treasury, coming from foreign sources. The American dream will soon be back and thriving like never before."

It is expected that the countries targeted with tariffs could retaliate with their own levies on US goods.

Mexico and Canada have already tightened their borders in an attempt to stop illicit drugs and migrants.

Mao Ning, a spokeswoman for China's Foreign Ministry, expressed

China's willingness to address the two countries' differences at a news conference in Beijing on Wednesday.

She said: "We always believe there is no winner in a tariff or trade war. We will always firmly safeguard our national interests."

Trump will instruct federal agencies to investigate trade deficits, what he called unfair currency deals, counterfeit goods and the "de-minimis" rule that allows goods to flow into the US without being subject to duties or taxes if valued at under \$800. They will report back by April 1.

Economists, business leaders and think tanks have said repeatedly that tariffs will raise costs for businesses and hurt American consumers and do not guarantee domestic jobs.

WORLD

Festivities start as Sino-Nepali ties reach 70

Kathmandu celebrates Spring Festival amid enhanced cultural connections

By XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong
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The traditional lion and dragon dances welcoming Chinese New Year in Nepal this year carried extra significance, celebrating both the donation of 1,000 bicycles from China and the launch of Nepal Visit Year, marking the 70th anniversary of bilateral ties.

"Those are significant events in bringing the neighbors, who are very important to each other, even closer with cultural and economic ties," said Manoj Man Shrestha, general secretary of the Arniko Society in Nepal, an organization of scholars and experts who studied in China.

Anoop Ranjan Bhattarai, chairman of the Nepal-China Executives Council, said 2025 will be a milestone year for tourism, trade and investment between Nepal and China. His organization, established in 2003 to foster bilateral ties, is poised to act as a key platform to enhance collaboration, he said.

"This year, we will be promoting Nepal tourism in different parts of China, including an expo in Yunnan ... we are planning to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations by presenting a Buddha statue to Yunnan province" as the friendship has lasted for more than 2,000 years, he added.

Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, is set to welcome Chinese New Year with vibrant red lantern displays, artistic performances and a friendship soccer match.

The celebration introduces Chinese traditions to Nepalese audiences, who are increasingly interested in the culture, said Shrestha. "There is a good, strong atmosphere of Chinese New Year in Kathmandu and other major cities in Nepal, with all the decorations and performances."

Traditional lion and dragon dances, performed by artists from both countries, kicked off the festivities on Saturday in the Kathmandu Valley. During the launch ceremony at Bhaktapur Durbar Square, Chinese performers dazzled with a lion dance on tables and high poles, along with a flower drum dance. Nepali artists captivated the audience with a monkey-step dance and a dragon dance.

"Celebrating Chinese New Year in Nepal is a reflection of the deep relationship between the two countries," said Dipak Khadka, Nepal's minister for energy, water resources and irrigation.

He made the remark at a ceremony that also marked the launch of Nepal Visit Year, a key event celebrating 70 years of diplomatic ties between Nepal and China.

"Being our very close neighbor, I would like to recall the support China has provided in Nepal's tourism, energy, agriculture and other sectors," he added.

Shrestha of the Arniko Society emphasized the importance of Nepal Visit Year for the country's economy, with tourism as a vital sector. Officials hope this initiative will attract more Chinese visitors to the mountainous region, he added.

Broader exchanges

Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Chen Song expressed hope that both countries will seize opportunities to enhance cooperation in tourism and other sectors. He emphasized leveraging tourism's rapid development to drive broader exchanges and partnerships in the economy, trade, connectivity, infrastructure, culture and education.

Chen highlighted the importance of upgrading Nepal's tourism infrastructure and services, noting that both countries can work together to implement China's Global Civilization Initiative and Global Development Initiative. These efforts, he said, will accelerate the realization of Nepal's vision for a "Prosperous Nepal and Happy Nepal".

Earlier this week, China donated the first batch of 1,000 bicycles to Nepal, benefiting students from nine community schools in two districts of Madhesh Province.

At the inauguration ceremony held at a school in Birgunj, Intiaz Alam, deputy mayor of the city, said, "I'm looking forward to the expansion of this initiative."

Zou Zhiqiang, director of the Nepal Office of the China Foundation for Rural Development, said they hope this donation will mark the first step in addressing challenges faced by children in remote areas when going to school.

Xinhua contributed to this story.



Students from nine schools in Nepal's Madhesh Province receive the first batch of 1,000 bicycles from China on Monday. XINHUA

War against mosquitoes



A health officer (left) fumigates a residential area in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, on Wednesday. According to community health authorities, the exercise was undertaken in densely populated areas to prevent the spread of dengue fever, a mosquito-borne disease. HOTLI SIMANJUNTAK / EPA-EFE

Kenyan recycling firm revives EV batteries, drives green transition

NAIROBI — An increasing number of electric vehicles in Kenya are finding a second life, thanks to the innovative efforts of a local recycling company. By repurposing used batteries into affordable alternatives, Qtron Industries is accelerating the country's transition to green transport and renewable energy.

Qtron Industries, established in 2016, specializes in repairing and recycling batteries for vehicles and motorcycles. The company ventured into EV battery recycling to address the growing problem of discarded batteries littering Kenya's landfills.

According to the National Environment Management Authority, Kenya generates about 51,300 metric tons of e-waste annually. EV owners with faulty batteries were previously forced to discard entire packs, even when the issue was confined to a few cells.

At Qtron's workshop on the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya's capital, technician Robert Kamau disassembles and refurbishes used batteries from hybrid and electric vehicles. These restored batteries are integrated into electric buses, motorbikes and charging infrastructure.

"The battery is the most expensive part of an EV, often accounting for

over 50 percent of the vehicle's cost," Kamau said. Advanced diagnostic equipment sourced from China allows Qtron to restore batteries at a fraction of the cost, making EV ownership more affordable.

Qtron has refurbished more than 100 EV batteries to date, preventing them from ending up in landfills.

Kamau attributed the accessibility of battery repairs to Chinese technology and components from companies such as BYD. "Without Chinese technology, repair costs would be out of reach for most of our clients," he said, adding that innovations in Chinese EV battery technology enable the replacement of damaged cells and extend the battery's life.

Expanding operations

He revealed Qtron's plans to expand operations, spurred by government tax incentives. Locally developed innovations, such as fire suppression systems that safely eject overheating battery packs, have also bolstered Qtron's success.

According to the Energy and Petroleum Regulatory Authority, Kenya's EV adoption is growing, with about 5,000 EVs including passenger and commercial vehicles.

The agency's Director-General

Daniel Kiptoo flagged EVs as a crucial solution for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. While the high cost of new EV batteries has hindered widespread adoption, repairing and repurposing used batteries makes green transport more accessible, he said.

Kiptoo said EV batteries retain part of their original capacity after their automotive life cycle. These batteries can then be repurposed for solar and wind energy storage, offering a cost-effective solution for powering remote areas.

Recycled batteries cost around \$1,500 on average, compared to up to \$10,000 for new ones, Kiptoo added.

Paul Kamano, an EV owner, turned to Qtron Industries when his car broke down after two years of operation due to a battery malfunction. The affordability of refurbished batteries made restoring his vehicle feasible.

Similarly, Kenneth Kibathi also opted for a recycled battery when the cost of a new one proved prohibitive.

By giving EV batteries a second life, Qtron Industries is not only reducing e-waste but also driving Kenya's transition toward sustainable transport and energy solutions.

XINHUA

Inferno guts Turkish ski resort hotel, killing 76

KARTALKAYA — A fire at a ski resort hotel in Turkey's Bolu mountains killed 76 people and injured dozens on Tuesday, forcing panicked guests to jump out of windows in the middle of the night.

"It was like the apocalypse. The flames engulfed the hotel immediately, like in half an hour," said Mevlut Ozer, who witnessed the incident at the Kartalkaya ski resort in northwest Turkey.

The fire began around 3:30 am on the restaurant floor of the 12-story Grand Kartal Hotel, authorities said.

Several fire engines and ambulances later surrounded the charred, wood-fronted building, where white bed sheets tied together dangled from at least three upper-floor windows, showing how people tried to flee.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared on Wednesday one day of national mourning.

Several funerals were held on Wednesday for families, including numerous children who died in the blaze.

"Our hearts and souls are hurting and we are currently trying to fulfill this duty," Erdogan said at one funeral for eight victims in Bolu in western Turkey.

Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said there had been 238 guests staying at the hotel, situated at the base of several ski slopes, which smoldered until the afternoon.

"Our pain is impossible to describe," he said, speaking from the resort and offering condolences. Yerlikaya said the fire was out and that search efforts at the hotel had finished.

Investigation underway

An investigation was underway into the fire, which occurred during the school holidays when many families from nearby Istanbul and Ankara headed to the Bolu mountains to ski.

Police detained nine people, including the owner of the hotel, as part of the investigation, Yerlikaya said on Wednesday.

He also reported that the bodies of 45 victims had been handed over to their families, while DNA tests were being conducted to identify the remaining bodies at the forensic institute.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Chinese innovation mending hearts in Tanzania

DAR ES SALAAM — Tears of joy flowed as Husna Shabaan Kingwande learned that her 3-year-old son Ikram's heart surgery had been a success.

The procedure at the Chinese-built Jakaya Kikwete Cardiac Institute in Dar es Salaam marked a significant step in introducing advanced Chinese medical technology to Tanzania.

Ikram was one of five children aged 3 to 7 who underwent cardiovascular surgeries using the PAN-Procedure, a minimally invasive technique pioneered by Pan Xiangbin of Fuwai Hospital in Beijing.

This revolutionary procedure, which relies on ultrasound imaging, treats cardiovascular diseases through peripheral blood vessels

without requiring open-heart surgery or radiation exposure.

The surgeries were conducted by a team of five Chinese medical experts, six Tanzanian specialists from the Jakaya Kikwete Cardiac Institute, and one member of the 27th Chinese medical team stationed at the institute.

For Kingwande, a native of Tanzania's coastal region, her son's successful operation means a brighter future for the boy who was diagnosed nine months ago. "I wholeheartedly thank the Chinese doctors and their Tanzanian counterparts for giving my son a new lease of life," she said, tears streaming down her face.

Her gratitude was echoed by Ajili Anthony Msonza, a father of two from the Mbeya region, whose 5-year-

old daughter Noreen was among the young patients. "This new technology has rekindled hope for heart patients in Tanzania," he said.

Violet Samuel Mkonwa, 40, from Shinyanga, northern Tanzania, expressed relief that her 5-year-old son Emmanuel can now look forward to attending school.

During a training session at the Jakaya Kikwete Cardiac Institute, Pan said, "This procedure is not only safer and more effective but also makes cardiac intervention accessible in community clinics."

Peter Kisenge, executive director of the institute, highlighted its long-standing partnership with China, formalized through a memorandum of understanding with Fuwai Hospital. The agreement includes screening

XINHUA

Afghan Taliban government swaps prisoners with US

KABUL — The Taliban government said on Tuesday it had released two US citizens from prison in return for an Afghan fighter held in the United States, in a deal brokered by Qatar.

Former US president Joe Biden agreed to the deal shortly before leaving office on Monday, with the exchange finally taking place after Donald Trump returned to the White House, according to a person familiar with the negotiations.

"An Afghan fighter, Khan Mohammed, imprisoned in America, has been released in exchange for American citizens and returned to the country," the Afghan Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Mohammed had been serving a life sentence in California after being arrested "almost two decades ago" in the eastern Afghan province of Nangarhar, the ministry said.

Mohammed, who was convicted of narco-terrorism by a US court, returned to the province on Tuesday, where he was greeted by a crowd and presented with garlands of flowers.

He told journalists he was grateful to the Taliban authorities for his release and he was "very happy" to be reunited with his family.

"A lot of innocent people are imprisoned; my request is that all of them can be released and be able to return to their homes," he said.

His son, Rafiullah Mohammed, said his father was innocent and that the family demanded compensation.

Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told AFP that two US nationals had been released, declining to provide any further details on the exchange.

The family of US citizen Ryan Corbett, who was detained by the Taliban in 2022, confirmed he was released and thanked both the Biden and Trump administrations, as well as Qatar. "Today, our hearts are filled with overwhelming gratitude and praise to God for sustaining Ryan's life and bringing him back home after what has been the most challenging

and uncertain 894 days of our lives," the family said on their website.

They called for two other US citizens still held in Afghanistan to be released.

The person familiar with the deal confirmed William McKenty as the second released US detainee. Little is known about what he was doing in Afghanistan and his family asked for privacy.

Qatar's lead negotiator, Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh Al-Khul-aifi, confirmed the nation's mediation in the exchange, with all the released people going through Doha.

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BUSINESS

Shanghai launches 1st training base for robots

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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China has unveiled its first training ground for heterogeneous humanoid robots in Shanghai's Pudong New Area, a milestone for the humanoid robot industry.

The facility, which can accommodate more than 100 humanoid robots of various sizes and functions at the same time, is part of the metropolis' efforts to tap the sector, of which the scale is expected to reach 75 billion yuan (\$10.31 billion) by 2029, industry sources have said.

"This is an important milestone for humanoid robot development in Shanghai and the whole country," said Zhang Hongtao, deputy director of the Shanghai Commission of Economy and Informatization, during the unveiling ceremony on Tuesday.

"Humanoid robots and embodied intelligence technology are on the verge of a big boom thanks to the continuous innovation and breakthroughs achieved in the fields of algorithm optimization, hardware upgrades and data collection, which have laid a solid foundation for the humanoid robot industry's upgrading and wide application," Zhang said.

Formerly known as Humanoid Robot Kylin Training Ground, the facility is the first of many more future training grounds to be unveiled across the nation. They are tasked with creating a platform of accurate, high-efficiency and low-cost data collection, meeting the various training requirements of the special robots, so as to promote technological breakthroughs and



An employee trains a humanoid robot at the nation's first training ground for heterogeneous humanoid robots in Shanghai on Tuesday. CHEN MENGZE / FOR CHINA DAILY

application of humanoid robots, according to Zhang.

"Without building redundant similar projects, the training ground will effectively reduce investment costs of developing humanoid intelligence technology," said Xu Bin, general manager of Humanoid Robot (Shanghai) Co Ltd, which is under the National and Local Co-Built Humanoid Robotics Innovation Center.

"As the training ground's operation matures, it will be expanded nationwide. These training grounds are expected to develop into a national-level platform of embodied intelligent technology, promote the new quality productive forces of China's humanoid robot industry, and provide a strong impetus for cultivating national strategic emerging industries and future industries," added Xu.

Taking up an area of 4,600 square meters, the training ground currently holds more than 100 humanoid robots receiving on-the-spot training

under 10 scenarios, said Xing Boyang, R&D director with the National and Local Co-Built Humanoid Robotics Innovation Center.

Licensed in Shanghai in May 2024, the center is the country's first public platform for humanoid robot innovation and is currently one of the two national-level humanoid robot innovation centers in China.

"We are going to duplicate the Shanghai model to many different places to extend numerous training grounds and a lot more scenarios, eventually creating a Chinese humanoid robot training system," Xu said.

Xu forecasts that by 2027, at least 1,000 humanoid robots will be applied in State-level training grounds.

"The humanoid robot industry is too big to let a single platform or enterprise create the industrial ecology alone. This is extremely meaningful for us to offer the training ground to solve various challenges in its application and development," said Xu.

China's humanoid robot market is experiencing rapid growth as the industrial output value reached 2.76 billion yuan in 2024, is projected to reach 5.3 billion yuan in 2025 and further snowball to 75 billion yuan in 2029, according to Jiang Lei, chief scientist at the National and Local Co-Built Humanoid Robotics Innovation Center.

Regarded as a key technology to solve the aging problem, humanoid robots will be integrated with other technologies including embodied intelligence and autonomous driving to form a new scientific research paradigm, Jiang said.

Having nurtured the nation's first batch of industrial robots in the 1980s, Shanghai unveiled a plan in 2023 to promote its robot industry, including having 10 industrial leading robot brands, realizing 100 robot application scenarios, and expanding the city's robot industrial scale to 100 billion yuan by the end of 2025, according to the Shanghai Commission of Economy and Informatization.

Florentia Village to expand in China market

Italian firm eyes more artistic elements with Chinese influences in its outlets

By WANG ZHUOQIONG in Beijing and DENG RUI in Chongqing

Florentia Village, a luxury outlet operator based in Italy, is enhancing its footprint in China through strategic partnerships, digital transformation and physical expansion, according to Jacopo De Vena, managing director of Florentia Village and RDM Asia.

The company recently signed a three-year collaboration agreement with Sichuan Fine Arts Institute in Chongqing, underscoring its commitment to integrating art and culture into its outlets.

"We aim to create an incubator that promotes art, music, design and architecture, showcasing Italian and Chinese influences," said De Vena while participating in the third Chongqing International Light Art Festival earlier this month.

As a core luxury retailer, Florentia Village is increasingly embracing Chinese brands, which are gaining in significance alongside international luxury labels.

Following partnerships with leading companies like Anta Group, these outlets maintain a 60-40 or 70-30 ratio between international and domestic brands.

De Vena said that the company's overall performance has remained robust despite a slowdown in the retail sector.

"Luxury brands continued to grow in 2024, and sports and affordable luxury are emerging as new trends," he said.

Brands such as Arc'teryx, Descente, lululemon and Li-Ning, are becoming pivotal players in the brand mix.

To capture the sportswear boom, Florentia Village organizes annual events such as "Sports Week", combining activities with promotions tailored to sports brands, he said.

Florentia Village is also expanding its physical presence. The company recently completed the third phase of its outlet in Chengdu, Sichuan province, and is set to expand in locations including Chongqing, Shanghai, Wuhan of Hubei province and Beijing.

Construction to expand its facilities in Chongqing will commence after the Spring Festival holiday, he added.

In total, the company operates seven outlets across China.

The country's digitized retail environment is reshaping Florentia Village's business model.

"Digitalization is the present and future," said De Vena, noting the launch of the company's "All in One" WeChat mini-program three years ago.

The platform links offline stores with online sales, allowing customers to book services and shop directly through WeChat. The company also leverages livestreaming on WeChat and Douyin while developing a customer data platform to enhance marketing automation.

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Takeda bullish on prospects in nation

By ZHENG YIRAN
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Upbeat about China's innovative digital business environment, Takeda continues to invest in the country as it ramps up efforts to turn China into a global source of innovation for biomedicine.

On Monday, the company signed an investment cooperation agreement with the administrative committee of Chengdu High-tech Industrial Development Zone to establish the Takeda China Innovation Center (TCIC) in Chengdu, Sichuan province.

According to the company, the innovation center will develop and leverage cutting-edge technologies, including artificial intelligence and big data, to enhance digital capabilities and drive innovation in healthcare.

Takeda said the innovation center



Sean Shan

in Chengdu is its fourth such facility worldwide.

Sean Shan, senior vice-president of Takeda and president of Takeda China, said: "We are

delighted to partner with the Chengdu High-tech Industrial Development Zone. The establishment of the TCIC marks another significant milestone in Takeda China's digital development journey and signifies our further enhancement of the value chain in China that will accelerate our digital transformation efforts.

"We will be leveraging cutting-edge digital technologies to develop advanced healthcare solutions, enabling more patients in China to benefit from the advancements in digital healthcare."

Sanjay Patel, senior vice-president and global head of data, digital and

technology innovation capability solutions and services at Takeda, said, "With the addition of the TCIC to our innovation network, we are strengthening our strategic blueprint for digital innovation in China."

As a leader in digital healthcare innovation, Takeda considers data, digitalization and innovative technology as fundamental capabilities of the company's strategy and continues to invest purposefully to unlock greater innovation potential.

Over the years, Takeda China has been at the forefront of digital innovation, continually deepening and accelerating digital transformation and upgrades. This includes actively exploring digital application scenarios in areas such as early-stage research and development, business model innovation and disease management upgrades.

In 2021, Takeda China launched its open innovation incubation plat-

form — TakedaSpark — aiming to collaborate with local innovation ecosystems to jointly explore the creation of "patient-centered" digital healthcare solutions and innovative business models. So far, TakedaSpark has attracted over 240 local innovative enterprises to participate, carrying out 22 conceptual experimental projects in three major areas — digital therapies, early screening and diagnostics, and smart healthcare services.

Wang Peng, associate research fellow at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, said: "Multinational pharmaceutical companies investing in digital healthcare is an inevitable trend. With technological advancement and changing medical demand, digital healthcare has become an important means to improve the quality and efficiency of medical services."

According to market observer AskCI, China's digital healthcare market is likely to reach 539.9 billion yuan (\$74.2 billion) by the end of 2025, with a compound annual growth rate of 31 percent.

Gobi groundbreakers



Builders from China Railway Construction Corp's 23rd bureau conduct on-site checks along the under-construction Xinhe-Baicheng Railway in the Gobi desert area of Aksu, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Monday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



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COMMENT

Editorials

Beijing underscores need for countries to keep to the right path for inclusive development

In his address to the World Economic Forum Virtual Event of the Davos Agenda in 2021, Chinese President Xi Jinping pointed out that the problems facing the world are intricate and complex, and that no country can solve them alone or just to their own advantage. There must be global action, a global response and global cooperation, he stressed. A cold war, hot war, trade war or tech war, antagonism and confrontation are misguided approaches that eventually hurt all countries' interests and undermine everyone's well-being. It is only by upholding multilateralism that the problems can be overcome.

It is consultation and cooperation that are needed, the top Chinese leader stressed, rather than a narrow-minded, zero-sum game mentality. It serves no one's interest to reverse globalization and seek seclusion and decoupling. The experience of the past four years shows that so long as countries pool their wisdom and strengths, and pursue inclusive cooperation to find win-win and all-win solutions, economic globalization remains a historical trend that cannot be reversed, despite the headwinds and setbacks.

In his speech at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland, on Tuesday, Vice-Premier Ding Xuexiang highlighted the constancy of China's commitment to multilateralism by recalling a similar message that President Xi delivered to the same event eight years ago.

Citing Xi's words that "pursuing protectionism is like locking oneself in a dark room. While wind and rain may be kept outside, that dark room will also block light and air", Ding reminded his audience that "protectionism leads nowhere. A trade war has no winners".

Such a reminder is once again pertinent as there is still, as Ding said, "an ongoing tug of war between the forces for and against economic globalization", with a newly installed US administration set to double down on the country's looking-after-number-one approach to world affairs.

Given its staunch pro-globalization stance and unshakable commitment to multilateralism, it is natural that participants at the Davos meeting should turn their eyes to China to see what it proposes to do.

One of the solutions that China provides for growth, as Ding pointed out, is green development, something that is apposite in the circumstances, with the US putting its own short-term gain before the common good by once again withdrawing from the global climate pact.

Over the past year, the Chinese economy has made steady progress while maintaining overall stability, with the country's GDP growing by 5 percent. A major driving force of its growth is the green economy, which Ding described as "a salient feature of the Chinese economy".

He pledged that the country will make "tireless efforts" to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate pollution and "accelerate the comprehensive transition to green economic and social development".

China boasts the world's largest and most complete new energy industry chain and the country now produces 90 percent of the world's solar panels and 70 percent of its electric vehicle batteries. It has served as a strong booster for global green development and climate response. It is no exaggeration to say that in much of the world, the green transition is powered by "made in China".

Yet despite this, Chinese companies are facing increasing protectionist policies as they expand overseas. For example, the US quadrupled tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles last year to 100 percent, and the European Union has also conducted a raft of probes targeting "State subsidies" in China's green tech sector, as well as imposing punitive tariffs on Chinese-made EVs, prompting Ding to warn against "erecting green barriers that could disrupt normal economic and trade cooperation".

It is encouraging that European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said in Davos that Europe "must engage constructively with China to find solutions in our mutual interest". After all, the need for the world to unite and work together to address global climate challenges has never been more urgent, with last year continuing the trend of being the hottest year on record.

Economic globalization is, as Ding remarked, not a "you-lose-I-win zero-sum game", but a universally beneficial process where all can benefit and win together so long as any tensions and disagreements that appear are resolved through dialogue and consultation.

China firmly believes that communication and coordination will not only make the pie of economic globalization bigger, but also distribute it better.

ASEAN best served by strategic autonomy

In a recent interview with the Financial Times in London during his visit to the United Kingdom, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim raised a good point: that upholding strategic autonomy amid tensions between China and the United States serves the interests of smaller economies best.

The comeback of the "America first" Donald Trump administration, as indicated by a considerable part of his interview being dedicated to the impacts of that, has undoubtedly provided a context to better understand the Malaysian leader's remarks.

Even the Philippines, a close ally of the US that has actively thrown itself to the front to provoke China over their South China Sea maritime disputes, cannot deny the rationality of Anwar's remarks.

In Southeast Asia, Anwar remarked, the West has delivered endless lectures on democracy and reform but delivered little practically to help. "Nothing was done to assist (the region). There's engagement only in trade and investment."

That explains why the former US administration was generally met with a cold shoulder from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations whenever it tried to drag the bloc on to its anti-China bandwagon over the past four years.

It was after meeting collective resistance from the organization, which is seeking to maintain its centrality in regional affairs, that the former US administration resorted to a divide-and-rule approach, trying to press the Ferdinand Marcos Jr government of the Philippines to drive a wedge between the ASEAN members and China by hyping up their maritime disputes in the South China Sea.

Regional countries have long seen through these US tricks that ironically have served to stimulate them to pay more attention to strengthening their solidarity and speak in one voice on the world stage, and spurred them to promote their respective dialogues and negotiations with China to resolve their maritime disputes in a proper way while markedly boosting their pragmatic cooperation and trade with the world's second-largest economy.

That is further evidenced in the wide-ranging joint statement the ASEAN foreign ministers issued after their meeting in Langkawi, Malaysia, on Sunday, which can be seen as the organization's reiteration of its independent foreign policy as a new US administration takes office.

The document clearly demonstrates ASEAN's determination to stay clear of the US' geopolitical game and focus on promoting regional common development, peace and stability with its neighbors, including China.

Asked if ASEAN under his leadership would be as tough on China as under some of his predecessors, Anwar said: "Why do we need to be tough? We disagree on many foreign policy issues with the US but we want them to be an important ally. Similarly with China. I don't think it's a matter of being tough against a strong, big neighbour."

These remarks ring true for the region and beyond.

Fully respecting their autonomy, Beijing has never pressed the Southeast Asian countries to make an either-or choice between it and Washington, and it will never do so in the future, as promoting the healthy development of Sino-US relations is also China's consistent policy. It is well aware the US remains a valued investor in the high-tech industry of all emerging economies, as it is in that of China.

The new US administration should pay heed to the welcome Anwar gave to increased Chinese investment in infrastructure and other areas, and at the same time to US investment in the high-tech industry. This reflects the complementarity between China and the US in their respective contributions to the world's common development and the broad space that exists for their cooperation in third-party countries, toward which Beijing remains open.

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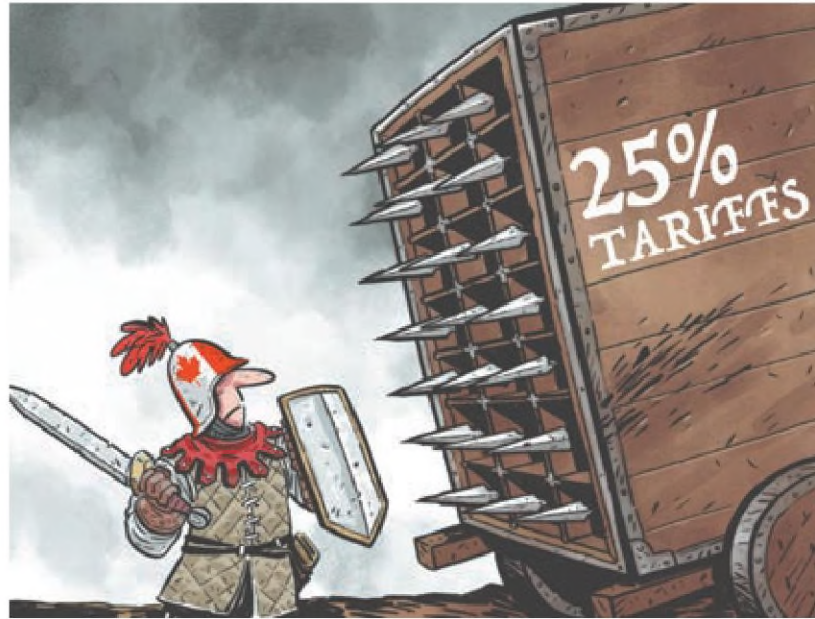
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Cai Meng



Opinion Line

New Delhi must realize neighbor brings India more opportunities

India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar has struck a positive note on China-India relations, saying on Saturday that the relations have a bearing on the two countries' development prospects and the global order, and India will look at relations with China from a long-term perspective.

Although Jaishankar also said that India must be prepared to deal with a neighbor with ever-growing strength, and enhance its own strength, his observations on the importance of China-India relations are objective and accurate, and if New Delhi really develops ties with Beijing and deals with the contradictions in this approach, bilateral relations will have greater space for development.

As two leading emerging economies, there is no reason for China and India not to develop better relations. The problems between the two

countries should not hold back the development of friendly relations, but should instead become the impetus for solving them.

During their meeting on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, on Oct 23 last year, China's top leader and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached a consensus that China and India are, for each other, development opportunities, not threats; cooperative partners, not competitors, and that the two countries will adhere to a strategic and long-term perspective to handle relations. This high-level consensus has provided a strong driving force for the two countries to bring bilateral ties back to the track of sound and stable development.

For a long time, the China-India boundary dispute has been a major obstacle to improving bilateral relations. However, as long as the two

countries keep the overall situation in mind and avoid taking unilateral and drastic actions to aggravate the contradictions, solutions will surely be found. On Dec 18, the special representatives of the two countries on the boundary issue held their 23rd meeting in Beijing, the first in five years, and reached six important points of consensus. This has created a good political environment for bilateral economic and trade cooperation.

The 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and India this year should become an important opportunity for the two countries to advance the further development of bilateral relations. At the strategic level, New Delhi should steer clear of external forces that want to contain China's development and realize that China's development brings it opportunities.

— WU YUXUE, CHINA DAILY

Sino-ROK economic relations mutually beneficial

In 2024, China's total foreign trade volume reached 43.85 trillion yuan (\$6.02 trillion), up 5 percent year-on-year. In terms of individual countries, the United States remained China's largest trading partner, while the Republic of Korea, with a trade volume of 2.33 trillion yuan, became its second-largest trading partner.

Despite the turmoil in the ROK, pressure from the US, and increasing focus on industrial competition between China and the ROK, economic and trade cooperation between the two countries has advanced further. There are several reasons for this.

First, for many consecutive years,

China has been the ROK's largest trading partner, exports market, and source of imports. Since the signing of a free trade agreement in 2015, the two sides have reduced tariffs 10 times.

Second, the dividends of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership over the past two years have accelerated regional economic integration. Thanks to the RCEP, many ROK products have seen significant reduction in tariffs, and the overall exports scale has continued to expand.

Third, the willingness of emerging enterprises in the ROK to cooperate with China has received a positive response from the Chinese side. Ana-

lysts in the ROK realize that the semiconductor, automobile, battery, and electronic appliance industries, important pillars of the ROK's economy, rely heavily on raw materials and core minerals that originate in China.

Lastly, China's visa-free policy for ROK nationals holding ordinary passports since Nov 8 has worked like a catalyst, facilitating trade. The economic and trade activities between China and the ROK have not only promoted bilateral relations but also set an example for many other bilateral relationships.

— YICAI.COM

What They Say

Roundtable promotes productive exchange of views

China not only has a vibrant super-large market, but also has complete industry and supply chains, rich innovation resources, and plenty of application scenarios. It will continue to be an important part of the global market, and European companies are welcome to give full play to their own advantages and improve their competitiveness by investing in China. The Chinese government will continue to provide good service guarantees for foreign-funded enterprises to invest and operate in China.

Ling Ji, vice-minister of commerce, hosted a roundtable meeting in Beijing on Tuesday soliciting suggestions from the representatives of European enterprises. Representatives of dozens of major corporations and business organizations from the European Union attended the meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Finance, the National Medical Products Administration and other central departments.

The meeting is the latest of its kind

under a mechanism of the Chinese government that has been formed to promote exchanges and communication between foreign companies and key policymakers aimed at letting the foreign companies better understand the motives, considerations, difficulties and purposes of relevant policies the Chinese government has rolled out, and also enabling the policymakers to better know about the companies' pragmatic concerns.

There were heated discussions during the meeting on some key subjects related to both sides' common concerns. But the interactions were productive and reflected the high hopes the foreign companies pin on the Chinese market, their confidence in the prospects of the Chinese economy, and the Chinese government's commitment to creating a good business environment and providing nondiscriminatory treatment to companies from the EU and beyond.

As Ling said, China-EU economic and trade cooperation has a solid

foundation, and their industry and supply chains and value chains are deeply intertwined. The structural complementarity of the Chinese and EU economies harbors huge potential for their economic and trade cooperation.

Due to the pressure applied by the former US administration, the EU imposed "anti-subsidy" tariffs on Chinese-made electric vehicles in October, prompting China to take some countermeasures against dairy, pork and wine products from the EU. The EU enterprises operating in China are well aware that the tit-for-tat trade frictions between China and the EU are politically motivated and harm the two sides' common interests, and hinder the EU's green transition. They should play a bigger role in lobbying their respective governments to review the EU's irrational tariffs on Chinese-made EVs and take the initiative to put an end to the trade frictions that will have no winners.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Bharat Khanal

Nepal-China ties rooted in history

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Nepal and China, although civilizational links between the two sides can be traced to early 5th Century AD. Since establishing diplomatic ties on Aug 1, 1955, Nepal and China have enjoyed cordial, cooperative and win-win relations, not least because the two countries are linked by history, geography and mutual interest.

The current state of bilateral relations, based on mutual understanding, shared interests, mutual support and appreciation of each other's concerns and sensitivities, is amiable and economically beneficial, facilitating the further deepening of ties.

Since the Nepal-China relationship has been guided by the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (Panchsheel), and amity and good neighborliness, the two countries' peoples harbor nothing but goodwill and love toward each other.

Influenced by the teachings of the Buddha, the artworks of Araniko, the translations of monk Buddhahabhadra, and the cultural contributions of Nepalese Princess Bhrikuti (Khrizun) who brought the Sutra of the White Lotus to Tibet, bilateral relations have helped strengthen the two countries' cultural and spiritual connection. And since opening its embassy in Kathmandu in July 1960 (with Nepal opening its embassy in Beijing in September 1961), China has remained a strong development partner of Nepal, supporting the latter's overall development endeavor.

The two countries share a 1,414-kilometer-long border, with the majestic and mighty Himalayas connecting them. People-to-people relations between the two countries are strong, close and deep-rooted. The people of Nepal will always remember China's support during the global public health crisis and in the aftermath of the April 15, 2015, earthquake China helped the country carry out rescue and relief operations.

China has always respected Nepal's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence. Similarly, Nepal remains committed to the one-China principle.

Regular exchange of high-level visits between the two countries has produced positive results, significantly contributing to the consolidation of friendly bilateral relations.

From Dec 2 to 5, 2024, Nepalese Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli paid an official visit to China, during which Nepal joined the "Group of Friends" of China's Global

Development Initiative and signed the "Framework for Belt and Road Cooperation", identifying key projects. The two sides, however, need to expedite the implementation of projects.

Also, Nepalese President Bidya Devi Bhandari paid a state visit to China in 2019, during which the two heads of state witnessed the signing of seven different agreements, including the "Protocol on Implementing Agreement on Transit and Transport".

The transport cooperation, trade facilitation, establishment of cross-border economic zones, and cooperation on trade infrastructure development will greatly benefit the people of both countries.

China's remarkable economic development is astonishing and inspiring. As a close neighbor and trusted partner, Nepal wants to deepen its economic cooperation with China, particularly in

the trade, investment, technology transfer and tourism fields, in order to benefit from China's remarkable development.

Nepal hopes to get a higher level of financial and technical support from China in priority development areas such as connectivity, infrastructure development, healthcare, hydropower and agriculture. In this regard, developing the trans-Himalayan multi-dimensional connectivity network, as agreed by both sides, will benefit not just Nepal but China as well. The immediate and urgent need of Nepal is to "materialize" cross-border connectivity through improved roads on both sides of the border. Later, this multi-dimensional connectivity network can be expanded to include railways, transmission lines and information channels.

Nepal also needs increased air connectivity between the major cities of the two

countries, including direct and regular flights to and from the Pokhara International Airport and Gautam Buddha International Airport in Siddharthanagar to boost its tourism sector and enhance connectivity.

Moreover, Nepal hopes to get China's support in transforming its agricultural sector through the increased use of modern technology; and hopefully, the modernization of Nepal's agricultural sector will stem the flow of Nepalese migrants to other countries. Considering the huge trade gap between the two sides, Nepal needs Chinese knowledge, experience and technology to increase its productive capacity so that it can boost its exports. It also wants to deepen cooperation with China on information technology, artificial intelligence and cybersecurity.

In fact, Nepal also requires huge amounts of investment to transform its economy, achieve its development goals, and meet its requirements, for which Nepal has been encouraging Chinese people and businesses to invest in Nepal.

The two neighbors also have the potential to promote different types of tourism, including sports tourism and adventure tourism. That Nepal and China jointly announced the new height of Mount Qomolangma (8,848.86 meters) at a special ceremony in Kathmandu in December 2020, shows they have enough room to expand cooperation in adventure sports.

Nepal will graduate from the group of least-developed countries by 2026, and China's support will be of great help to make the "graduation" process smooth. Similarly, Chinese expertise in urban infrastructure, urban transportation and healthcare development can greatly benefit Nepal. The two sides can also collaborate on environmental protection and climate change mitigation.

Nepal is a staunch advocate of a just, equitable, inclusive and rules-based world order, and commends China's strong and important role in defending and supporting the cause and interests of developing, and less- and least-developed countries at multilateral forums.

To take Nepal-China relations to newer heights and ensure the fruits of closer ties benefit the two peoples, both countries have to make extra efforts.

The author is consul general of Nepal in Guangzhou. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Ji Deqiang

Digital age offers novel ways to celebrate Spring Festival

As one of the most digitalized markets in the world, China has built world-class information channels and developed mobile apps to boost economic growth and social development. As a result, China has been transforming into a digitally connected and interactive society, changing the way the Chinese people celebrate traditional holidays.

Till about two decades ago, most Chinese families had only one source of entertainment on New Year's Eve: television. Watching TV programs together with the family, particularly the Spring Festival Gala telecast by China Central Television, had become an organic component of Chinese New Year celebrations.

Since being launched in 1983, the Spring Festival Gala has facilitated the creation of other forms of entertainment and interactive activities during Chinese New Year. For a majority of Chinese people, watching the 4.5-hour-long Spring Festival Gala with family had become one of the main activities of family reunions on Chinese New Year's Eve.

But after smartphones became popular, affordable and an all-inclusive source of information, entertainment and news, the TV-centered, in-home Chinese New Year celebration changed. Sending greeting messages to friends via a smartphone while watching the gala on TV became a new trend.

Combining celebration and consumption is highly consistent with the goal of preserving culture and promoting development.

CCTV, as the main producer and broadcaster of the Spring Festival Gala, took advantage of this technological revolution by ensuring programs on the big screens of TV could be watched on the smaller screens of smartphones. In particular, CCTV facilitated the development of innovative interactive programs, including voting and grabbing virtual red envelopes, thus encouraging national and international audiences to not only watch the TV program but also participate in the interactive sessions. This gave rise to a new business model, which further consolidated the dominance of TV channels in the advertisement market.

Soon after the mobile phone industry boom, social media became a new but transformative platform, changing the communication pattern of Chinese society. Many social media platforms flourished and formulated a multi-sided market ecology which soon captured almost all cultural events including Spring Festival.

For example, social media platforms provided channels for real-time interactions between the TV programs and the viewers, created space for online discussions and networked dissemination of selective content, and collaborated with TV stations for targeted advertisements, diversifying the commercial structure. Watching TV has now evolved into a multi-media phenomenon characterized by the massive participation of ordinary audience/users.

Social media companies have also become major sponsors of the Spring Festival Gala over the past few years, introducing more digital economy elements into the content including online shopping. As a result, the Spring Festival Gala is no longer just about watching a good program, because TV programs have been transformed into an integrated platform for digital consumption. Combining celebration and consumption is highly consistent with the goal of preserving culture and promoting development.

From online to offline, amid the rapid digital transformation of Chinese society, the Chinese New Year holiday is widely seen as a unique opportunity for promoting various cultural activities such as tourism, plays and films. Thanks to China's highly developed transportation infrastructure, it has become easier for people to travel during Chinese New Year. Instead of staying at home, many families and individuals choose to travel, either within the country or abroad, in order to celebrate Spring Festival in a different way.

If home is the place for family reunion, the outside world could be considered a place for cultural adventure and visiting new places. Digital technology plays a vital role in facilitating mobility during holidays by offering customized services. While digital platforms have become the center stage of the digital economy, it is becoming increasingly evident that social media platforms have been influencing how we celebrate traditional holidays.

As the most dynamic digital market in the world, China has been innovatively combining cultural and economic activities. As a result, more and more people are seeking innovative ways to celebrate Chinese New Year.

The author is professor of Media and Communication Studies at the Communication University of China. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

Wang Jiating

'Debut economy' new engine driving consumption

China has been shifting its economic gears in recent years, and one of the most intriguing and commercially profitable trends of this shift is the "first store plus debut" model — a strategy that is fast becoming the catalyst for an unprecedented surge in consumption. At the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in July 2024, the blueprint introduced for boosting consumption highlighted the "debut economy" as an initiative aimed at reducing restrictive measures, increasing public consumption and fueling economic growth.

In line with this vision, the Central Economic Work Conference in December reaffirmed the importance of fostering this model as one of the main initiatives to boost consumption in 2025. What makes this approach so captivating is its remarkable ability to tap into China's "submerged markets", turning them into powerful engines of consumption. With first-tier cities such as Beijing and Shanghai leading the charge, the "first store plus debut" model has facilitated the debut of products by hundreds of new stores, stimulating consumption in ways that are both fresh and vibrant. In 2024 alone, such cities saw the opening of more than 900 first stores, which has somewhat reshaped the retail and consumer landscape.

With competition intensifying in first- and second-tier cities, brands are increasingly turning to third- and fourth-tier cities, especially the so-called submerged markets in search of new growth opportunities. This shift is fueled by a change in consumer spending habits.

Management consultancy firm McKinsey has forecast that by 2030, China's personal consumption will reach a stag-

gering 65.3 trillion yuan (\$8.9 trillion), with more than 66 percent of the growth coming from lower-tier cities and towns.

The submerged markets — often overlooked by businesses in favor of more established, wealthier urban centers — are now seen as the next frontier of rising consumption, and the "first store plus debut" model has become the best way of harnessing the latent potential of these markets, delivering products and experiences that once could only be found in metropolises. Brands are no longer simply opening stores; they're opening doors to innovative consumption experiences.

To understand why the "first store plus debut" model works so well in these markets, we must look at the evolving consumer demand. Rising disposable incomes, coupled with increasingly sophisticated tastes, have created a fertile ground for brands willing to offer something new. The first stores appeal to consumers in smaller cities, as they offer trendy goods, high-end home appliances and personalized dining experiences.

Take Starbucks for example. In a strategic move, it ensured that smaller cities and rural areas accounted for about 33 percent of its stores by 2023 in China. As Liu Wenjuan, Starbucks China chief operating officer, said, consumers in county-level markets show strong brand loyalty, making them ideal for business expansion. Similarly, other major brands are opening their first stores in such areas to make profits by meeting local demands and filling the market gaps.

Debut products — the launch of limited-edition products or new offerings — cater to a growing demand for novelty and uniqueness. A limited-edition product may not just fulfill a need; it could also give consumers reason to feel ahead of the consumption curve.

From the supply-side perspective, the "first store plus debut" model is revolutionizing the retail ecosystem in submerged markets. Traditionally, such places were dominated by small local retailers without the scale or innovation capacity needed to create a modern, consumer-driven retail market. It is in such an environment that the first stores of companies introduced advanced store management practices, digital marketing and a sophisticated supply chain, impressing consumers and drawing them in larger numbers.

An apt example of such a store is Super Ming. The company, adopting a bulk retail model in submerged markets, shows how innovation can boost sales even in lower-tier cities. Its first stores introduced innovative merchandising strategies, such as shelving products not in demand. By integrating online and offline platforms, Super Ming offers a seamless shopping experience while leveraging big data to optimize inventory and product selection. During product launch, the company collaborates with local media, influencers and businesses to generate a buzz, creating a holistic retail ecosystem that benefits everyone.

"Submerged markets" used to be plagued by information asymmetry, with consumers having limited access to the latest products, and brands struggling to reach potential consumers. The internet has broken that barrier, enabling the "first store plus debut" model to gain traction.

Today, brands can use social media platforms and targeted online advertising to bring news of their first store's opening and product launch directly to consumers in smaller cities. This digital-first approach has been driving the online buzz and discussions, while off-

line stores become experiential hubs. When consumers engage with these brands, they don't just shop; they experience, discuss and share their encounters, creating an organic word-of-mouth promotion for the store and its products.

The most remarkable aspect of the "first store plus debut" model is its ability to catalyze entire ecosystems, as the opening of bricks-and-mortar stores generate high footfall, enhancing the profile of shopping districts and encouraging others to invest in real estate. A product launch creates more synergy, as it involves a complex supply chain. Consumer excitement generated by the first release boosts the demand for after-sales services, repairs and complementary products, forming a complete economic loop, helping revitalize the submerged markets.

Looking ahead, the potential of the "first store plus debut" model in submerged markets is huge. With continued growth and rising incomes, consumer spending in these markets, too, will grow. And the digital transformation will further streamline access to information, empowering consumers to make more informed decisions and engage with the latest products and trends.

With the "first store plus debut" model continuing to help upgrade consumption, submerged markets are likely to become a driver of economic recovery. By giving consumers in smaller cities the tools, experiences and opportunities to participate in the consumption economy, the model has the potential to reshape China's economic landscape.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

ENRIQUE DUSSEL PETERS

Three-way split

Enormous potential for cooperation between China and Mexico under a new triangular relationship with the US

Countries such as Mexico in Latin America and the Caribbean are under enormous pressure from the United States' administration of President Donald Trump and his direct tariff threats on the pretexts of migration and organized crime.

Considering the US-China confrontation, these countries in addition are required to adjust their relationship with China. The Mexico-China relationship has been maturing significantly in all imaginable fields, not only in the economic field, since diplomatic relations were established in 1972. From a Mexican perspective, it does not make sense to exclude either the US or China. It seeks long-term cooperation with both China and the US.

Surprisingly though, many LAC countries have lacked an explicit bilateral agenda with China, as a result of the US' security-shoring process against China since 2022.

The Center for Chinese-Mexican Studies of the School of Economics at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, in cooperation with Chinese and other international counterparts, has been researching for more than two decades on LAC-China issues, including topics of bilateral history, diplomatic and political relations, and details of economic matters.

In the recently released document titled "Aspects for a Mexico-China Strategic Agenda: New Triangular Relationships", several issues stand out for such a Mexico-China agenda. The relationship between Mexico and China should be examined under a "new triangular relationship", explicitly incorporating the US-China confrontation since at least 2017 and defined by

the first Trump administration as great-power competition. Such a perspective is fundamental for most of LAC and particularly Mexico, since the US is still by far the most important point of reference in the multiple fields of their international relations. Thus, considering the increasing overall presence of China in LAC, the challenge for countries such as Mexico is to engage in detailed agendas with both the US and China. Mexico therefore needs to define its relationship with China in the diplomatic-political, economic and cultural spheres, among others. Such a perspective could also be functional for other countries that have profound ties with the US and China.

It is imperative that Mexico enhances the public, private and academic institutions specializing in China. They should be the motor for a strategic and integral agenda in the short, medium and long run. The Mexican Senate, the foreign secretary and several other secretaries related to tourism, investments and foreign trade are responsible today to immediately update the bilateral agenda. It is not feasible for Mexico to postpone a strategic bilateral agenda.

Mexico and China have several bilateral institutions, such as Mexican and Chinese cultural centers. These institutions should evaluate and update their goals, make effective progress on the numerous issues raised in their annual meetings, reflect on their achievements and the missed opportunities. A modernization and high-quality update based on the new era and challenges is unavoidable.

The economic and trade scenarios are probably the most controversial today, considering that Mexico and China are the first and third most important trading partners of the US. It is significant to under-

stand the new triangular relationship that has evolved during the 21st century. In 2020, 7.5 percent of Mexican exports to the US accounted for Chinese value-added, which has risen significantly in the past decade. At the same time, a large number of Mexican imports today go to foreign companies established in Mexico, particularly US companies. As a result, the proposed new tariffs against Mexico will mainly affect US companies established in Mexico and their exports to the US. These companies have integrated imported Chinese parts and components for decades and an import-substituting process will take time and be expensive for almost all parts, without ruling out the possibility of Chinese investments in Mexico aimed at this import-substituting process. Not recognizing this process under the new Trump administration may result in simplistic and utterly illusory proposals that might be ideologically appealing, but do not understand the complex economic reality of the 21st century. Proposals to face these new challenges should also be triangular, that is, explicitly integrating US, Chinese and Mexican perspectives in the highly heterogeneous global value chains.

There are dozens of cooperation initiatives between Mexico and China on education, culture and science. The analysis by the Center for Chinese-Mexican Studies examines the enormous potential of tourism in Mexico, the importance of six Confucius institutes, as well as student and academic exchanges, and collaboration in cultural and social research. Cooperation could be particularly fruitful with younger generations to strengthen future bilateral ties.

From this perspective, it is important to face current challenges in this new triangular relationship in the 21st century. Both China



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

and Mexico should face their important bilateral conditions and potential. And the bilateral relationship goes far beyond current economic and trade debates, and threats of third countries in the short term. Existing bilateral insti-

tutions play a particularly important role and should modernize and update this relationship as soon as possible.

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EHIZUELEN MICHAEL MITCHELL OMORUYI

'America First' poses challenge to African development

The new Trump administration's policy agenda could undermine South-South cooperation, whereby China does more to help developing countries fight climate change and other problems

The implications of the "America First" policy of the second Donald Trump administration are being debated around the world. International affairs and interests of other countries are secondary to Trump's "America First" policy. Relationships are based on benefits to the United States.

Thus, US foreign policy interests and engagements would be tied to strategic security and economic interests. Trump's protectionist insular outlook could pose a challenge to the US' African Growth and Opportunity Act, which has so far allowed eligible African countries such as Nigeria to export some of their produce to the US without paying taxes since 2000. It is quite likely that the Act will not be renewed in its current form. During the 2024 election campaign, he pledged to impose a 10 percent tariff on all foreign goods. If that happens, African exporters such as Nigeria would sell fewer products in the US market.

Nigeria will have to adjust its strategies to deal with two related, but different, challenges at once. It needs to rally as many countries as possible, especially China, to put pressure on developed countries to push for changes to the current international economic and political system. For this, Nigeria can examine strategies adopted by major players such as Vietnam, Mexico, Indonesia, Poland and Morocco toward creating a multipolar world. These economies, also called "economic connectors", have gained increased trade and investment amid the increased geopolitical competition between the US and China.



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

In the meantime, those experiences highlight the challenges before many other developing countries, especially those without natural resources and basic manufacturing bases.

However, to develop its own economy, Nigeria could explore the possibility of working with China in order to harness its vast human

and material resources. Several aspects of China's foreign policy and global development priorities could be brought together. For instance, through official development assistance and other finance tools, the Chinese government can help Nigeria diversify away from petroleum products. This would increase non-petroleum trade in

Nigeria and help Nigeria achieve its carbon-transition goals.

Similarly, given the abundance of lithium and cobalt or nickel and platinum in different Nigerian states in large commercial quantities, these resources could become one of the primary sources of electric batteries as the world explores how to green the global economy.

China's foreign assistance can help promote sustainable mining practices that benefit China, Nigeria and the rest of the world. And more importantly, Nigeria should strengthen national resource mobilization capabilities and formalize the Nigerian economy by prioritizing local workforce development, boosting digital trade and supporting country-level initiatives.

Due to Trump's "America First" and anti-multilateralist stance, his return heralds uncertainty for global climate action, which will be detrimental to vulnerable countries such as Nigeria. As a result of his focus on fossil fuel expansion, he could roll back environmental policies in the future. Also, it could limit the US' engagement with global climate initiatives and may lead to a reduction in funding for Nigerian climate adaptation projects and investments in clean energy in the future. As a result of this action, mitigation efforts could be hindered and partnerships that are essential for building renewable energy infrastructure and disaster resilience may be weakened.

Additionally, his retraction might embolden other countries to deprioritize climate action, resulting in a domino effect that would exacerbate the vulnerability of countries such as Nigeria, which are already suffering from environmental and economic hardships. Considering Nigeria's high agricultural dependency, such policies could worsen climate vulnerabilities.

Inaction on climate change will affect the entire planet, including the US, regardless of where greenhouse gases come from. Climate change also affects livelihoods and daily finances, damages infrastructure, costs taxpayers and reduces national security. If the US steps back on its climate leadership, it

will be difficult to phase out fossil fuels and halt global warming. This will further fragment global climate efforts, placing increased strain on nations least able to manage climate change. Because of a lack of momentum in climate action, the planet's environment is at risk of crossing environmental tipping points.

It is evident that in an increasingly multipolar world characterized by a number of powers challenging the hegemony of the US, Nigeria has the opportunity to pursue diversified partnerships in a manner that helps it reach solutions to its climate problems. Therefore, as the US priorities shift under the new Trump administration, the Nigerian government will have to decide how to navigate partnerships in order to secure investments, maintain political stability and meet its long-term development needs through inward-looking strategies as well as by furthering its cooperation with China. The long-term prospects for Nigeria are bright in light of this development. So, Nigeria and China may be able to take advantage of this opportunity to strengthen their cooperation. There is a possibility that this will contribute to more South-South cooperation, as well as increased opportunities for China to assume a more proper role in global governance, promoting models that diverge from Western ideals.

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TALES & TRAILS

Editor's note:

China Daily reporters leverage local expertise to craft diverse itineraries, showcasing a blend of historical landmarks and natural wonders across highly recommended cities and sites, offering practical guidance for your exploration of the country.

China embraces winter's chill

Geographical diversity and new offerings are resulting in a panoply of experiences designed to make the most of the cold season, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

China's geographical diversity and size make it heir to a range of distinctive winter experiences, from the frigid, snow-covered expanses of the north to the milder, subtropical climates of the south. The Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics lit a fire under the winter tourism market, turning it from a niche interest into an important sector.

The surging number of winter sports venues, improved infrastructure, and customized routes are fueling winter wanderlust.

During the 2023-24 snow season, the China Tourism Academy reported over 400 million visits to ice and snow leisure experiences.

That figure is expected to keep growing following the unveiling by the State Council of an ambitious plan to transform the ice and snow economy into a new economic driver, targeting a market size of 1.2 trillion yuan (\$164.8 billion) by 2027, and 1.5 trillion yuan by 2030.

Destinations are increasingly promoting the integration of winter tourism with sports and local culture to add excitement to the traveler experience. They are focusing not only on beautiful landscapes but also tapping into new business models that integrate gourmet food, hot springs, folk culture, shopping, sports, and educational programs.

With the Asian Winter Games happening in February, China Daily is taking the opportunity to explore some of the finest new winter experiences, each optimized for its specific location.

See more on pages 15, 16

\$164.8 billion

is set to be the market size of the ice and snow economy by 2027, according to a plan by the State Council



Online

See more by scanning the code.

400 million visits

were recorded, where people enjoyed experiences in the ice and snow during the 2023-24 snow season

Beijing's Summer Palace coated in snow presents a captivating fusion of history and nature. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

TALES & TRAILS



Left: Fuhai county in Altay, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, hosts spectacular winter fishing events. LIU XIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE **Center:** The Unfrozen River runs through Arxan National Forest Park in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region. LIU ZHAOMING / FOR CHINA DAILY **Right:** The forest park is home to a variety of wildlife. LIU GUOXING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia

Hot culture in a cold climate

By YANG FEIYUE
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The ethnic diversity, folk celebrations, and vast and varied landscapes set the Inner Mongolia and the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous regions apart from the rest of China as cold weather getaways. The Mongolian and Uygur cultures add a unique flavor to these winter tourism destinations.

Visitors can experience yurts and horseback riding across snowy grasslands or partake in the Naadam Fair to appreciate traditional Mongolian wrestling, archery, and horse racing. In Xinjiang, the Uygur culture takes evident forms in ethnic performances, traditional handicrafts, and regional cuisine like *laghman* (Uygur-style noodles with flavorful sauces) and kebabs, which are especially appealing during the cold months.

Additionally, vast grasslands across Inner Mongolia can transform into a serene, white wonderland for visitors to experience activities like ice fishing, dog sledding, and snowmobiling.

The snow-covered Tianshan Mountains and the stunning Karakul Lake strike awe in Xinjiang, complemented by skiing and snowshoeing in the arid landscape of the northwestern region.

Forests in Arxan

The Hinggan League in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region boasts an area of 60,000 square kilometers and is home to rich grasslands, forests, wetlands, hot springs, snow and ice. Winter blesses the region with exceptional tourism resources.

Arxan in the northwest of the league boasts breathtaking forest landscapes and a rich and unique forest culture. At the Lujiaowan (deer horn bay) Forest Ranch, countless surprises await in winter, where tourists can experience the exhilarating rush of horseback riding, the precision of archery, and driving a snowmobile across the vast, snow-covered fields.

Tourists can join a team collaboration on an ice dragon boat or try the thrill of



Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region enjoys increasing popularity among skiers, thanks to its long snow season and vast area of natural powder snow. WANG JUNAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

combat in a snow-covered world in the real-life version of the video game *Counter-Strike*.

Adorable animals ranging from leisurely strolling sika deer and galloping horses to herds of cows, sheep, and camels add a touch of exotic charm, bringing warmth and joy to the winter landscape.

About a 40-minute drive away, the Bailangfeng scenic spot offers views of sparkling rime. It has a carefully designed viewing platform that offers visitors a panoramic view of the extensive forests. As the sun rises, the scene becomes a silver wave, with each tree covered in frost sparkling in the sun rays. As the gentle breeze blows, the branches sway slightly to produce a wind chime melody.

Folk experiences are accessible at Bailang town, 11 km from Bailangfeng. The town prepares a winter tradition known as "rolling ice", symbolizing the removal of bad luck and illnesses. Be sure to see the town's bark painting made of rough

birchbark meticulously peeled and separated into up to 40 layers, each with a different tint.

The Arxan National Forest Park, about 90 km from the town, hosts one of Asia's largest volcanic geological sites — Shitang Forest — where volcanic stones of varying sizes and uneven surfaces are exposed in the snow like scattered round mushrooms. The volcanic crater lake — Tuofengling Tianchi, formed 300,000 years ago — is a highlight, while the Santan Gorge hosts glistening jade-green waters.

The Unfrozen River running through the park is a natural wonder as it never freezes even when temperatures drop to -30 C.

More than snow

Xinjiang sits in the world's golden latitude belt for snow and ice and enjoys an average snow season of over 100 days each year, delivering excellent snow quality. The unique geography of the region, a

mixture of mountains and basins, creates favorable conditions for skiing with significant elevation differences and moderate slopes. Several regions within Xinjiang's rugged mountains have been converted into ski resorts featuring top-tier facilities.

Altay prefecture, in the north of Xinjiang, is known for its long winter season that can last up to eight months and its vast area of natural powder snow.

The Jiangjunshan Ski Resort in Altay is among the few high-altitude resorts located in a city center. The resort boasts 72 ski slopes, two of which are certified by the International Ski and Snowboard Federation and can host international competitions. The resort also introduced paragliding and hot air balloons this year. Snowmobiles are also arranged for visitors to explore the wonders of nature around the resort.

After bidding farewell to Jiangjunshan, head to Ulungur Lake, which is less than a two-hour drive. The lake in Altay's

If you go

Xinjiang: Altay in Xinjiang is about a five-hour flight from Beijing. Roasted lamb, often prepared whole and slow-cooked to perfection, flavored with spices like cumin and chili, as well as fresh and creamy yogurt typically served in clay pots, can be enjoyed in local restaurants. Those looking for a beverage that packs a punch should try kumis, alcohol made from mare's milk.

Inner Mongolia: It's about a two-hour flight from Beijing to Ulaanhot, gateway to Hinggan League. Don't miss the roasted lamb seasoned with herbs and spices, and Mongolian milk tea that is an essential part of daily life. The hearty beverage is a staple for herders and is perfect for cold weather. Mongolian wool is highly regarded for its softness and warmth, and traditional wool coats are popular souvenirs.

Fuhai county offers spectacular winter fishing events that will last till March. As one of the largest inland freshwater lakes in China, Ulungur has seen fishermen employing traditional methods such as digging holes in its frozen surface, casting nets, and hauling tons of fish up through the ice.

Besides soaking up the harvesting vibe, tourists can engage in ice dragon boat races, try their hand at winter fishing using small nets, and take part in a range of activities, such as ice skating, snowmobiling, and sleigh rides. Moreover, a diverse selection of local delicacies awaits to tantalize their taste buds.

For those with an adventurous spirit, cross-country tours have been developed to explore the hidden wonders of the Taklimakan Desert. Compared to the hot temperatures and sandstorms in other seasons, the white snow covers the golden desert, adding to the interplay of light and shadow amid the undulating dunes.

Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang

By YANG FEIYUE

China's geographical proximity to Siberia gives its northeastern winters a distinct bite. The long, harsh cold season gives rise to a stunningly raw and unspoiled environment of vast snowy expanses, frozen rivers and forests. As the three northeastern provinces of Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning have continued to upgrade infrastructure and introduce celebrations to create immersive winter experiences, the region is now at the heart of the country's winter tourism.

A sparkling wonderland of joy

Sporting activities at world-class ski resorts, displays of massive ice and snow sculptures, wildlife observation, and a wealth of folk traditions are part of a rich mine of winter wonders.

The northernmost province of Heilongjiang allows visitors to experience the winter the way it should be experienced.

The provincial capital, Harbin, is an ideal first stop. The Harbin Ice-Snow

World offers winter fun with sound and light shows over an area of 1 million square meters this year.

Some 300,000 cubic meters of ice and snow were used in the design and construction, which tips its hat to the 9th Asian Winter Games that will open in Harbin in February. This includes ice re-creations of landmarks from the members of the Olympic Council of Asia,

among them Cambodia's Bayon temple.

An ice harvesting festival, a new fantasy show, outdoor performances, and ice carving competitions are available to make the experience more interesting. Technology-enabled digital culture and art experiences are also available that allow visitors to explore the microcosmic world of ice crystals and snowflakes and try their hand at building

snowmen, curling, and solving lantern riddles.

Located just a three-hour drive away, the Yabuli ski resort features one of China's longest and most challenging ski trails weaving through dense forests.

It also houses one of the world's longest slides, stretching 2,680 meters with a vertical drop of 570 meters and 48 twists and turns. Constructed using stainless steel tracks and a sturdy plastic canopy, the slide resembles a giant dragon winding its way down the mountainside.

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The Harbin Ice-Snow World is the biggest draw for visitors to the northeastern city in Heilongjiang province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

TALES & TRAILS

Beijing and Hebei

Hi-tech, traditional charms enthrall

By YANG FEIYUE

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The 2022 Winter Olympics not only put Beijing and Zhangjiakou in Hebei province on the map of winter tourism but left world-class infrastructure behind that has transformed them into globally recognized tourism hot spots.

In Beijing's northwestern Yanqing district, where the Alpine skiing events took place, and Zhangjiakou, which hosted the snowboarding, freestyle, and cross-country skiing events, state-of-the-art venues have become key attractions for winter sports enthusiasts.

Throw in the Beijing-Zhangjiakou high-speed railway, which has reduced travel between the two cities to an hour, and visitors are able to enjoy the best of both worlds.

Olympic zone

Those seeking a professional ski experience can make the National Alpine Skiing Center in Yanqing's Olympic zone their first stop. The center has officially opened Ruixue Avenue, its signature downhill course, for the 2024-25 ski season.

Running nearly 2,200 meters, with a maximum gradient of 64 percent, the course is located in the mid-to-upper section of the center and was used for the downhill event during the Olympics. It's an ideal fit for advanced and professional skiers in search of a challenging run. With this latest addition, the center now has 10 ski runs covering all levels, including beginner-friendly areas, and trails of intermediate to expert difficulty.

To enhance the visitor experience, the Olympic zone has introduced the Ski Association of Japan training and certification system, which provides professional training and exams to skiers of all levels.

In addition, the zone has developed a commercial street and a winter-themed town with dining, accommodation, entertainment, and shopping options.

Just 40 minutes' drive away, the Badaling Great Wall is a Yanqing must-see, especially now that the scenic area administration has developed winter tours, including night hikes on the wall, with gourmet food, creative cultural gifts, professional photography services, intangible cultural heritage experiences available, as well as a stage show that takes visitors back to the ancient stories behind the wall.

Another 40-minute drive away from Badaling, the annual Longqing Gorge Ice Lantern Festival is every bit as exciting at night as the Great Wall. The hundreds of figures carved from snow and bathed in colorful lights, as well as the thousands of ice lanterns in various shapes and sizes, create a fantasy land amid stunning natural rock formations at the geological park. This year's event will last until late February, and at 500,000 square meters, is much larger than in previous years. Enjoyable sports, like a tug-of-war, as well as gourmet food and folk performances, will be staged for visitors to experience winter's charm.

For more of a Yanqing lifestyle vibe, visitors can continue on to the Yeyahu National Wetland Park where 10 winter fun activities are available, including snowmobiles, as well as hotpot in tents and making tea by the fire.

Downtown appeal

Beijing's numerous ancient architectural landmarks, from the Palace Museum and the Summer Palace to the Drum and Bell towers, have a way of glowing in cold, crisp air and the delicate beauty of snow. Apart from being popular with photographers, several sites have tapped into winter resources that add to their charm.

After experiencing more than 600 years of history at the Palace Museum in the center of Beijing, and soaking up the traditional architecture and culture behind it, visitors can enjoy nearby Beihai Park, which is immediately northwest of the museum. It dates back to the Liao Dynasty (916-1125) and covers an area of some 680,000 square meters, a good part of which is water. Originally a royal pleasure garden and place of sacrificial rituals, the park offers enjoyable activities on its frozen expanses.

For a grander and more expansive journey



The Snow Ruyi ski resort is one of the new additions in the burgeoning ice-and-snow industry in Chongli district, Zhangjiakou, Hebei province. YANG WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY



Top: A child plays on the Badaling Great Wall in Beijing after a snowfall in 2023. GREG BAKER / AFP



Above: The National Alpine Skiing Center in Yanqing draws a crowd of skiers. SONG YU / FOR CHINA DAILY

If you go

Beijing: Yanqing district is easily reachable by high-speed rail or bus from central Beijing. The cuisine is uncomplicated yet rich in flavor, highlighting natural, locally sourced ingredients.

Hebei: Chongli district in Zhangjiakou is likewise accessible by high-speed train from Beijing, with the journey lasting approximately an hour. Alternatively, visitors can opt to fly to Zhangjiakou, which boasts connections to major cities across the country.

through imperial history and nature, the Summer Palace is a safe bet for travelers with high expectations. In the winter, Kunming Lake, which is about four times the size of Beihai, turns into a playground for people to stroll around when it freezes over. The fun is complemented by the picturesque beauty of the royal garden, where imposing pavilions and bridges blend seamlessly with the snowy landscape in a captivating fusion of history and nature.

For those seeking more Olympics-oriented experiences, the Olympic Forest Park, 15 kilometers from the Summer Palace, offers stunning views of the ingenious National Stadium and the National Aquatics Center, both of which were built for the 2008 Summer Olympics.

Impressive venue

The effort of pulling off the Winter Olympics across scattered sites can best be appreciated by taking the high-speed train to Zhangjiakou.

Those wanting to focus on venues and immerse themselves in the Olympic atmosphere should head straight for Taizicheng Railway Station. To get the big picture of how Chongli district evolved into an international ski hot spot, the exhibition hall in Taizicheng resort, the core area of the Olympic venue, provides an excellent introduction. It chronicles preparations for the Winter Olympics through interactive exhibits.

A few minutes drive away, the National Ski Jumping Center, or Snow Ruyi, is one of Chongli's highlights. It was the venue for the ski jumping and Nordic combined (a sport that comprises ski jumping and cross-country skiing disciplines) events. There, visitors can ride the specially designed inclined elevator, one of the fastest of its kind in the world, which will take them up more than 250 meters in two minutes, to get stunning panoramic views of the area.

At nearby Snow Ruyi, a massive resort with 32 kilometers of ski trails over 135 hectares, new experiences like snow trekking and dog sledding with Alaskan huskies, add a delightful twist to the winter experience.

Visitors should be sure not to miss the Ice Jade Ring, a C-shaped skywalk with breathtaking views of major Olympic buildings, including the National Ski Jumping Center and the National Cross-Country Skiing Center, as well as of the area's natural beauty.

The district also boasts top ski resorts that have proved big magnets alluring skiers from neighboring areas, especially Beijing. The Wanlong, Thaiwoo and Genting sites have stood out for their superb facilities, such as an impressive range of runs that are friendly to beginners while giving veteran skiers the thrill of challenges.

Northeast: Skiing, pandas, hot springs, and more await

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This year, the resort is offering a favorably priced one-card deal that gives access to ski trails on its three mountains, as well as to Alpine and cross-country ski experiences. At the same time, apres-ski experiences have been introduced in collaboration with well-known coffee and music bar brands. It's also possible to have a dip in hot springs after an exhausting day on the slopes.

Be sure to visit the giant panda pavilion, currently the northernmost and coldest of its kind in China. Two giant pandas were moved there in 2016 and have since fully adapted to the climate.

For those who want to relive a fairy tale, Xuexiang, located less than a two-hour drive away, exudes an enchanting dreamlike atmosphere. Known for its thick, pristine snow which gives roofs and fences mushroom-like wintry caps, the site is suited to photography and leisurely exploration. The scenic spot in the depths of the Changbai Mountain is offering bonfire parties at which visitors can sample local treats and enjoy folk customs. Snow-related activities like sledding, skiing, snowmobiling, and horse-drawn sleigh rides are also on offer.

In addition to superb powder snow, Jilin province to the south of Heilongjiang has top-tier hotels, hot springs, and abundant entertainment. It's an ideal place to chill — literally. Many of its well-equipped resorts, such as the Changbai Mountain Wanda International Resort in Fusong county, Baishan, have arranged shooting club experiences. Local authorities have also made a feature of the rime ice that drapes trees in the area, and developed themed sightseeing tours to islands, mountains and along rivers.

Changbai Mountain in the southeast of the province is at the front and center of premium winter offerings, thanks to a volcanic terrain and diversity of activities, ranging from forest hiking, camping, fishing, cross-country motorcycling, snow cabin hotpot and winter travel photography. Climbing the northern slope to enjoy the snowy scenery of Tianchi Lake is a top choice for photography and adventure enthusiasts. There are volcanic hot springs, where visitors can enjoy a therapeutic soak.

About 600 kilometers from Changbai Mountain, Chagan Lake in Songyuan city is offering a winter fishing and hunting experience, where visitors can enjoy folk charm. Ice and snow runs and snow volleyball are also available.



Chagan Lake in Jilin province hosts a variety of folk performances. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

To get a good measure of the beauty of rime, it's definitely worth visiting Wusong Island in the Songhua River to the north of Jilin city. The island is renowned for its spectacular rime-covered landscapes. This year, the island has added a cultural twist in the form of galas combining folk customs with modern artistic performances to enable visitors to enjoy the natural wonder in a lively rural cultural atmosphere.

Liaoning is the southernmost province in Northeast China, and enjoys a milder climate. Its coastal location has endowed it with breathtaking winter seascapes and an abundance of seafood. Dalian is considered a jewel in the crown for its long coastline and hundreds of islands.

A visit to Dalian is not complete without experiencing the sea. During periods of sustained low temperatures, sea ice can be seen at Xiajiahezi beach, where the red-and-white lighthouse and yellow sands set against the vast expanse of white sea ice create a stunning visual contrast.

A 25-kilometer drive to Donggang presents the perfect spot for viewing the sea, with flocks of seagulls soaring overhead, that could be straight out of a movie. The seawater freezes instantly on the railings of the wooden seaside boardwalk forming thick layers of icicles.

For those seeking a taste of Dalian, Anbo fair in Pulandian district is said to be the largest and most popular in the area. From seafood and traditional costumes to Spring Festival couplets and decorations, the market has something for everyone. Here, you can chat with the vendors, learn about local life and culture, and taste local cuisine.

Zeng Ziyang and Yu Hexin contributed to this story.

If you go

High-speed trains and flights are readily available from Beijing to the three provinces. The trip to Harbin takes two hours by plane or five hours by high-speed rail. Homestays and hotels can be found in all the major cities. Be sure to bundle up. Bring down jackets, scarves and gloves to deal with the extreme cold. Also, be sure to try regional specialties, such as smoky sausage, and crispy fried pork in a sweet-and-sour sauce.



The Great Wall runs like a winding dragon atop snowcapped peaks. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY