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CHINA DAILY

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Foreign trade keeps growing amid headwinds

Companies countering protectionism with innovation and expansion, say observers

By ZHONG NAN
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Continuous innovation, global expansion and industrial upgrade will empower Chinese companies to counter rising protectionism and geopolitical tensions this year, driving foreign trade growth and reinforcing China's global competitiveness, said market observers and exporters.

Despite challenges, China's foreign trade remains resilient, adapting to an increasingly complex global landscape shaped by the United States' new tariff policies, supply chain disruptions, and regulatory uncertainties in certain countries, they added.

Zhang Xiaotao, dean of the School of International Trade and Economics at the Central University of Finance and Economics in Beijing, said that as a major player in global trade, China has accumulated extensive experience in navigating international political and economic shifts over the past decade.

"Foreign trade companies have seen positive results from their strategic adjustments to tackle headwinds, including building new factories and overseas warehouses in countries such as Thailand and Hungary, as well as increasing investment in research and development," Zhang said.

Denis Depoux, global managing director at German management consultancy Roland Berger, said that China is now increasingly recognized for its high-value, technologically advanced products, including electric vehicles, solar cells and liquefied natural gas carriers, as it moves up the value chain to drive export growth.

Chinese companies exporting high-value products include Narwal, a manufacturer of household robots based in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. The company saw the number of its export markets expand from less than 10 in 2023 to over 30 last year, covering multiple regions and countries including North America, Europe, Australia and Japan.

"We will continue to invest in multiple fields such as 3D perception, artificial intelligence solutions and big data applications to win more orders in the global markets this year," said Zhang Junbin, the company's founder.

Li Lizhong, sales director at Zhejiang Yueli Electrical Co, a home appliances manufacturer based in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, said the company's personal care products, such as hair dryers and curling irons, previously targeted the US and Western Europe markets.

"However, our exports to these tra-

ditional markets have been impacted by the US tariff hike and the Russia-Ukraine conflict in recent years," he said, adding that the company has launched more intelligent, eco-friendly home appliances to expand into markets in Central and Eastern Europe, and economies participating in the Belt and Road Initiative.

Data from Ningbo Customs showed that Zhejiang Yueli's hair dryer exports reached 602 million yuan (\$82.4 million) in 2024, marking a 6.3 percent year-on-year increase, while the company's exports in this category to Central and Eastern Europe totaled 45.46 million yuan, up 39.2 percent compared with 2023.

Li said the increasing penetration of the internet in Central and Eastern Europe has allowed e-commerce to expand at a remarkable pace in countries such as Poland and Romania. The company's cross-border e-commerce exports emerged as a key growth driver in the region, he added.

As China continued to enhance its high-value export portfolio and deepen its market presence in emerging economies, the nation's foreign trade rose 5 percent year-on-year to reach a record high of 43.85 trillion yuan in 2024, according to the General Administration of Customs.

Meanwhile, China's mechanical and electrical product exports grew 8.7 percent year-on-year, accounting for 59.4 percent of the country's total exports. Last year, the country's EV exports rose 13.1 percent compared with 2023, while its 3D printer exports increased 32.8 percent and industrial robot exports surged 45.2 percent.

Lan Qingxin, a professor at the School of International Trade and Economics of the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said the restructuring of global supply chains and protectionist moves in certain countries have pushed Chinese companies to adapt and leverage their strong manufacturing and technological capabilities.

By responding innovatively to these changes, the companies can meet market needs in other emerging economies, thereby enhancing their competitiveness and expanding their global presence, said Lan.

A Chinese business delegation, organized by the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, departed on Monday for Kazakhstan to explore new opportunities for economic and trade exchanges.

During the four-day trip, the delegation, comprising representatives of more than 30 Chinese companies across industries such as petrochemicals and machinery manufacturing, hopes to sign several cooperation agreements and foster mutually beneficial outcomes.

On the way home



People walk with their belongings along Al-Rashid street between Gaza city and Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza Strip on Monday as displaced Palestinians continued to return home amid a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas. EYAD BABA / AFP See story, page 7

Tesla's new Shanghai Megafactory starts production

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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US electric vehicle maker Tesla's continued expansion in China has reflected multinational companies' confidence in the Chinese market, which can be attributed to the rapid development of the country's green economy and the government's efforts to further improve the business environment, said officials and industry experts.

Their comments came on Tuesday, when Tesla's new Megafactory in Shanghai's Lin-gang Special Area went into operation, with the factory's first Megapack battery system rolling off the production line.

The Megapack, an advanced battery system designed for large-scale energy projects, can store more than 3,900 kilowatt-hours of electricity in a single unit, enough capacity to power a Tesla Model 3 rear-wheel drive version

for 39,000 kilometers of driving. Covering about 200,000 square meters, the new energy storage project involved a total investment of 1.45 billion yuan (\$200 million). Up to 10,000 Megapack storage units are scheduled to be produced there annually.

Michael Snyder, Tesla's vice-president of energy and charging, said at the commissioning ceremony on Tuesday that the new project is aimed to coordinate the development of EVs and energy products. This is to serve the company's vision of accelerating the world's transition toward renewable energy.

The energy storage project in Lin-gang will ramp up its production capacity this quarter to help Tesla tap into more markets, said Snyder.

According to Chen Haisheng, chairman of the China Energy Storage Alliance, the targeted output of new-type energy storage, such as electrochemical energy storage

and hydrogen storage, will top over 3 trillion yuan by the end of 2025. The cumulative installed capacity of new energy storage is estimated to reach 100 million kilowatts by the end of this year.

New types of energy storage have become new economic drivers in many places in China, as demonstrated by local governments' industrial planning not only for this year but also for 2027 and even 2030, said Chen.

As Tesla's first energy storage Megafactory outside the United States, the new Lin-gang plant only took nine months from ground-breaking, which took place in May 2024, to its official operation. This was three months faster than when Tesla's EV gigafactory in Lin-gang became operational in January 2020.

Tesla's gigafactory for EV production in Lin-gang, which is also the first plant of its kind that the US EV maker has built overseas, was the largest foreign-invested manu-

facturing project in Shanghai, with a total investment of 50 billion yuan.

Tesla announced on Jan 7 that the Lin-gang gigafactory has turned out over 3 million EVs over the past five years, among which 1 million were sold to overseas markets. Up to 916,000 EVs were produced in the Lin-gang factory last year, accounting for half of the cars that Tesla delivered across the world.

"Tesla's energy storage project marks the second cooperation with Lin-gang, showing the company's recognition of Lin-gang's business environment," said Lu Yu, head of high-tech industry and innovation department of the Lin-gang Special Area Administration.

Lin-gang Special Area, which is part of the China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone, has actively participated in the development of Tesla's energy storage project.

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XINJIANG'S FUR SKIERS FIND FAME IN ASIAN WINTER GAMES

Youths from villages in Altay Mountains build on traditional skills to excel

By CUI JIA in Altay, Xinjiang

Azamat Adalbek is a skilled snowboarder. However, the 16-year-old from Altay prefecture in Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region knows he still has a long way to go before he becomes a fur skiing pro like his father and uncle and had been looking forward to owning a pair of fur skis tailor-made for him by his father.

The teenager's wish was fulfilled as he returned home to Meilifeng village at the foot of the Altay Mountains in January for his school's winter break. Heavy snowfall during the long winter, which often lasts from late October to early April, had created a fairytale-like atmosphere in the village of herdsmen from the Kazak ethnic group.

Azamat's father Adalbek



Halengbek welcomed his son with a pat on the back and announced he had a surprise for him. As Azamat followed his father into the living room, his face lit up with pleasure when he spotted a pair of fur skis made of pinewood taking shape.

"The length of the skis has to match the user's height," said the 46-year-old as he put the tails of skis on the floor and held them up vertically next to Azamat to make the comparison. "See, they are just perfect for Azamat. It's about time my son owned a pair of fur skis of his own and started to learn to master them."

See Fur skiing, page 2

New Trump tariffs are ill-conceived

Keeping his campaign promise, United States President Donald Trump unleashed his tariff agenda almost immediately after assuming office. For imports from China, an extra 10 percent tariff was introduced on top of the existing ones, and the de minimis exemption for Chinese products was revoked, only to be restored. However, these new measures are neither well-founded, nor will they prove to be any good for the US.

One reason for Trump to raise tariffs — one that may find some support from economics theory — is that tariffs could bring

WORLD WATCH
By Yao Yang

manufacturing back to the US. Trump likes to liken himself to the 25th US president William McKinley, who imposed high tariffs to protect domestic industry and took land from foreign countries. In the second half of the 19th century when McKinley lived, the US was a "developing" country that struggled to catch up with the industrial powers in Europe, so the so-called infant industry theory would have applied.

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Food fest



Overseas students of Anhui Polytechnic University learn how to make yuanxiao, or rice glue balls, at a neighborhood in Wuhu, East China's Anhui province, on Monday, to celebrate the Lantern Festival which falls on Wednesday and marks the end of Spring Festival.

WANG YUSHI / FOR CHINA DAILY

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Ski patrol member Zangar Kalimuhan carries his fur skis at Jikepulin Ski Resort in Hemu on Jan 16.



Azamat Adalbek's uncle Milibek Halengbek, 47, carries the pinewood and horsehide needed to make the fur skis on Jan 15.

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Adalbek explained that it would take another week before the curves on the tips of the skis made of pine-wood, which is tough yet lightweight and has good elasticity, can be permanently fixed. Next he will line the outer side of the skis with six to 10 strips of horsehide from the animal's lower legs, as the coat grows in the same direction and the hair is short and brittle.

When going downhill, the fur sticks to the ski, increasing the sliding speed. When going uphill, it goes against the board, increasing friction and providing an anti-slip function. The skier uses one birch-wood snow stick to maintain balance and maneuver.

"The fur skis embody the wisdom of our ancestors. And making them is not only a traditional craft, but also an important part of the local culture. It reflects the wisdom of living in harmony with nature, and is a manifestation of regional cultural diversity," Adalbek said.

In 2005, cave paintings depicting Altay people hunting on skis with poles were discovered in the Dundebulak rock art complex. Archaeologists estimate that the paintings could be more than 10,000 years old. Since then, Altay has been recognized by many as one of the birthplaces of skiing as we know it today.

Skiing is still an essential skill that the villagers master. Every household has fur skis, said Adalbek, who recently lent his fur skis to a friend who was trying to find his missing horses in the woods.

Azamat said he began snowboarding when he was 14 because he thought it was cool, but he still finds fur skiing, which not many people can master, even more exciting.

"I've decided to spend time this winter learning how to use fur skis from my father and uncle who lives next door," Azamat said. "I will upload videos of me on my own fur skis on social media, so that more people get to know about the cultural heritage that we are so proud of."

Mastering the sliding technique with fur skis and the wooden pole is actually more difficult than skiing with modern skis, said Azamat, who asked his father to give him a lesson the very next day.

The next morning, the pair set off early from home on horseback carrying fur skis borrowed from Azamat's uncle. The horses were covered with frost as temperatures dropped to more than -30 C. The animals had to tread gently in the snow, which was deep enough to cover their whole legs.

"When the snow gets deeper and even the horses are unable to walk in it, fur skis are the only means of transport to get around," Adalbek said.

Father and son made their way up a small hill where children from the village had already started to practice snowboarding. Adalbek gave Azamat some tips as they stood on top of the hill on how to slide down gracefully. Unsurprisingly, Azamat lost his balance and landed in an undignified heap as he tried to make his way down.

"He has a long way to go before he can become a fur ski pro who can take part in competitions," Adalbek said with a laugh. To preserve and promote Altay's heritage of fur skis, a series of races are held in the prefecture every winter.

The race courses involve both climbing uphill and going downhill. The skill sets needed to successfully complete such courses include endurance, technical climbing skills, and precise skiing ability, similar to the skills of ski mountaineering, which is a blend of

FUR SKIING: A HERITAGE REBORN ON SNOWY SLOPES



Azamat Adalbek (left) and his father, Adalbek Halengbek ride horses and carry fur skis on the snow in a village in the Altay prefecture in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region on Jan 15. PHOTOS BY WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY



Buluer (right) from Altay transitions from skiing to mountaineering in the ski mountaineering sprint preliminary round during the Asian Winter Games in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, on Sunday.

alpine skiing and mountain climbing.

The sport, which has been included in the 2026 Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics, made its official debut at the 9th Asian Winter Games in Harbin on Sunday.

Buluer from Hemu village near Meilifeng said skiing on fur skis since childhood had greatly helped him

to excel in ski mountaineering.

The 19-year-old from the Mongolian ethnic group has stood out as one of the most talented skiers on China's ski mountaineering men's team, winning the ski mountaineering men's sprint at the Games on Sunday. He will also take part in the mixed-team relay on Wednesday and is likely to win another gold.



Azamat Adalbek (right) sets out for a fur ski training session with his father, Adalbek Halengbek.



Azamat Adalbek uses fur skis to traverse the snowy plain on Jan 15.

“

The fur skis embody the wisdom of our ancestors. And making them is not only a traditional craft, but also an important part of the local culture. It reflects the wisdom of living in harmony with nature, and is a manifestation of regional cultural diversity.”

Adalbek Halengbek, villager in Altay, Xinjiang

Team China enjoys an upper hand in ski mountaineering in Asia, and that was evident when it swept all medals in the ski mountaineering sprint events on Sunday. However, a gap still exists between China and European powerhouses, Buluer said. "The sport is yet to be well known to all. I hope to achieve better results to contribute to its promotion to attract more people to the sport in China."

Buluer said he has been skiing on fur skis since he was six. "I would go out on fur skis on the mountains all day with my friends when I was a child. We would skip lunch and breaks because we enjoyed it so much."

In December 2021, Xinjiang formed a ski mountaineering team, and at the age of 16, Buluer became one of the first members to join the team after his fur skiing talent was spotted by scouts.

"I hope my performance can encourage more young people from the Kazak and Mongolian ethnic groups from the villages in the Altay Mountains to take on the sport, because we naturally have the grit and passion for mountain life and sports," Buluer said. "But the more places I travel to for competitions, the more I feel that the mountains and snow in my home are the best."

Zangar Kalimuhan, also from Hemu, said Buluer is a household name in the village because he is almost unbeatable in races on fur skis. "He is so fast that the one in second place wouldn't even be able to see him let alone catch up with him. And after winning gold at the Winter Asian Games, he is getting close to becoming a winter Olympics champion."

Zangar from the Kazak ethnic group is a ski patrol at Jikepulin Ski Resort in Hemu, which opens to local people for free. Winter sports have boomed in Altay in recent years as several high-standard ski resorts have been built in the prefecture, which boasts high mountainous terrain, heavy snowfall, excellent snow quality, and low winds.

The 25-year-old sometimes takes his fur skis out for practice on the modern courses in the resort, which can also help to let more people know about fur skis. "People are always curious about my skis every time I take them out. I just tell them they are the ancestors of all skis," Zangar said with pride.

With local people's determination to pass down the heritage of fur skis, and having a modern ski resort at their doorstep, Zangar said he believed that more young people from nearby villages will get the chance to become top athletes in winter sports like Buluer and shine on the international stage.

"From local fur skis champion to Winter Asian Games gold medalist, Buluer is a true inspiration for us," Zangar said.



Left: Azamat Adalbek's mother, Batirna Mawken (second from left), prepares dinner for the family on Jan 14. Middle: Milibek Halengbek uses his handmade fur skis to walk through the snow on Jan 15.



Right: Adalbek Halengbek showcases the pinewood heated to shape the fur skis in his house. PHOTOS BY WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

Ne Zha collectibles catch movie's coattails

Derivative products represent identity and a form of social currency for young people, expert says

By ZOU SHUO in Changsha and QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou

What comes after the blockbuster success of a Chinese animation? Toys and other collectible products, of course.

Sales of character-themed products related to the movie *Ne Zha 2*, the first film to gross more than \$1 billion in a single market globally, have been red hot. From toys and apparel to collectible cards, demand for Ne Zha-themed promotional products is soaring, as cities across the country compete for recognition as the mythical hero's birthplace.

In Xiangtan, Hunan province, Hunan Sunny and Sandy Toy Manufacturing Co — the exclusive authorized manufacturer of 3D plastic food-related toys based on the film — is operating at full capacity to meet a tidal wave of demand.

Yang Zhenlin, assistant to the company's chairman, said the first batch of Ne Zha-themed "blind box" toys supplied to a chain of snack stores sold out before Spring Festival, which fell on Jan 29. With a blind box, you can't see which toy figure is inside until you open it, so it's a fun surprise.

The company has produced toys based on six main characters in the film, that sell for 11.5 yuan (\$1.57) each, Yang said. More than 450,000 sets of Ne Zha-themed toys had been sold as of Monday through livestreams on Douyin, with revenue reaching 30 million yuan. That ranks first on the platform's board game and collectibles category, he said.

The company is also negotiating to get the intellectual property rights for two more characters from the film and intends to start producing those toys as well, he said.

"We expected that the toys would be popular based on the success of the first movie of the franchise, but the popularity of *Ne Zha 2* has far exceeded our expectations," Yang



Customers browse through *Ne Zha 2* merchandise on Monday in a toy store in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. After the movie became the first film to gross more than \$1 billion in a single market globally, sales of related collaborative products have skyrocketed. LONG WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

said. "We think it will be even more popular in the coming months, with sales revenue of related products reaching 200 million yuan for the year."

The movie is expected to be a large-scale hit in overseas markets as well, so the company is preparing to sell the toys abroad, including in Southeast Asia, Japan, North America and Europe.

Sales of other products, such as limited-edition cards and badges, have also skyrocketed since the movie's release.

Chen Qi, general manager of Guangdong Henglitai Crafts Co in Dongguan, Guangdong province, which produces Ne Zha-themed cards, refrigerator magnets and badges, said the company made over 300,000 sets of such products

in early January, and all have sold out. Workers are racing to produce more merchandise for the movie to meet public demand, he said.

"The success of *Ne Zha 2* shows that Chinese animation can compete with that of the Japanese and American giants," Chen said.

Li Baochuan, an expert in cartoon history at Hangzhou Normal University, said that derivative products are more than just merchandise. For the younger generation of consumers, they represent identity and a form of social currency.

The remarkable sales success of the *Ne Zha 2* products has also sent a positive signal to the industry, he said.

Meanwhile, several cities across China are now vying for the title of Ne Zha's birthplace, capitalizing on the film's success to boost tourism.

The playful controversy has become a spectacle in itself, with some cities claiming to have "proof" of the character's origins.

On Feb 5, the first working day after the Spring Festival holiday, tourism and culture authorities in Tianjin municipality released a video claiming that Ne Zha was born in the city and went to primary school there.

The next day, Anhui authorities said that images of Ne Zha could be found all over the province's Guzhen county, with many sculptures and wall paintings of him. Shortly thereafter, authorities in Yibin, Sichuan province, announced that Ne Zha was born in its Nanguang township, and it released a list of cultural sites and landmarks inspired by the character. Song Yangyang, deputy dean of

the Institute for Creative Industries Technology at Renmin University of China, said the logic behind local governments competing for cultural ownership of Ne Zha is easy to understand: It generates a buzz, enhances the city's reputation and ultimately attracts tourists.

But he also said that he is not optimistic about the competition for so-called hometowns or birthplaces. Instead of vying for the title of hometown, he suggested focusing on adding genuine value through such things as tourism services, cuisine or other tangible products beyond toys.

Zhu Youfang contributed to this story.

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Long March 8A rocket debuts

By ZHAO LEI
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China conducted the debut flight of its Long March 8A carrier rocket on Tuesday afternoon, transporting a group of satellites to space, according to China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp.

The space industry conglomerate said in a news release that the rocket blasted off at 5:30 pm from the Wenchang Space Launch Site, a coastal spaceport in Hainan province, and soon placed the payloads — the second group of low-orbit satellites in China's State-owned internet network — into their preset orbit.

The launch marked the 559th flight mission of the Long March carrier rocket series.

After the mission, Long March 8A has become the 18th operating member in the Long March family, the pillar of China's space programs.

Designed and built by the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology, a subsidiary of China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, the Long March 8A is 50.5 meters tall, and has a liftoff weight of 371 metric tons and a liftoff thrust of about 480 tons.

The model is mainly tasked with deploying satellites to sun-synchronous orbits, and is capable of transporting payloads weighing as much as 7 tons to a typical sun-synchronous orbit with an altitude of 700 kilometers.

Song Zhengyu, a senior rocket scientist at the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology who led the rocket model's design work, said on Tuesday that the new type is based on the Long March 8 configuration, with the same designs for the first core stage and side boosters.

The newly developed parts on the Long March 8A are its second core stage and payload fairing, he said, adding that it can use two types of payload fairing, with a diameter of 4.2 meters and of 5.2 meters, which means it has more space for satellites.

The new rocket model also incorporates several technical improvements, including a modified engine with stronger thrust, better servo devices and an optimized top structure with lighter weight, according to Song.

The Long March 8 model was first launched in December 2020 from the Wenchang Space Launch Site. So far, it has carried out three flight missions.

In the near future, the Long March 8A will be used to deploy large numbers of satellites for China's massive space-based internet networks, Song said, adding that all of its launches will take place at the Wenchang Space Launch Site and the Hainan International Commercial Aerospace Launch Center, which is also located in Wenchang.

China now has multiple internet satellite networks under construction, but keeps low-key about those projects.

Tariff: Rule change hurts US companies

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The US was a latecomer and tariff protection could help the country quickly build up its own production capacities. However, the US economy is in a very different state today.

The US became an industrial powerhouse and a leader in technological progress a long time ago. Today, the growth of the US economy almost totally depends on the productivity growth of its high-tech industries. While some competitors do exist elsewhere, the seven US tech giants — Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Meta Platforms, Microsoft, Nvidia and Tesla — dominate the world. Their markets are global and do not need protection of tariffs. Other US high-tech companies, for example those in the pharmaceutical sector, do face international competition. These heavily rely on imported goods to make their final products. High tariffs hurt instead of protecting them.

The medium- and low-range industries have long been hollowed out in the US. The most serious challenge for the country in rebuilding those industries is not the competition from other countries, but the lack of proper human capital. Instead of producing engineers for manufacturing companies, elite universities are now preparing their graduates for Wall Street, Silicon Valley and the pharmaceutical triangle. In addition, financiers from Wall Street have no appetite for investing in those industries. With money pouring in from all over the world, Wall Street managers are chasing projects that promise high and often risky returns. Ordinary manufacturing companies are not their targets; only high-tech companies are.

Tariffs are not able to compensate for the lack of engineers and the bias of the financial sector. This was evident from Trump's first round of tariffs. On the surface, direct Sino-US trade dropped substantially. However, if counted by the rules of origin, China's exports to the US

increased. This is because Chinese companies moved to other countries and continued to export to the US from there. The Joe Biden administration realized this and tried to impose high tariffs on electric vehicles and batteries imported from countries that received large investments from China. However, due to a lack of a broad manufacturing base in the domestic economy, those high tariffs have not helped produce world-class companies. No US company ranks among the top 10 battery producers in the world.

Rationale behind tariffs

Using tariffs to balance trade is a falsely founded idea. The US' trade deficit with China has declined since 2018, but its total deficit in goods trade has increased by 50 percent from 2017 to reach \$1.21 trillion in 2024. Trade imbalances are a matter of multilateral trade and cannot be corrected by bilateral tariffs.

Another rationale is to use tariffs to raise revenue for the federal budget. One of Trump's campaign promises was cutting taxes. This will inevitably increase government deficits if he does not find ways to raise revenue or cut spending. While Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency may cut some spending, tariffs will only help marginally. Even if a 10 percent tariff were imposed on all imports from other countries, the US federal government would only get an extra revenue of \$330 billion, which is peanuts compared with the federal debt of \$36 trillion.

The last reason is to use the tariffs to extract concessions. After Canada and Mexico promised to tighten border control, Trump postponed the 25 percent tariffs on those two countries. Likewise, the new China tariffs were linked withentanyl. But China and the US are already cooperating to tighten cross-border flows ofentanyl. It is bewildering why tariffs were still hiked.

This leaves only one plausible explanation — Trump did not think through the whole issue and

announced the tariffs in a spontaneous manner. His quick turn on Canada and Mexico indicates this. Another example was the turn on the de minimis exemption for Chinese imports. The de minimis policy exempts tariffs and customs report for cross-border purchases under \$800. Revoking de minimis will not just hurt platform companies and small manufacturers in China, but will also hurt US companies such as Amazon and Walmart, and more importantly, millions of ordinary US citizens would be affected. This was probably why Trump reverted his de minimis decision in less than a week after announcing it.

Fighting inflation was one of Trump's campaign promises, but tariffs will only make inflation worse. High inflation under the Biden administration was one of the key factors that sent Trump back to the White House. Trump may not care about how angry the Democrats are about his policies, but he needs to care about the reaction of his political base.

If the Trump administration is serious about bringing manufacturing jobs back to the US and reducing its trade deficit, its most sensible policy is to allow Chinese companies to invest in the country. China's industrial structure is complementary to that of the US — the US is strong in high-tech industries, and China is strong in medium-range industries.

In the past, China benefited from foreign investment and technologies to develop its manufacturing sector; today, with one-third of the world's manufacturing capacity, China is ready to contribute to the industrial development in other countries, including the US. Trump is good at cutting deals, but he may soon realize that welcoming Chinese investment is a much better deal than imposing tariffs on Chinese exports.

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Tesla: Shanghai eyes more foreign-invested projects

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It helps with the construction plans and assists in various steps, including obtaining land use and construction permits.

This made it possible for the plant to become operational in just nine months, said Lu.

High-level opening-up is the core competitiveness of Lin-gang, Chen Jinshan, director of the Lin-gang Special Area Administration, said during a business environment improvement conference on Friday.

Lin-gang will conduct greater stress tests in terms of further opening-up so that government services can be more efficient, the market mechanism can be further completed and the system of international rules can be more deeply rooted. All of this will serve companies' more rapid development, he said.

Lin-gang's moves reflect the continued efforts of Shanghai. While releasing the business environment improvement action plan 8.0 on Feb 5, the municipal government stressed that more foreign-invested projects should be introduced to the city at a faster pace.

A plan to stabilize foreign investment was released during a State Council executive meeting on Monday. China will fully implement its commitment to remove all market access restrictions for foreign investors in the manufacturing sector and expand the list of sectors encouraging foreign investment, according to the plan.

A total of 59,080 new foreign-invested companies were established across China last year, an increase of 9.9 percent year-on-year, according to the Ministry of Commerce.



Best paw forward

Old English Sheepdogs compete on Monday during the 149th Annual Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show at Javits Center in New York, the United States. This show is one of the oldest of its kind.

ANDRES KUDACKI / GETTY IMAGES

CHINA

Report details onslaught of cyberattacks

North American, Asian hackers mainly target govt institutions, education sector

By JIANG CHENGLONG
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More than 1,300 advanced persistent cyberattacks targeting China were detected last year, with more than half aimed at the government institutions and the education sector, according to a newly released research report.

Domestically developed software systems in China have become key targets, the 2024 Advanced Persistent Threat Report published by Chinese cybersecurity firm 360 said.

The findings follow extensive cyberattacks on Chinese artificial intelligence startup DeepSeek at the end of January. The internet protocol addresses involved were all traced to the United States, according to the report.

The report said cyberspace has become a critical battleground in regional conflicts, with global advanced persistent threat organizations maintaining high levels of activity.

An advanced persistent threat is a prolonged, targeted cyberattack, often orchestrated by skilled hackers, typically state-sponsored, aiming to infiltrate and maintain access to a network for espionage or data theft.

China has long been a primary target for advanced persistent threat organizations, the report said. More than 1,300 attacks targeting China were recorded last year, with the attacking organizations primarily originating from South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia and North America.

The attacks targeted 14 key industries in China, with government institutions accounting for 33 percent and the education sector 20 percent. Other heavily targeted sectors included scientific research, national defense and military industries, and transportation.

"Government institutions and educational units have always been primary targets for advanced persistent threat groups," said Bian Liang, a cybersecurity expert at 360.

Attackers target diplomatic and overseas embassy institutions to steal information on the latest diplomatic strategies and positions on major international issues, Bian said, helping the political forces behind them gain an advantage in geopolitical conflicts.

"In the education sector, most of the affected universities have backgrounds in aviation and military industries or undertake related national research projects, meaning the attackers are essentially targeting China's national defense and technological development," he said.

Meanwhile, cyberattacks targeting national defense and military-related objectives primarily focus on aviation, aerospace, shipbuilding and weapons industries, the report said.

"These cyberattacks are not only capable of espionage to gather military intelligence and disrupt enemy network communications, but they can also control military facilities, paralyze enemy command and control systems, and forge and transmit false commands," Bian said.

Domestically developed software systems in China have become major targets as more Chinese institutions replace foreign products with domestic alternatives, the report said.

Bian warned that domestically developed software has a broad customer base among Chinese enterprises and institutions, meaning penetration of a successful supply chain by an advanced persistent threat organization could have severe consequences.

In late January, DeepSeek, whose AI chatbot has been described as a challenger to ChatGPT, said on its website that its AI model services had been subjected to large-scale malicious attacks. Many users were prevented from logging in, registering or engaging in conversations.

A report by China Media Group cited Wang Hui, a cybersecurity expert at Chinese security company Qi An Xin Group, who said the IP addresses involved in the DeepSeek attacks were located in the US.

Performers on parade



Left: People watch folk performance *taige* on a street in Changde ancient town in Miluo city, Hunan province, on Tuesday. In *taige*, also a national intangible cultural heritage, child artists stand on raised platforms while others carry them during a parade. Right: A young performer dressed as Ne Zha, a popular character in Chinese mythology, stands on a unicycle during the performance. GU PENGBO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Mainland-HK cooperation zones set to drive growth

By GANG WEN in Hong Kong
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Hong Kong officials and community leaders said a recent inspection led by central government official Xia Baolong of key cooperation zones involving Hong Kong has provided the city with clearer insights into advancing major projects and contributing to the nation's high-quality development.

From Friday to Monday, Xia, who heads the Hong Kong and Macao Work Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, visited significant cooperation platforms outlined in China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25).

His tour included the Hong Kong Park of the Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Cooperation Zone, the Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industry Cooperation Zone and the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

The Hetao Cooperation Zone is situated on the border between Shenzhen and Hong Kong, while

the other two cooperation zones are located in Shenzhen and Zhuhai, both in Guangdong province.

Xia also visited Yantian Port in Shenzhen to examine the collaboration among ports within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

During his inspection, Xia led a discussion in Qianhai and received briefings from Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government officials on the city's economic and financial plans.

Speaking to the media before the Executive Council meeting on Tuesday, acting Hong Kong Chief Executive Eric Chan Kwok-ki said Xia provided clear guidance on how the city could facilitate the nation's development in economic and financial sectors. Chan said the visit was instrumental in helping the city better leverage major projects such as the Hetao Cooperation Zone and the Northern Metropolis.

He added that discussions with Xia offered valuable insight into the central government's perspectives, improving cooperation between Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland.

Chan pledged that Hong Kong

would continue to capitalize on its comparative advantages and the cooperation platforms to drive high-level openness in the Greater Bay Area.

Hong Kong's Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry Sun Dong briefed Xia on the latest developments in the Hong Kong park of the Hetao Cooperation Zone. He emphasized that Hetao is a crucial platform for fostering new quality productive forces and is vital for the high-quality development of Hong Kong, the GBA and the country as a whole.

Sun urged the Hong Kong government to embrace policy innovation and advance reforms to attract more resources to the cooperation zone, aiming to establish it as a "bridgehead" for China's technological innovation.

Lau Siu-kai, a consultant with the Chinese Association of Hong Kong and Macao Studies, said the projects inspected by Xia are closely tied to Hong Kong and Macao's economic growth and industrial transformation, as well as the nation's broader reform and opening-up policy.

Lau said Xia's visit would encourage the governments of Hong Kong

and Macao to more effectively implement development plans related to the projects.

Tam Yiu-chung, a former Hong Kong delegate to the National People's Congress Standing Committee, said Xia's visit allows the central government to better understand the challenges Hong Kong faces in its development and identify ways to provide support.

Rock Chen Chung-nin, a Hong Kong lawmaker from the financial sector, said Xia's visit to Yantian Port underscores the central government's expectation that Hong Kong will strengthen its role as an international shipping hub.

Chen noted that Hong Kong should not solely focus on increasing shipping throughput, but also expand value-added services such as maritime registration, insurance, arbitration and financing. By leveraging its legal and financial strengths, the city can maximize its potential in these areas, he said.

He suggested that Hong Kong enhance the quality of its professional services and collaborate with high-value industries in the Greater Bay Area to better integrate with the global market.

Guidelines recommend 'no' digital exposure for toddlers

By WANG XIAOYU
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China's top health authority has urged that children under age 3 should not be exposed to any digital screens, as part of efforts to enhance early childhood development.

The National Health Commission released the recommendation on Saturday in a new guideline aimed at strengthening early childhood development services and fostering a birth-friendly society.

The guideline warns that digital devices, including televisions, computers, smartphones, tablets and game consoles, can reduce communication and interaction time with caregivers, hindering brain development, motor skills, language acquisition, cognition and social interaction of toddlers.

It also highlights an increased risk of myopia linked to prolonged exposure to digital screens.

"It is inappropriate to use screen-based devices as playmates for children," the guideline states. "Children age 3 and under should not be exposed to any form of screen-based products."

The first three years of life are critical for a child's overall develop-



Caregivers look after toddlers at a childcare comprehensive service center in Beijing's Chaoyang district on Dec 6.
CHEN JIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

ment, the commission said, emphasizing the importance of responsive caregiving and early learning opportunities.

To promote healthy development, the guideline recommends providing young children with a variety of toys and books, encouraging play with peers and exposing them to nature.

"Caregivers are encouraged to engage in parent-child activities using toys and read picture books together with their children," it said.

Interacting with peers can help young children develop communication, cooperation and conflict resolution skills, while exposure to different sensory stimuli in nature enhances perceptual abilities and environmental awareness, the commission noted.

The guideline also calls for rural and community healthcare centers, as well as county-level maternal and child care institutions, to assist families in creating a nurtur-

ing environment and improving parenting skills.

Ma Li, a mother of a 14-month-old girl in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, said she tries to keep her daughter away from television but occasionally uses a smartphone to keep her child still when trimming her nails or cutting her hair.

"I want to delay her screen usage as much as possible — at least until she turns 3," she said. "When she starts kindergarten, we may allow her to watch some cartoons so she can discuss them with her peers."

To combat rising myopia rates, the commission also recommends that children age 3 to 6 minimize screen exposure. For primary and middle school students, leisure screen time should be limited to 15 minutes at a time and no more than one hour per day.

When using electronic devices for learning, students should take a 10-minute break after 30 to 40 minutes of screen time, the commission said.

Brain-machine firm gets major investment

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai
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StairMed, a Shanghai-based medical technology company, announced on Monday that it has raised 350 million yuan (\$48 million) in Series B funding, marking the largest investment to date in China's implantable brain-machine interface industry.

The funds will be used to accelerate clinical trials, advance research and development of next-generation technologies and build a medical-grade microelectromechanical systems production facility to support commercialization efforts, the company said.

Founded in 2021, StairMed focuses on minimally invasive implantable brain-machine interface technology. Its founder, Zhao Zhengtuo, said the company's anticipated products could enable patients with conditions such as paralysis and aphasia to control mobile phones and computers using only their minds.

"By combining artificial intelligence and intelligent hardware, our products could allow these patients to control assistive devices such as embodied intelligent robots, humanoid robotic arms and intelligent wheelchairs, significantly improving their ability to live independently and participate in social life," Zhao said.

The technology could also help patients engage in online jobs such as programming, design, writing and e-sports, creating value for their families and society, he added.

The latest funding round was led by Qiming Venture Partners, OrbiMed and Lilly Asia Ventures,

with previous angel investor FountainBridge Capital also participating. StairMed had previously secured hundreds of millions of yuan in Series A funding and tens of millions of yuan in angel funding.

Like Elon Musk-backed Neuralink, StairMed is pursuing an invasive brain-machine interface approach, a path with high technical and application challenges. The company aims to address the needs of patients with severe communication disorders who lack effective treatment options.

StairMed has developed China's first high-throughput, implantable brain-machine interface system that meets medical device standards, designed to help paralyzed patients perform complex brain-controlled tasks.

"This year, we plan to launch China's first prospective clinical trial for the long-term implantation of an invasive brain-machine interface, involving two to three participants," Zhao said. "By 2026, we will conduct multi-center, large-scale clinical trials in China to pave the way for medical device registration and commercialization."

The company's ultra-flexible electrode is just 1 percent the size of a human hair, one-fifth the size of Neuralink's electrode and hundreds of times softer, reducing the likelihood of brain tissue detecting the implant as a foreign object. Additionally, StairMed has developed a neural electrode interface that prevents immune scarring, ensuring long-term stability in recording neural activity.

The implant itself is half the size of Neuralink's, with a diameter comparable to a 1-yuan coin and a thick-

ness similar to two stacked coins. The implantation procedure requires only a 3- to 5-millimeter hole in the skull, performed using minimally invasive neurosurgical puncture techniques to reduce surgical trauma and risks.

"This innovative design makes our product the smallest and least invasive implantable brain-machine interface system to date," Zhao said.

StairMed operates a 2,000-square-meter production facility in Shanghai's Pudong New Area that includes 300 square meters of clean rooms and a quality inspection laboratory. The company plans to complete China's first medical-grade brain-machine interface MEMS production base this year, enabling full-chain coverage from research and development to production and quality control.

"In the short term, StairMed will develop products for applications such as language function reconstruction, artificial hearing, facial paralysis repair and spinal cord injury repair, leveraging our core technologies, including ultra-flexible electrodes, miniaturized implants and minimally invasive techniques," Zhao said.

"In the long run, we are working on a next-generation brain-machine interface system with thousands of channels, aiming to revolutionize the efficiency of human-machine interaction," he said.

StairMed said it looks forward to collaborating with leaders in large language models and embodied intelligent robotics to explore new innovations in intelligent human-machine collaboration.

POLICY REVIEW

Path laid out for education reform

Nation aims to become leader in learning in coming decade

By WANG QINGYUN
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China has set out a concrete roadmap to build up its strength in education to support its modernization drive, with authorities issuing a sweeping plan guiding the country's educational reform for the coming decade.

The plan, jointly issued by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council and made public on Jan 19, puts forward a two-phased objective, calling for the establishment of a high-quality educational system by 2027.

Covering basic, higher and vocational education, the plan reiterates China's goal to turn itself into a leading country in education by 2035.

By that year, the country's basic education system, which mostly spans from pre-schools to senior high schools, should rank among the best in the world in terms of its universality and quality, the plan said.

The country should also form a society based around learning and significantly enhance the role of education in serving national strategies by then, according to the plan.

Schools are required to aim for the healthy and comprehensive development of students and speed up efforts to shore up weaknesses in physical, aesthetic and labor education.

It called on elementary and high schools to ensure students receive no less than two hours of physical activities per day, build up soccer courses and control obesity and myopia, adding that they should implement a program to boost children's hands-on abilities and their capacity to solve complicated problems.

Local authorities are also required to consolidate the results of a national campaign launched in 2021 to ease the burden of homework and off-campus training on children.

They must strictly control off-campus academic tutoring, and let schools play a major part in improving children's academic performances. Schools are urged to reduce the amount of repetitive homework and strengthen science education and the cultivation of core competencies.

Yang Yinfu, vice-president and secretary-general of the Chinese Society of Education, said that a major advantage of China's basic education lies in its ability to help students firmly grasp the knowledge they have learned.

But repetitive and heavy homework risks reducing the time children spend on physical activities and eroding their enthusiasm for learning, Yang said, adding that it's an utmost task for basic education to foster adaptability, creativity and other core competencies bearing on lifelong development.

The plan also called for establishing a system to monitor the changes in the school-age population for all grade levels and readjusting the number, scale and locations of schools and kindergartens accordingly.

Researchers have noticed how changes in the country's birthrate may challenge education. The annual population of newborns in China has dropped rapidly after the most recent peak at 18.83 million in 2016.

This led to the peaking of the number of children enrolled in elementary schools in 2023 and a drop afterward in some regions, said Liu Shanhuai, a distinguished professor at South China Normal University.

The drastic increase and decrease in student numbers risks straining and then idling educational resources at different grade levels in the coming years, Liu said.

On the other hand, schools in some big cities are under pressure from a continuous inflow of people, while those in some rural areas are receiving fewer and fewer students, according to Liu.

As a result, the measures laid out in the plan such as allocating educational resources promptly across different grade levels, promoting smaller class sizes and expanding educational resources for cities witnessing an increase in residents, are highly



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

pertinent in addressing the demographic changes, Liu said.

The plan asks local authorities to diversify their senior high schools to develop different kinds of talent.

It also clarifies that the country will carry out programs to promote science literacy among elementary and junior high school students, while fostering the development of senior high school students who have shown promising potential in innovation.

Such arrangements take into account both education equality and the individual needs of outstanding students, said Yang from the Chinese Society of Education.

Ma Xiaoliang, a researcher with the China National Academy of Educational Sciences, said that tech and industrial revolutions unfolding rapidly around the world require children's early exposure to science education. "Everyone can be innovative," Ma said. "We need to develop children's respect and passion for science and the pursuit of truth, which will benefit them greatly in their future lives."

The programs will allow China to better tap into its rich human and educational resources and find the "very few" and "very gifted" to promote its high-quality growth, he said.

In addition to basic education, the plan puts forth detailed requirements for reforming higher education.

The country supports different higher education institutions in forging their own special advantages such as in science, engi-

neering, agriculture, medicine, liberal arts and physical education, it said.

The country must develop world-class universities and disciplines featuring Chinese characteristics at a faster pace, and establish disciplines that are urgently needed by national strategies, the plan added, and encouraged high-quality science and engineering universities in other countries to work with Chinese universities and run academic programs in China.

In the past year, China has strengthened its efforts to readjust disciplines in universities and colleges.

According to Wu Yan, vice-minister of the Ministry of Education, in 2024, the country set up more than 1,600 undergraduate programs to support national strategies and slashed nearly as many programs that failed to meet socioeconomic needs.

Ma, the researcher, said the differentiated development of universities and colleges will help them find their niche for survival. He suggested companies and other recruiters take part in the designing of academic programs to share their perspectives on what kinds of disciplines, talent and skills are needed.

Another emphasis of the plan is lifelong learning, the necessity of which has been highlighted by emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence.

The plan calls for improved public support, including open universities, senior citizen universities and a "national digital

university" for building a learning society.

The country will implement a strategy to digitalize education, according to the plan.

It will continue to construct and utilize Smart Education of China, a public platform sharing online courses, build the national big data center for education, and explore ways to innovate teaching at school using digital technologies.

Advocating the utilization of AI to build up teachers' competence, the plan said the country will develop a large model for education and "schools on cloud", and establish an evaluation and decision-making system based on big data and AI.

Noting that China has been providing highly affordable lifelong learning support in various forms such as online platforms, community colleges and libraries, Ma said lifelong learning is essential to guarantee both the public's well-being and the country's competitive edge in the fast-changing world.

Xiong Bingqi, director of the 21st Century Education Research Institute, said measures outlined in the plan meet the emerging demand from the public for better and more equitable education, after the country has popularized different kinds of education.

As the country's population is declining, greater efforts are required to nurture high-quality talent and improve labor productivity, Xiong said.

Zhao Yimeng contributed to this story.

inquiry experiments, it said.

It also called for schools to explore experiments with teaching using artificial intelligence and virtual reality.

More science courses should be included in school after-class activities to meet the needs and interests of students in different school years, the guideline said.

The guideline also urges schools to tap into natural resources such as rivers, ponds, farmland and woods, and introduce knowledge about nature by setting up signs and posters and displaying specimens.

It also called on universities, research institutions and the National Natural Science Foundation of China to work together to conduct research in educational theories and strengthen international cooperation in the field.

Local authorities should carry out surveys to determine the level of science literacy of students, and make policies to improve science education based on the surveys, it said.

Policy Digest

Chinese standards in foreign languages to raise cooperation

China recently released the translated versions of 75 important national standards related to agricultural production, transport and logistics, and intelligent manufacturing to enhance trade and international cooperation.

The foreign language versions have been approved by the State Administration for Market Regulation, it was announced in a notice on Friday.

In the agricultural production sector, the foreign language versions of two national standards for soybeans and wheat will facilitate international exchanges and cooperation in the food industry.

This will also help increase the supply of high-quality soybeans and wheat, and promote joint efforts to build an international ecosystem for food trade cooperation.

Regarding transport and logistics, the foreign versions of two national standards in the rail transportation field, such as the General Technical Specification for Railway Passenger Cars, aim to boost China's exports of rail transportation equipment and enhance the integration and interoperability of related technologies.

The foreign language versions of national standards in the realm of intelligent manufacturing will expedite the global promotion of China's experience in digital transformation. This will provide valuable insights for the adoption of digital technologies in traditional industries worldwide, according to the administration.

Guidelines released to better regulate early years care

The National Health Commission released on Saturday trial guidelines on the early development of children under 3 years old for primary-level health institutions to help caregivers develop better parenting practices.

The guidelines recommend township-level health centers, community health service centers and county-level maternity and child care institutions, to guide caregivers in nurturing children's brain and neural development through companionship, emotional communication and behavioral interaction.

This approach is intended to enhance children's physical, language, cognitive and social interaction skills, the guidelines said.

The institutions are advised to assist families with children under 3 years old in creating a nurturing environment. This involves offering a variety of toys and books, as well as facilitating opportunities for children to play with peers and in natural settings.

The guidelines caution against the use of televisions, computers, mobile phones, tablets and gaming consoles as substitutes for interactive playmates.

The guidelines stressed the importance of assessing caregivers' parenting behaviors and mental health status to identify potential risks. Child healthcare providers are encouraged to offer tailored counseling and guidance to help caregivers address negative behaviors and improve the overall parenting environment.

China retains crown as world's largest trading nation

China has maintained its position as the world's largest goods trading nation for the past eight years, the country's customs regulator said on Friday.

The nation's total goods imports and exports surpassed 43 trillion yuan (\$6 trillion) for the first time last year, up 5 percent year-on-year, according to Sun Meijun, Party chief of the General Administration of Customs.

In 2024, the administration introduced and implemented 16 measures aimed at further optimizing the business environment at ports and facilitating trade for enterprises throughout the year, Sun said at a national customs work conference.

Tariff reductions and various types of tariff preference measures were enforced, resulting in a total tax reduction or refunding of 282.9 billion yuan, Sun said.

Last year, 111 types of agricultural products from 62 countries and regions were authorized for import into China, 14 ports were newly opened or took further opening-up measures, and seven bonded logistics centers were established, according to Sun.

While pushing forward with existing policies and measures, the customs administration will introduce special measures to promote foreign trade, she added.

Specifically, Sun said authorities will boost the preparation work in the transition of the Hainan Free Trade Port into an independent customs operation; research to offer a new round of supportive policies for the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin; and boost the capacity and quality of ports in Northeast China and the Xinjiang Uygur and Xizang autonomous regions.

CHINA DAILY—XINHUA

Greater scientific inquiry to be fostered in schools

By WANG QINGYUN

The Ministry of Education has issued a guideline to promote science education in elementary and high schools, and support the nation's ongoing drive to boost its self-reliance and strength in science and technology.

The guideline, released on the ministry's website on Jan 22, asks local education authorities to ensure the availability of sufficient science teachers in elementary schools.

The release came days after China publicized a sweeping plan to turn itself into a leading country in education by 2035, which elaborated on measures needed for improving students' science literacy.

Junior and senior high schools should have enough science teachers, as well as teachers

for other related subjects such as physics, chemistry, biology, geography and information science and technology, the guideline said.

To ensure that schools stay committed to improving science education, the ministry requires them to have at least one "vice-principal of science", and encouraged scientists and experts from high-quality universities and research institutions to take on the role.

These vice-principals are tasked with making full use of their resources and professional backgrounds, and lead their schools' science education by conducting lectures, participating in the design of curricula and overseeing students' science projects.

Normal universities — universities that train teachers — should improve the curricula and programs of their science education

major, the guidance said, while emphasizing the cultivation of science literacy for elementary and high school teachers.

Resources at universities, research institutions and science museums should be fully mobilized to develop a training system to improve science teachers' abilities, including the ability to design and carry out experiments and projects, it said.

Students' performance in experiments should be tested in proficiency exams before they graduate from junior high school, and their performance in daily experiments and science projects should also be assessed at school, the guideline said.

Schools should enhance their science education facilities, set up laboratories and let students participate in more open

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The past few weeks marked the first celebration of Spring Festival, or Chinese New Year, after it was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity on Dec 24.

According to a UNESCO document, the festival has been included for its wide range of rituals and unique cultural elements that engage all of Chinese society. These include prayers for good fortune and family reunions, activities planned by elders and public events organized by communities.

UNESCO noted that the traditional knowledge and customs associated with Spring Festival are passed down informally within families and communities, as well as formally through the educational system, promoting family values, social cohesion and peace, while providing a sense of social identity.

It also emphasized that the festival embodies harmony between humans and nature, and contributes to sustainable development.

As one of the cradles of Chinese civilization, the North China province of Shanxi is the place where centuries-old traditions and cultural elements are still alive in people's daily lives. And this is especially true during the Spring Festival period.

Varied celebrations

Spending several days in Shanxi during Spring Festival can give people an immersive experience of the variety of traditions, cultural elements and values associated with the holiday, according to locals and visitors alike.

In Shanxi, as well as other regions of the country, the Spring Festival celebrations last for more than a month.

The celebrations start on Laba Festival, which is the eighth day of the 12th month on the lunar calendar, which fell on Jan 7 this year.

For more than 2,000 years, Laba Festival has been an occasion to worship ancestors and the gods and to pray for a good harvest and good fortune. The tradition involves a number of practices like making *laba* garlic.

The making of *laba* garlic is simple — garlic cloves are pickled in jars of vinegar. The cloves usually turn green before Chinese New Year's Eve, ready to be served along with the famed *jiaozi* dumplings for family reunion dinners.

Simple as it is, making tasty *laba* garlic is dependent on high-quality vinegar. Fortunately, Shanxi is the place where the country's best matured vinegar is produced.

On the morning of Jan 7, people lined up in front of an outlet of a time-honored vinegar business in Taiyuan, the provincial capital.

They used various containers to collect vinegar from a huge jar at the outlet. The sour-sweet fragrance of matured vinegar permeated the air and could be smelt hundreds of meters away.

"That's the smell we Shanxi people love in particular," said a Taiyuan resident surnamed Wang. "That's the smell of New Year we have been so familiar with since childhood."

After that day, the festive atmosphere prevails throughout the province, which is demonstrated in practices such as decorating homes, streets and communities with Spring Festival couplets, lanterns and other auspicious ornaments; preparing local dishes such as flowery buns; and varieties of folk activities such as stilt walking, molten iron firework shows and performances of local operas.

A molten iron fireworks show, which is also known as *datiehua* among locals, is popular in Shanxi's cities such as Yuncheng and Jincheng.

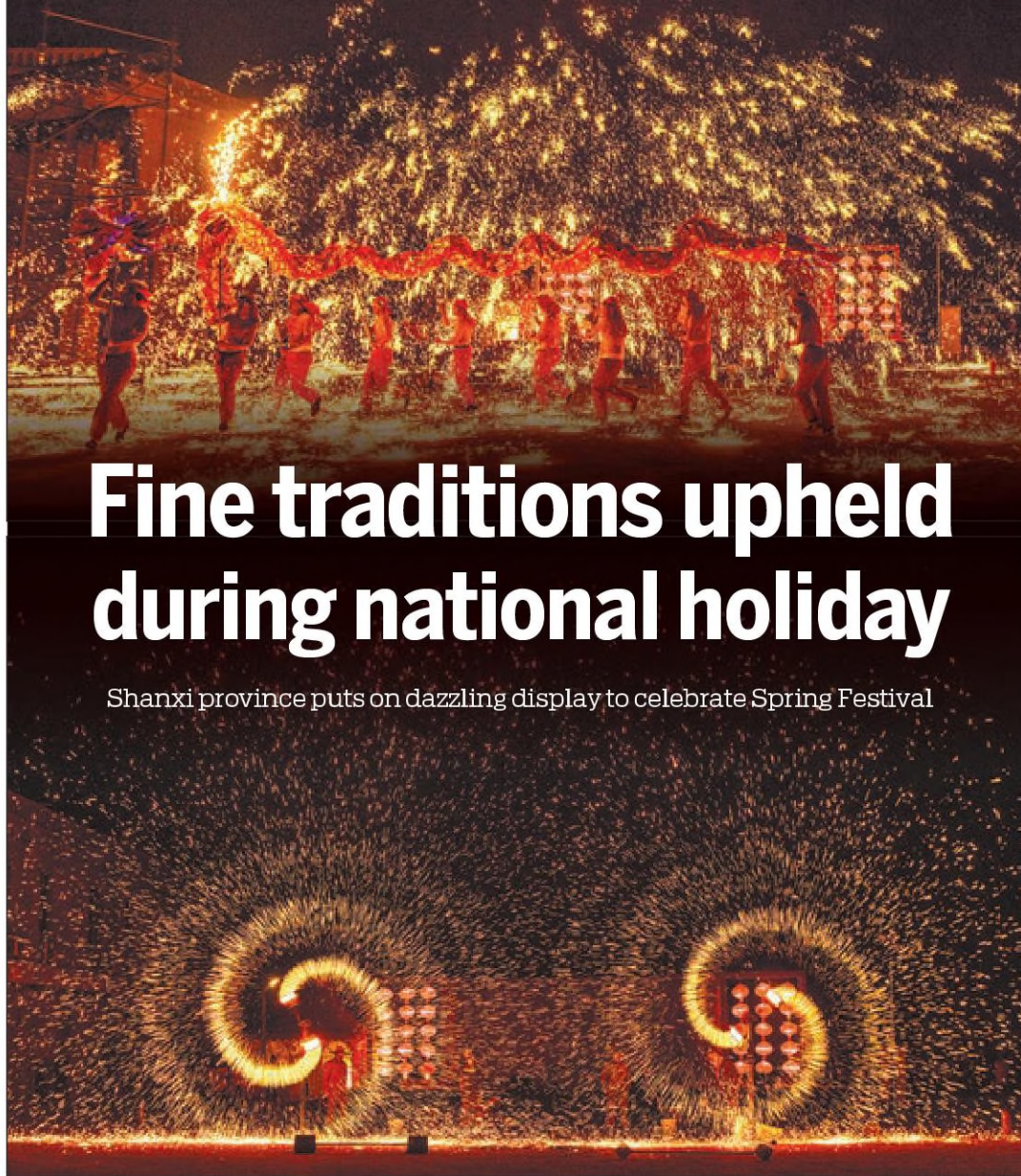
This practice involves spraying molten iron into the air, which is said to be able to scare away demons and other evil spirits.

On Jan 31, a *datiehua* show was held in Yuncheng's Yanhu district, attracting an audience of thousands.

At a public square near the Yanhu Lake, which was surrounded by crowds on three sides at a safe distance, eight big pots with molten iron were placed near bonfires. Hundreds of performers danced beside these bonfires to the rhythm of drums and gongs.

When the rhythm intensified, the *datiehua* show began. Performers sprayed the scorching iron liquid into the air, produc-

Performers dressed in colorful attire stage a dragon dance in front of a museum in Zuoquan county, Shanxi province, during this year's Spring Festival holiday.
ZHANG WENJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Fine traditions upheld during national holiday

Shanxi province puts on dazzling display to celebrate Spring Festival

Folk artists perform the traditional *datiehua* (molten iron fireworks) show in Zuoquan county on the night of Jan 30.

ZHANG WENJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY



From left: Some 1,000 lanterns illuminate the night sky in Changzhi, Shanxi province, on Feb 2. SHEN JINGUANG / FOR CHINA DAILY
Crowds gather to watch the traditional *beigun* intangible cultural heritage performance in Shanxi during the holiday. The performance features a child in costume bound to the top end of an iron rod. The lower end of the rod is secured to a man's back. As the man walks, he moves to the beat of drums, and the child sways and acts out theatrical stories, creating a visual spectacle. LI ZHAOMIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



ing a shower of magnificent sparks, just like fireworks. Among the audience members, children watched and jumped with excitement, while the adults raised their phones to capture the dazzling scene.

According to a performer, there are more than a dozen ways of spraying molten iron into the air, with tools such as an iron ladle, wire and a board.

There are also plenty of opera shows throughout the province during Spring Festival.

As one of the sources of the country's opera arts, Shanxi is dubbed "a cradle of Chinese operas", with its numbers of ancient opera stages and opera genres both ranking first in the nation.

The main stage for the CCTV Spring Festival opera evening gala on Jan 30 was set up

in the old county seat of Taiyuan. Renowned performers of local opera arts, ranging from Jinju Opera, Puju Opera to Shangdang Bangzi and Beilu Bangzi, offered an audiovisual feast to audiences throughout the country.

In addition, Shanxi is home to 182 intangible cultural heritage items at the national level and 942 ICH items at provincial level. Most of these cultural assets were presented to audiences through various shows during this Spring Festival.

During Spring Festival, the charm of Shanxi cultural heritage can also be experienced by foreigners.

On Jan 22, a day known as *xiaonian* or Little New Year in northern China, Gojayeve Bagul from Turkmenistan and Mutangay Jesteben Beni from the Democratic Republic of the Congo attended a workshop at

Shanxi Museum in Taiyuan.

At the workshop that featured a range of ancient craft skills, the two showed a special interest in the making of new year paintings based on wood carvings.

Modern adaptation

Chinese New Year celebrations have been conducted in Shanxi, as well as the rest of the country, for thousands of years. While preserving culture and values throughout history, the celebrations have changed with the times and adapted to the modern tastes of people.

One example is *jifu*, the practice of collecting the Chinese character of *fu*, or fortune, in various forms and styles, and presenting them on social media to convey good wishes. Companies or other social entities also used

the *jifu* practice as a method of promotion. For example, renowned Chinese online payment company Alipay launched a *jifu* event on Jan 20. It distributed 28 sets of *fu* cards featuring various *fu* characters and various themes as the background behind the characters. One set of such cards featured Shanxi's cultural and natural attractions, aiming to promote Shanxi's tourism.

The Shanxi-themed cards highlighted five renowned attractions in the province, namely Yungang Grottoes and Huayan Buddhist Temple in Datong, Yuhuang Temple in Jincheng, Xuankong Temple in Hunyuan, and Xiaoxitian in Xixian.

While offering brief introductions of the attractions to help people with their tour planning, the cards have other practical benefits. On showing the cards, tourists can enjoy reductions in bus and subway fares or the entrance fees to scenic areas. They are also able to get souvenirs for free.

Sheng Yijiao, a Taiyuan resident, said she had collected all the Shanxi-themed *fu* cards. "I'm happy that Shanxi's excellent cultural and tourism resources can be better recognized among people throughout the country via the process of collecting *fu* cards," Sheng said.

Touring is now a popular way for people to spend Spring Festival. As a popular cultural tourism destination, Shanxi is a major beneficiary of the Spring Festival tourism boom. Statistics show that the number of Shanxi-related online bookings during the period has increased 27 percent from a year ago, while bookings from overseas tourists rose 33 percent year-on-year thanks to China's 240-hour visa-free policies for transit tourists from many countries.

In Shanxi, there are also many helpful measures for overseas tourists, including the growing number of outlets for currency exchange and the upgrading of ATMs to allow foreign bank card holders to withdraw cash.

A major destination for cultural tourism in Shanxi, Shanxi Museum in Taiyuan has used modern technologies to attract visitors.

At the CCTV Spring Festival opera evening gala on Jan 30, the museum introduced itself to the audience in an innovative manner. With the help of digital technologies, the Jin Dynasty (115-1234) terracotta opera-playing figurines, for instance, were revived, sitting among the audience to enjoy operas of modern times.

Wang Jianqiang, a Taiyuan resident, has been a volunteer in the museum for more than 10 years.

"Over the past decade, I have witnessed how the museum has become increasingly popular among tourists," Wang Jianqiang said. "The success can be partially attributed to the innovations driven by modern technologies, including more online promotions to attract visitors and the use of digital technologies inside the museum to enhance visitors' understanding of the exhibits and their related history."

Safety ensured

Spring Festival is the occasion for family reunions. But while most families are getting together to celebrate, there are some people who are still on duty to ensure public safety.

"As the Spring Festival period features the biggest flow of people in a year, safety is a major concern," said Zhang Yubing, a police officer in Yangcheng county.

Zhang is the head of a police station in Yangcheng's Manghe township. The station is responsible for 18 villages and a population of 13,000.

The eight-day Spring Festival holiday, spanning Jan 28 to Feb 4 this year, is a period dedicated to family reunions. Most people left their work duties behind.

But this was not the case for Zhang and his eight colleagues; they worked eight days on shifts.

"The big traffic flow, drunken driving and the risks arising from fireworks are among our major concerns," Zhang said.

While some police officers were on the roads to ensure traffic safety, others were busy visiting villages, cautioning residents about fireworks, drinking and other risks, according to Zhang.

"We walked more than 20,000 steps a day during the period," Zhang said.

Also on duty during the national holiday were customs officers at Taiyuan Wusu International Airport, medics at various hospitals throughout Shanxi, and community officials, to name just a few.

Zhang Qi contributed to this story.

Hukou Waterfall on the Yellow River in Jixian county, Shanxi province, with its roaring torrents and stunning icefall rainbows, attracts many tourists during the Spring Festival holiday.
LYU GUIMING / FOR CHINA DAILY



WORLD

Yoon raises objection at 7th hearing

South Korean leader opposes the use of prosecution's reports as evidence in trial

By YANG HAN in Hong Kong
kelly@chinadailyapac.com

South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk-yeol on Tuesday opposed the use of the prosecution's reports, which include interrogations of key suspects involved in the martial law case, as evidence in his impeachment trial.

During the 7th hearing of the impeachment trial at the Constitutional Court in Seoul, Yoon said the investigations were not conducted consistently by a single entity, such as the prosecution, military prosecution, or the police, but rather involved multiple agencies in a disorganized manner, according to Yonhap News Agency.

"Even records from (the) National Assembly's hearings were mixed in as well," said Yoon, adding that it is inappropriate to adopt these records as evidence in a desultory manner and use them to establish facts.

Though Hong Jang-won, former first deputy director of South Korea's National Intelligence Service, and others involved in the martial law declaration were directly questioned at the previous hearings, Yoon said there is a significant gap between what was written in the records and what was testified at the court.

"If a single agency had conducted a systematic investigation, it might have been different," said Yoon. "But since these records are inconsistent even among themselves, I request that you take a close look at this issue."

In response, Moon Hyung-bae, acting chief justice of the Constitutional Court, said the issue will be discussed during deliberations with other justices.

The 7th hearing involved testimony from former interior minister Lee Sang-min, National Security Office chief Shin Won-sik, Baek Jong-wook, former third deputy director of the National Intelligence Service, and Kim Yong-bin, secretary-general of the National Election Commission, or NEC.

Key issues in the hearing include allegations that Yoon ordered officials to cut off power and water supplies to media outlets, as well as the decision-making process of the Cabinet meeting, and allegations of election fraud and the

deployment of troops to the NEC. Lee, who was present at a Cabinet meeting Yoon convened immediately before declaring martial law on Dec 3, said he did not order cutting off power or water supplies to media outlets, nor had he ever received orders to do so.

Yet, Lee said he did see a few notes from far away at the president's office, which headlined the words "National Fire Agency chief" and listed the names of several media outlets and a polling agency.

One of the notes mentioned the fire agency cutting off power and water, he said.

'Emergency measures'

Shin, the national security adviser, said Yoon mentioned "emergency measures" during a dinner at a presidential safe house in Seoul around late March to early April last year.

"I didn't think it extended to martial law, but I did express my opinion that such measures would be inappropriate in any case," Shin said, noting he understood it was referring to a situation where the military might play a role in real politics.

In a statement on Tuesday, Seo Ji-young, floor spokesman of the ruling People Power Party, also said interrogation records prepared during the prosecution's investigation cannot be regarded as court-verified facts.

Yoon Jong-kun, floor spokesman of the main opposition Democratic Party, said Yoon caused a civil crisis out of his personal resentment and must be removed from office as soon as possible to restore the constitutional order of South Korea.

According to the current schedule, the Constitutional Court will hold the last hearing on Thursday. While further hearings may be scheduled, some expect that the court will speed up the trial process to issue a decision in March on whether to uphold or dismiss the impeachment.

Yoon was impeached by the National Assembly on Dec 14 over his brief martial law declaration. If the court upholds the impeachment and removes him from office, a fresh presidential election will be held within 60 days of removal.

A separate criminal trial of Yoon, who was indicted on charges of insurrection, is expected to begin on Feb 20.



South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk-yeol (left) talks with his lawyer Bae Bo-yoon as he attends the seventh hearing of his impeachment trial in Seoul on Tuesday. YONHAP

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A drone view shows first responders working at the site of a deadly bus crash in Guatemala City, Guatemala, on Monday. At least 55 people were killed in the accident. JOSUE DECAVELE / REUTERS

55 killed in Guatemala bus accident

GUATEMALA CITY — At least 55 people were killed in Guatemala on Monday when a bus crashed through a guardrail and plunged into a ravine, authorities said, in one of the worst road accidents in Latin America in years.

The bus was carrying around 70 people when it fell into a river contaminated with sewage in Guatemala City, making it difficult for rescuers to retrieve the bodies.

"So far, 53 people have died at the scene," a spokesman for the public prosecutor's office, Moises Ortiz, told reporters.

Two others died after they were admitted, along with several other people, to the San Juan de Dios Hospital, spokeswoman Marilyn Perez said.

The bodies recovered at the site were taken to an improvised morgue in a nearby community hall, where several distressed relatives went, fearing the worst.

Rosa Lopez told reporters that four of her nieces and nephews were thought to have been on the bus.

"When we heard about the accident on the news, we headed straight here," the 48-year-old said.

Injured passengers were taken to hospitals, many of them in serious condition.

Guatemalan President Bernardo Arevalo expressed sorrow over the tragedy and declared a three-day national mourning.

'Difficult day'

"Today is a difficult day for the Guatemalan nation," he said.

The fire department said the driver apparently lost control of the bus and collided with several small vehicles before plunging over the precipice.

"The bus kept going, broke through a metal railing, and fell into a ravine about 20 meters deep until it reached the sewage-contaminated river," the fire department's Carlos Hernandez told reporters.

AFPTV images showed lines of firefighters passing bodies pulled from the murky waters, which were filled with trash, up the slope on stretchers.

"We're having a hard time with

the rescue work," said firefighter Luis Quintanilla. "We've been underwater for more than three hours trying to rescue the body of an apparently male person who is trapped between the twisted metal of the bus," he said.

The bus was traveling to Guatemala City from the town of San Agustin Acasaguastlan in the El Progreso department, about 90 kilometers to the northeast, authorities said.

"It's a huge tragedy, very painful," 40-year-old Marbelin Ortiz, a resident of the area near the accident site, told reporters.

Communications Minister Miguel Angel Diaz said an initial investigation showed that the bus was 30 years old but still had a license to operate.

He said the cause of the early morning accident was still unknown and that investigators were looking into whether the bus was overloaded with passengers.

The public prosecutor's office said it had opened an investigation into the crash.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Iranian president slams 'maximum pressure' campaign by Washington

By MIKE GU and JAN YUMUL
in Hong Kong

The "maximum pressure" campaign by the United States against Iran has undermined the foundation for negotiations between the two countries, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has emphasized.

US President Donald Trump "says he wants to negotiate, yet at the same time, he signs a document (ordering) all kinds of plots to bring the Islamic Revolution to its knees," Pezeshkian said during an event marking the 46th anniversary of the victory of Iran's Islamic Revolution on Monday.

Trump signed an executive order on Feb 4 to restore the so-called "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran with a claimed aim to prevent the Islamic Republic from obtaining nuclear weapons.

The US Department of the Treasury on Thursday began sanctions on over a dozen people and firms accused of facilitating the shipment of Iranian crude oil.

Reacting to US calls for negotiations over Teheran's nuclear pro-

gram, Iran's Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi on Monday stressed that the country would never enter into negotiations under pressure and threats, the Islamic Republic News Agency reported, adding the US had a long track record of oath-breaking, including pulling out of the 2015 nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

"Today, we are faced with a president in the United States who has returned to the maximum pressure policy against Iran's people," Araghchi said.

"The interesting point is that while signing a document to issue an order for placing the Iranian people under the highest pressures, concurrently, the US president spoke of his readiness for negotiations as a means of deception," he said.

Abdolreza Alami, a member of the Faculty of Mass Communication, Universiti Teknologi MARA and director of Asia West East, told China Daily that Iranian leaders have repeatedly emphasized that negotiations must be conducted

under fair and balanced conditions, not when one side is exerting maximum pressure, Alami said.

"Rather than creating an environment for fair dialogue, Washington seeks to use economic tools and political pressure to extract maximum concessions. From the Supreme Leader's perspective, any negotiation held under coercion and threats is not only irrational but also doomed to fail from the outset," Alami said.

As Trump pursues aggressive and uncooperative policies against many nations, Iran has the opportunity to strengthen its international position and form new alliances, Alami stated. In this context, moving toward a diversified economy, reducing dependency on the dollar, and developing regional cooperation stand out as the most viable strategies for Iran to navigate the crisis of sanctions, Alami said.

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Xinhua and agencies contributed to this story.



Fountain of joy

People cool off at a water fountain in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on Monday.

RODRIGO ABD / AP

Trump's Gaza plan criticized

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
jan@chinadailyapac.com

More than 100 organizations have issued a joint statement rejecting the forcible displacement of Palestinians from Gaza after US President Donald Trump unveiled plans to take ownership of the besieged enclave.

In a TV interview aired on Monday, Trump also threatened to cancel the cease-fire deal between Israel and Hamas if all Israeli captives were not released by Saturday.

Hamas on Monday announced a delay in the next release of Israeli hostages on Saturday, alleging that Israel had violated the cease-fire agreement, including targeting Palestinians and conducting airstrikes in Gaza. Israel, on the other hand, accused Hamas of breaking its promise and starting to prepare for military actions again.

Trump said he "will build beautiful communities for the 1.9 million people" and "safe communities away from the danger" in the interview with Fox News.

He added that there would be no right of return for Palestinians under the plan because they would have "better housing" amid plans to build "a permanent place for them".

Trump also warned it would take years to rebuild Gaza.

In response to Trump's comments, several activist organizations — including CODEPINK, Jewish Voice for Peace Action, the UNRWA USA National Committee, and Doctors Against Genocide — released a joint statement on Monday.

The statement signed by Christian, Muslim, and Jewish groups reiterated that the forcible displacement of civilians "is a violation of international humanitarian law, including under Article 49(1) of the Fourth Geneva Convention, to which both the US and Israel are party".

'Not practical'

Ayman Yousef, a professor of international relations at the Arab American University in Jenin in the West Bank, said Trump's plan "is not practical at all" as the Palestinians are the original inhabitants of this land, so they would not buy their land from a leader such as Trump.

Yousef said it might also be an attempt to test the waters. "He wants to see the reaction of the Palestinians, the Arabs. He wants to see the reaction of Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia so that he can, in the future, lay down the foundation of future US policy in the Middle East," he added.

Abdul Wahed Jalal Nori, an analyst and lecturer at the Department of Fundamental and Inter-Disciplinary Studies at the International Islamic University in Malaysia, told China Daily that Trump's plan violates international law, particularly the right of return, and risks being labeled as "ethnic cleansing".

He said it also undermines regional stability.

"This move will set a dangerous precedent for forced displacement, escalating conflict and radicalization, and straining US diplomatic relations with allies," said Abdul Wahed, who wrote *State-building under Foreign Occupation: The Case of Iraq 2003-2008*.

"Overall, it will definitely threaten global stability and Middle East peace by fueling resentment and eroding international norms. Trump and Netanyahu's arrogance will ultimately lead to their own downfall," he said.

Abdul Wahed expressed doubt that the US will be able to invade Gaza as it fails to understand the Palestinian mindset.

"These people are prepared to sacrifice everything. Denying Gazans the right to return would mean their complete eradication, something they will never accept. I don't think Trump understands the mindset of the Palestinians," said Abdul Wahed.

WORLD

Dismantling watchdog leaves consumers in a limbo

WASHINGTON — The Donald Trump administration's rapid dismantling of the US consumer protection watchdog will have broad implications for consumers with credit cards, mortgages and bank accounts, leaving people with little recourse if they are unfairly treated by financial institutions, experts say.

The US Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, or CFPB, was defanged over the weekend by Trump administration appointees after Russell Vought, the agency's acting chief, ordered the staff to halt work and temporarily locked the doors to its headquarters.

As a result, the job of policing a wide range of financial firms for compliance with several consumer protection laws has functionally disappeared — one that has been a mainstay since the agency was created by the US Congress in 2010 in response to the 2008 financial crisis.

"The Trump administration just hung out a sign saying, 'Cops on break' in the financial services sector," said Aaron Klein, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution think tank, who was at the Treasury Department when the law creating the CFPB was drafted.

On Monday, the White House criticized the agency as a "woke, weaponized arm of the bureaucracy" that should be reined in immediately.

The CFPB enforces a spate of consumer financial protection laws. Those include laws that safeguard active-duty military members from



US Senator Elizabeth Warren (left), Democrat from Massachusetts, attends a protest rally against Donald Trump administration's anticipated plan to close the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau in front of the bureau's headquarters in Washington, DC, on Monday. SAUL LOEB / AFP

predatory lending practices, protect US citizens from inaccurate credit billing and prohibit creditors from discriminating against applicants based on their religion or race.

Beyond enforcing existing laws, the CFPB has also imposed limits on overdraft fees, banned medical debt from being listed on credit reports and promulgated rules to prevent brokers from selling consumers'

sensitive data. The agency also collects consumer complaints against financial companies and provides financial education services.

Eliminating the agency — or even handicapping it — would mean that no one would be policing the nation's largest financial firms to ensure that they are complying with those rules, according to experts.

Dennis Kelleher, president and

CEO of Better Markets, which advocates for stricter government oversight of the financial sector, said that low-income consumers will likely feel the lack of CFPB protections the most.

"There's a chain effect of sorts, especially among lower-income borrowers," said Kelleher.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Tariffs to be focus of PM Modi's US trip

Indian leader may offer concessions to Trump to avoid trade war: Experts

By APARAJIT CHAKRABORTY in New Delhi and XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi begins a two-day visit to the United States on Wednesday, with reports suggesting that he has lined up some tariff concessions as he meets US President Donald Trump in Washington and tries to avert a potential trade war.

The primary focus during the meeting between Modi and Trump will be on reducing import tariffs to boost US exports to India, Indian trade experts said.

"We don't want to give anybody any signal that we would like to be protectionist," India's Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey said on Feb 1 after the federal budget was unveiled in Parliament that day.

The official made the remark after Trump sparked global concerns with sweeping tariff proposals against Canada, Mexico and China, and said he may also impose levies against other nations and regions.

India's "enormously high" tariffs block imports, US news channel CNBC quoted Kevin Hassett, Trump's top economic adviser, as saying. Hassett made the comment ahead of Modi's scheduled visit to Washington. Trump, advocating reciprocal tariffs, previously criticized India as a "big abuser" of trade, according to CNBC.

India may announce a cut in import duties on some US products, said Biswajit Dhar, a former professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, or JNU, New Delhi.

In the federal budget, India reduced import duties on motorcycles, cutting tariffs on heavy bikes with engines above 1,600 cc from 50 percent to 30 percent and smaller ones from 50 percent to 40 percent.

The move to reduce import duty on heavy bikes is an attempt to avoid a tariff threat and facilitate the smooth entry of US-made Harley-Davidson motorcycles into India, Dhar said, adding New Delhi wanted to convey a message to Trump that it wants to accommodate his interests.

Dhar said it is a different matter whether Trump is going to be convinced because he has a long list of products on which he wants tariffs to be reduced.

"Canada and Mexico are the biggest trading partners of the US. If he can act against them, he could easily target anyone," he said.

According to Indian official data, India had a trade surplus of \$35.3 billion with the US in the fiscal year ending March 2024.

India exports a wide variety of goods to the US, including textiles,

pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, petroleum products, machinery and cut diamonds. Bilateral trade between the two countries totaled almost \$120 billion in 2023.

Tariff reduction announced in the budget on products such as motorcycles will benefit US exports, said Ajay Srivastava, founder of the Delhi-based think tank Global Trade Research Initiative, or GTRI.

Amid Trump's repeated criticism of India as a trade abuser, India's budget introduced significant tax cuts on multiple products, GTRI said in a report. "Whether these reductions will alter Washington's view of India's trade practices ... remains to be seen," it said.

More cuts

It is possible that after the Modi-Trump meeting, India may announce more tariff concessions to boost US exports to India, according to Indian economist Abhirup Sarkar.

Swaran Singh, a professor of international relations at JNU, noted that so far India has been spared from Trump's tariffs, adding the Modi-Trump meeting scheduled on Thursday "is expected to further fine-tune bilateral irritants".

Karori Singh, former director and emeritus fellow of the South Asia Studies Centre at India's University of Rajasthan, said the entire world has apprehensions about Trump's moves.

In his announcement on Monday, Trump unveiled 25 percent blanket tariffs on steel and aluminum imports and ended duty-free quotas, exemptions and exclusions.

The move will increase prices in the US and adversely affect exports by some countries, experts say.

"Such measures may cast their shadow over Modi-Trump talks as well," Karori Singh said. "It is, therefore, imperative that countries across the globe take joint steps to resist these protectionist measures which are likely to adversely affect the flow and fair practice in international trade."

Expressing "deep concern" over the latest US steel tariffs, Indian Steel Association President Naveen Jindal said in a statement on Monday that Washington's move will further disrupt global trade and intensify challenges for the steel industry.

Aparajit Chakraborty is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

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US shoppers lamenting high price of eggs

By BELINDA ROBINSON in New York belindarobinson@chinadailyusa.com

Some shoppers said they like them scrambled, others prefer them baked, while a few enjoy them boiled or poached.

But none of the customers who were out buying eggs in supermarkets in New York City on Monday were happy about the significant price increase on a dozen due to an outbreak of bird flu nationwide.

"I think it's disgusting," Noel Barry, a 50-year-old originally from Maryland, told China Daily about the price of eggs while shopping at a Stop & Shop store in downtown Brooklyn.

"I don't understand where this virus is coming from. Are the chickens picketing? I was in Trader Joe's two weeks ago, and the eggs were like \$8. It's stressed my budget. I no longer buy eggs. It's not a part of my options in terms of protein."

More than 150 million poultry birds have been killed in 50 states in a bid to stop the spread of the H5N1 avian influenza virus.

It has created a lack of egg-laying hens, which has caused an egg shortage and pushed up prices on those left on supermarket shelves.

Many shoppers are having to pay \$8.99 or more for a dozen eggs, when the average price in December was \$4.15, US Bureau of Labor Statistics data shows. In some grocery stores, the egg shelves are bare.

Jason Bach, 34, of Brooklyn, originally from San Diego, California, peered into an empty refrigerator

where eggs would typically be in a Target store in downtown Brooklyn.

The father of a 7-week-old baby was out shopping with his partner. He looked surprised while reading a sign on the refrigerator door that said: "We are currently experiencing high demand and supplier shortages for eggs. We are actively seeking additional supply."

"It's disappointing," Bach told China Daily. "It's just really hard because a lot of things we used to cook or to bake use eggs. Even before this egg shortage, our family and I would always make eggs and bacon in the morning. Now it's just bacon, and it's not the same."

Across the country, a few supermarkets have put limits on how many fresh eggs each customer can buy.

In Los Angeles, Sprouts has limited customers to four dozen eggs per visit. A spokesperson for Kroger said some regional stores are asking customers to limit themselves to two dozen per trip.

At Costco, shoppers are limited to three packages of eggs per person or five online. And the store's website warns that "due to supply challenges caused by the highly pathogenic avian influenza, shell eggs and egg products may be short or cut from delivery orders without notice."

Customers at a Trader Joe's store in Brooklyn looked puzzled as they wheeled their shopping carts closer to gaze at empty shelves where rows of eggs once were. Staffers said supply had been low for a week or longer.

A spokesperson for Trader Joe's

said in a statement: "Due to ongoing issues with the supply of eggs, we are currently limiting egg purchases to one dozen per customer, per day, in all Trader Joe's stores across the country."

Months after inflation slowed, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) forecast a 20 percent price increase for eggs this year.

The average price nationally of a dozen eggs is now \$7.95, up from \$3.30 in 2024, USDA figures show.

Flustered shoppers say they've paid even more.

"I've seen a \$3 to \$4 increase in what I'm paying for eggs," Ami Patel, 35, of New York told China Daily.

Bach agreed. "The other day we bought eggs, it was \$9.99, he said. "That was astronomical, and that's almost a dollar an egg. We used to get the Costco eggs, 60 for seven bucks."

New York Governor Kathy Hochul ordered seven poultry markets in Queens, the Bronx and Brooklyn to temporarily close between Feb 7 and Feb 14 and be disinfected after inspectors discovered bird flu.

Hochul also ordered live markets in Westchester County to be shut and disinfected, and also in Nassau and Suffolk counties, despite inspectors not identifying bird flu in those areas.

The Wildlife Conservation Society reported that three ducks died at the Queens Zoo due to the flu. At least 12 birds that may have been exposed died at the Bronx Zoo.

Fausta Einhorn, 71, originally from Italy and now a New York City resident, is a pensioner on a fixed

budget. She was out shopping at a pricey Whole Foods market, carefully picking up just a few things to stick within her tight budget.

"I have noticed at my local Pioneer supermarket, which isn't as upscale as Whole Foods, prices are higher there," Einhorn told China Daily.

"It is in a neighborhood with a lot of people who are not upscale, like here. In Whole Foods, eggs cost me \$7, and there, it was like, \$12. The prices have been going up. I think it's greed of commerce. Many think that Trump is going to put tariffs, so they say let's put the prices up."

Nationwide, the price of eggs is so high that there have been reports of theft.

At least 100,000 eggs disappeared from Pete and Gerry's Eggs facilities in Greencastle, Pennsylvania, last weekend, ABC News reported.

The egg company said 8,000 cartons worth \$40,000 were stolen on Feb 2. The business has since boosted security.

In Washington state, more than 500 eggs worth nearly \$400 were stolen from a West Seattle cafe on Feb 8, according to Seattle police.

Security footage showed two men entering the restaurant's refrigerator and taking eggs, bacon, ground beef and liquid egg products.

They then loaded the goods into a van and sped off, only to get cold feet and return after being spotted by staff.

Waffle House has implemented a surcharge of 50 cents for egg items on the restaurant chain's menus.

HOW MUCH DOES A DROP OF WATER MEAN TO AQUATIC LIFE?



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LI DONGHANG AND MA XUEJING / FOR CHINA DAILY

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Gemini Cooperation begins operations at Shanghai Port

By WANG YING in Shanghai
wang.ying@chinadaily.com.cn

Gemini Cooperation, a benchmark collaboration between Maersk and Hapag-Lloyd, officially started operations at the port of Shanghai on Monday, further consolidating Shanghai Port's status as an international shipping hub amid the ongoing restructuring of the global shipping industry.

The collaboration between Shanghai Port and Gemini Cooperation will enhance the former's international route network, ensure punctuality and provide global customers with better-than-expected logistics support, according to the port operator Shanghai International Port (Group) Co Ltd.

"With the vision of building a world-class port operator, Shanghai International Port (Group) plays a part in helping build Shanghai into an international shipping center. We will constantly improve the capability and service of the port of Shanghai and contribute to the global shipping industry with high quality Chinese solutions," said Zhou Yong, deputy general manager of the production business department with SIPG.

According to Zhou, the collaboration will facilitate SIPG's development in digitalization, intelligentization and green transformation, enhance Shanghai Port's capabilities in international transit and empty container transfer, as well as expand its key business scopes.

The essence of the collaboration between Shanghai Port and Gemini Cooperation is the shift from scale competition to efficiency competition, said SIPG, citing an expert from the Shanghai International Shipping Institute.

Through data sharing and standard co-construction by the cooperation between port and shipping companies, the global shipping industry's competition is elevated

from scale to efficiency, said the expert.

Being the world's busiest container port, the port of Shanghai handled 51.51 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) throughout 2024, holding the top position for 15 consecutive years by container throughput globally.

Gemini Cooperation took the third phase of Shanghai Port's Yangshan Deep-Water Port as its major terminal for calling in China.

Gemini Cooperation announced last year that it would start operations in February 2025, according to the official website of Hapag-Lloyd.

With the goal of delivering a fast, flexible and interconnected ocean network with industry-leading reliability being its cornerstone, Gemini Cooperation will cover seven trades and offer 57 services including mainliner and dedicated shuttle services, complemented by feeder services.

The fleet of the new partnership will consist of around 340 vessels, many ready to adopt cleaner fuels, with a total standing capacity of about 3.7 million TEUs, according to Hapag-Lloyd.

In addition to its top position as the world's busiest container port, Shanghai Port became the world's first port to cross the 50 million TEUs mark in 2024, and more than 5 million TEUs were handled in January at Shanghai Port, a new monthly high in container throughput worldwide.

In the past few years, the port of Shanghai set new monthly records in July 2024, January 2022 and August 2021, as the conventional peak season for container shipping takes place in the months between July and October, as well as December and January.

The new monthly record is also a reflection of China's active foreign trade and the resilience of China's economy, which lays a solid foundation for the steady growth of the port throughout the year.



A shopper buys vegetables at a supermarket in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province. JIA MINJIE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Full-year CPI target likely lower at 2%

Among provincial-level regions, 27 out of 31 set inflation goals at such levels

By ZHOU LANXU
and OUYANG SHIJIA

China is likely to lower its annual inflation target to around 2 percent this year — the lowest reading in two decades — when the country's top legislature convenes next month, signaling a significant fine-tuning in macroeconomic policy goals, economists and analysts said.

The reduction would indicate a shift of policy focus from preventing inflation from exceeding a certain threshold to guiding its recovery to a reasonable level, implying an increased weight on promoting deflation and correcting subdued demand via policy-making.

According to the 2025 government work reports of provincial-level regions on the Chinese mainland, the vast majority of these local governments — 27 out of 31 — set their annual consumer price index expectation growth targets at "around 2 percent".

Exceptions include Yunnan province, which did not specify a CPI growth target, and the Xizang autonomous region, which aimed to keep inflation within 3 percent. Hunan province stated that its CPI growth would align with the national level, while Shandong province aims to maintain consumer prices "at a reasonable level".

"CPI targets have been generally lowered to around 2 percent across various regions. It is highly likely that the national target for 2025 will also be reduced from around 3

percent to about 2 percent," said Xiong Yuan, chief economist at Guosheng Securities.

If the national CPI expectation target is lowered to 2 percent, it would mark the first time that the target is set below 3 percent since China started specifying the figure in its national government work report — unveiled at the annual gathering of the National People's Congress — in 2005, when the target was 4 percent.

From 2015 to 2024, the national CPI target was mostly set at "around 3 percent", except for 2020 when the figure was 3.5 percent as COVID-19 hit. In 2015, the target was lowered by 0.5 percentage point to about 3 percent, after another cut in 2013 by 0.5 percentage point to around 3.5 percent.

"CPI target adjustments aren't uncommon in history," Xiong said. "China's CPI growth in 2023 and 2024 were both 0.2 percent year-on-year. It can be quite challenging for CPI growth to rebound to around 3 percent in 2025, making a 2 percent target pragmatic."

Zhang Jun, chief economist of CGS International, said: "Many provinces and cities have lowered their CPI expectation targets from around 3 percent to 2 percent. This change should not be interpreted as a reduced policy focus on inflation, but rather a significant shift in the management target of inflation."

Zhang said that in the past, the aim of setting inflation targets was primarily to prevent economic overheating, with the 3 percent CPI target serving as an upper limit

in practice, meaning policies were designed to keep CPI growth from exceeding this threshold.

However, under the goal of promoting a reasonable recovery in prices, a 2 percent CPI growth target may now act as an average inflation goal, suggesting that a reasonable price level should fluctuate around 2 percent, he said, adding that local governments could facilitate this goal by addressing excessive competition.

The tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference in December has called for achieving an optimized mix of "stable growth, stable employment and reasonable price rebounds" as it seeks to expand domestic demand on all fronts.

The National Bureau of Statistics said on Sunday that the country's CPI rose 0.5 percent year-on-year in January, up from a 0.1 percent growth in December, thanks to holiday factors and rising oil prices.

"Inflation is in an early stage of bottoming out and recovering," said Li Chao, chief economist at Zhesang Securities.

Li said that with the implementation of incremental countercyclical policies and the gradual improvement in consumer demand, CPI growth is expected to see a modest rebound in 2025.

"With the Central Economic Work Conference having called for a reasonable recovery in overall price levels, there is still room for monetary policy easing, including reserve requirement ratio cuts and interest rate reductions," Li said.

Dong Yilang contributed to this story.

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Future bright for low-carbon vessels

By TAN YINGZI and
DENG RUI in Chongqing

At 10:46 am on Saturday, a significant milestone was reached in China's inland waterway transportation history as *Minhou*, a new 130-type methanol-diesel dual-fuel distribution vessel, arrived at Chongqing Guoyuan Port from Shanghai.

The ship's maiden voyage marked China's entry into methanol-diesel dual-fuel distribution vessels, paving the way for greener and more low-carbon inland waterway vessels in the country.

It is also the first inland vessel in China equipped for flexible loading between standard and wide containers, enabling seamless transfer of wide containers from railways directly onto inland vessels, thus advancing intermodal transportation.

Built by Chongqing-headquartered Minsheng Industrial (Group) Co, the vessel carried 395 standard containers loaded with a range of goods like chemical raw materials and automotive parts.

80 percent

proportion of Chongqing in the cargo throughput for the entire upper reaches of the Yangtze River

According to the group, China's inland clean energy vessels mainly consist of electric ships and LNG-powered vessels currently, and lack methanol vessels.

In a bid to enhance and modernize the logistics system in Chongqing and bolster high-quality development in the Yangtze River Economic Belt, the company said it will expand the city's fleet of eco-friendly shipping vessels by introducing three additional vessels of the same type this year.

Hailed as a major economic engine, the Yangtze River Economic Belt, covering nine provinces and two municipalities, accounts for more than 40 percent of both the country's population and GDP.

Chongqing, a municipality of 32 million people, is a major industrial base of China and boasts 80 percent of the cargo throughput of the entire upper reaches of the Yangtze River.

According to Feng Wurong, director of the machinery department of Minsheng (Chongqing) Shipping Branch, *Minhou* has a total length of 129.97 meters, a width of 16.26 meters, a depth of 6.6 meters, a draft of 4.6 meters, and a maximum container capacity of 440 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units).

Feng said that in addition to various innovative design optimizations aimed at enhancing operational efficiency, the vessel stands out for its environmental performance due to its use of methanol as fuel.

Methanol combustion does not generate sulfur oxides and is less prone to forming particulate matter. Furthermore, its low-temperature combustion properties contribute to a reduction in nitrogen oxide emissions.

Compared to traditional pure diesel-powered vessels, methanol clean energy-powered vessels emit approximately 96 percent less carbon monoxide and 99 percent less hydrocarbons, with smoke emissions reduced by about 54 percent, Feng said.

Last year, the Ministry of Transport announced the first batch of tasks for constructing a clean-and-low-carbon transportation powerhouse, and Minsheng's inland methanol vessel promotion demonstration project was included.

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With the lifting of the first container at Shanghai Port on Monday, Gemini Cooperation officially launches operations at the port. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Briefly

China's auto exports up 23% in 2024

China's automobile exports maintained growth momentum in 2024, data from the China Passenger Car Association showed on Tuesday. China shipped a total of 6.41 million vehicles overseas last year, surging by 23 percent year-on-year, according to the CPCA. In December 2024, the auto exports soared by 25 percent year-on-year to hit 570,000 units, the association said. Russia, Mexico, and the United Arab Emirates were the leading vehicle export destinations, while the top five countries driving China's vehicle export growth were Russia, the UAE, Brazil, Belgium and Saudi Arabia.

Yuan weakens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, weakened 9 pips to 7.1716 against the US dollar on Tuesday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. In China's

spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day. The central parity rate of the yuan against the US dollar is based on a weighted average of prices offered by market makers before the opening of the interbank market each business day.

CDB loan supports infrastructure

China Development Bank issued 1.53 trillion yuan (\$213.37 billion) in infrastructure loans across the country in 2024, the bank said. The loans were granted for major infrastructure areas such as industrial upgrading, urban development and national security, the bank noted. Last year, China Development Bank strengthened its support for medium and long-term financing, and helped advance the implementation of the 102 key projects listed in the country's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25).

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Tourist trains to better serve silver economy

By ZHU WENQIAN
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China plans to launch more special tourist trains for seniors as the country continues to promote services consumption, and the newly launched trains will not overlap with peak passenger periods such as the Spring Festival travel rush, the Ministry of Commerce said on Tuesday.

Seniors generally have relatively flexible and ample leisure time, and the addition of tourist trains will make full use of nonpeak transportation periods to provide better services for elderly travelers, the ministry said.

"The launch of the special tourist trains for seniors represents a measure to further improve elderly friendly facilities and services and improve the well-being of the graying demographic, while the trains will also provide services for consumers of all age groups," said Kong Dejun, director of the department of trade in services and commerce services at the ministry.

As China continues to expand large-scale equipment upgrades and consumer goods trade in programs, the government plans to

incorporate the transformation of trains designed for senior travelers into the scope of the programs, according to a new guideline issued by nine entities including the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and China State Railway Group Co Ltd on Tuesday.

China has the world's largest passenger railway network, and the development of tourist trains has been rapid, while the operation of such trains in the country is still in its development stage. The number of tourist trains operated in 2024 grew by 20 percent over the previous year, the commerce ministry said.

As of the end of last year, China's aging population — those aged 60 and above — exceeded 300 million, said the National Bureau of Statistics.

"With the expansion of the elderly population and their growing demand for cultural and tourism consumption, the growth potential of tourist trains for seniors is huge," Kong said.

Tourist trains boast features such as flexible routes and multi-point connections, and they usually operate at night. By 2027, China

aims to complete the design of more than 100 high-quality railway routes for elderly tourism, with the operational scale of such trains expected to exceed 2,500 trains annually, China Railway said.

In 2024, China operated a total of 1,860 tourist trains nationwide, a record high, and the number jumped nearly 50 percent over the pre-pandemic period in 2019, the company said.

"The main operation directions of these trains are concentrated in popular tourist destinations and routes such as the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, as well as Yunnan and Heilongjiang provinces. Last year, the tourist trains handled more than 1 million passenger trips," said Zhu Wenzhong, deputy director of the passenger transportation department at China Railway.

He added that China Railway will renovate the equipment and facilities of the tourist trains, highlight the theme of the trains, and optimize the size and layout of the berths, seats and restrooms of passenger trains to make them senior-friendly. The trains will also add necessary facilities such as handrails, oxygen cylinders, first aid equipment and emergency call buttons.

BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

Fast-food giants deepen market reach in 2024

Focus on operational efficiency, product innovation and increased penetration in lower-tier cities to stay ahead

By WANG ZHUOQIONG

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Fast-food giants Yum China and McDonald's China expanded rapidly in 2024, opening record numbers of new stores and deepening their market presence.

With a focus on operational efficiency, product innovation — especially in coffee — and increased reach in lower-tier cities, both companies continued to capture growing consumer demand despite an increasingly competitive landscape.

The expansion aligned with a growing trend in China's restaurant industry.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, total national catering revenue reached 5.57 trillion yuan (\$762.37 billion) in 2024, up 5.3 percent year-on-year.

Zhu Danpeng, an independent food and drink analyst, said there are a few big reasons why Western fast food has grown quickly in China.

"A steady stream of younger consumers means there's always a strong customer base, and with life getting busier, more people are looking for quick and easy meal options. These chains offer good value for money, making them an attractive choice," he said. "On top of that, their brand power, large-scale operations and loyal fan base have only gotten stronger, keeping them ahead in the game."

Yum China Holdings, the operator of KFC, Pizza Hut, and Lavazza in China, posted strong financial results in 2024, achieving record expansion and profitability.

The quick-service chains saw revenue grow 3 percent year-on-year to \$11.3 billion last year, a record.

Same-store sales index reached 97 percent of prior-year levels, while core operating profit grew 12 percent year-on-year.

It opened a record 1,751 net new stores, up 12 percent, bringing its total store count to 16,395. Delivery sales grew 14 percent year-on-year.

KFC remained the company's primary growth engine, with revenue rising 5 percent to \$8.5 billion last year.

The brand expanded aggressively, opening 1,352 net new stores — the most in its history — bringing its total footprint to 11,648 locations across more than 2,200 city and county-level regions in China.

Around 30 percent, or 402 of these new stores were franchised. The total proportion of franchised stores in KFC is 13 percent.

"They help us unlock incremental opportunities in lower-tier cities, remote areas and strategic locations such as highways, campuses and tourist areas," said Adrian Ding, CFO of Yum China. "KFC's growth



A view of a KCOFFEE cafe in Beijing in September. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

potential in China is huge."

Product innovation played a key role in KFC's success.

Its flagship offerings, original recipe chicken and juicy whole chicken, saw double-digit sales growth, while new items, such as the handshaken Americano with frozen pear, a traditional snack for people living in the northern part of the country, generated strong consumer interest, according to the company.

Coffee is a key growth driver for KFC.

KCOFFEE, the brand's coffee arm, sold 250 million cups in 2024, a 30 percent year-on-year increase.

The brand also expanded its cafes from 50 locations in 2023 to 700 in 2024, with plans to reach 1,300 by the end of 2025.

"The synergy between KCOFFEE and KFC stores generated incremental sales and profit growth," Ding said.

Joey Wat, CEO of Yum China, referred to last year as "an inflection point" for Pizza Hut.

Its revenue rose 2 percent to \$2.26 billion and profit stood at \$157 million, up 19 percent. The brand opened a record 412 net new stores. Among these, 42 are franchised stores. Total store count reached 3,724 locations.

Pizza Hut's repositioning toward a mass-market offering delivered strong results.

The brand expanded its pricing



McCafe sets up a characteristic stall in Shanghai in May. CHEN YUYU / FOR CHINA DAILY

range, with sales of pizzas priced under 50 yuan surging 50 percent year-over-year. The introduction of Pizza Dough Burgers in April gained traction, contributing to a low single-digit percentage of total sales, according to the company.

The WOW model, designed to attract younger consumers with a streamlined, lower-cost format, continued its rollout, surpassing

200 locations in 2024.

Lavazza, Yum China's high-end coffee brand, pursued a dual-track growth strategy through physical stores and retail sales. Retail sales grew over 30 percent and turned profitable for the first time, according to the company.

Wat said the company remains excited about the significant growth opportunities in China.

"With tailored store models, we are expanding through both company-owned stores and franchise stores and are on track to achieve our goal of 20,000 stores by 2026," she said.

Meanwhile, McDonald's China opened 917 new stores in 2024, bringing its total store count to 6,820. It means at least two new stores on average every day in the past year.

McDonald's China accounted for about 70 percent of all new store openings in the company's international licensed markets, up 3 percentage points from the previous year. More than half of McDonald's global new stores were opened in China last year.

In the fourth quarter, McDonald's International Developmental Licensed Markets segment, which includes China, recorded a 4.1 percent increase in comparable sales, while the United States market saw a 1.4 percent decline. For the full year, the international operated markets segment decreased 0.2 percent, while the US market increased by the same percentage.

Looking ahead, CFO of McDonald's, Ian Borden, said at its fourth-quarter earnings call: "We expect to open more than 1,600 restaurants in our IDL segment, including about 1,000 in China."

"Globally, we plan to open about 2,200 restaurants this year," he added.

The company expects a net addition of nearly 1,800 stores globally, contributing to an overall unit growth of 4 percent.

McDonald's is also making a strategic push into China's coffee market.

Starting Feb 5, about 7,000 McDonald's restaurants nationwide will upgrade their brewed coffee offerings to freshly extracted coffee, accompanied by a one-week free beverage giveaway campaign. The upgraded coffee will use 100 percent Arabica beans, said the company.

The initiative represents a major upgrade to McDonald's coffee business and a competitive move in China's evolving coffee market, said industry experts.

By leveraging its extensive store network and strong brand influence, the company aims to expand its presence in China's coffee sector.

Consumer demand for coffee in breakfast consumption continues to rise. According to research from consumer insights firm GenBridge Capital, the penetration rate of coffee in breakfast beverages has increased significantly in China's urban markets.

In new first-tier cities, coffee's share of breakfast beverages rose from 9 percent three years ago to 15 percent in 2024.

"As more Chinese consumers develop a taste for coffee, their expectations are shifting toward higher quality," said analyst Zhu Danpeng.

"McDonald's is making a smart move by upgrading its coffee to meet this rising demand. It's not just about better coffee — it's about strengthening customer loyalty and standing out in an increasingly competitive market. This step will be key to McDonald's positioning in China's fast-growing coffee scene."

It's crunch time for global, domestic industry bigwigs as consumers snack up

By WANG ZHUOQIONG

Consumers in China continue to show a strong appetite for snacks, with global and domestic brands expanding their footprint and innovating to meet evolving needs.

Global food and beverage giant PepsiCo Inc has gained market share in the country's savory snack segment over the past year, highlighting sustained consumer demand for indulgent snacking, according to its 2024 financial results.

The company reported a 14 percent increase in operating profit for Asia Pacific, Australia, New Zealand and China in 2024, reinforcing its confidence in long-term international growth.

PepsiCo continues to ramp up its investment in China.

Last year, it broke ground on its first food production base in the northwest, a \$1.3 billion facility in Shaanxi province. In September, the company launched a food production base in Shandong province, fea-

turing automated potato chip production lines with an annual capacity of 25,000 metric tons.

This January, PepsiCo entered into a partnership with Jiangsu Rilong Food Co to invest in a new factory focused on developing its oat brand Quaker in the Chinese cereal nutrition market.

Major Chinese snack brands are responding to market demand with expansion and production upgrades.

Qiaqia Food, a snack producer in Anhui province, launched its 11th plant in Baotou, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, in November, boosting capacity to 39,000 tons of sunflower seeds and 6,000 tons of nuts annually. The facility is expected to serve northern provinces, ensuring supply chain efficiency ahead of the festival shopping season.

The snack company reported 4.76 billion yuan (\$651.5 million) in revenue for the first three quarters of 2024, up 6.24 percent year-on-year, with a net profit increase of

23.79 percent to 626 million yuan.

Meanwhile, Yanjin Shop, a snack maker based in Jiangxi province, was ramping up production for the Spring Festival peak sales season. The company recorded 3.86 billion yuan in revenue for the first three quarters of 2024, a 28.5 percent increase, with net profit up 24.5 percent to 490 million yuan. Its third-quarter revenue alone rose 26.2 percent year-over-year to 1.4 billion yuan.

The broader snack market in China is also seeing shifts in consumer behavior.

According to Mintel Group, a research institute, retail sales of nut and seed snacks grew 3.5 percent in 2023 to 140.6 billion yuan and are projected to reach 180.4 billion yuan by 2028, with a compound annual growth rate of 5.1 percent.

However, the potato chip segment slowed, growing 3.2 percent in 2023 to 28.9 billion yuan and is forecast to grow to 36.7 billion yuan by 2028, or a CAGR of 4.9 percent.

"Health concerns are reshaping

the category, with brands needing to focus on innovation in nutrition to sustain growth," said Pepper Peng, senior analyst, China Insights at Mintel.

New product trends suggest rising consumer interest in functional snacks.

Mintel data showed that over the past three years, the fastest-growing claims (information claimed by the producer) in nut snacks include added ingredients, convenience, and naturalness. Antioxidant claims surged, while small, portable packaging saw a 337.2 percent growth rate.

In crisped and puffed snacks, alternative ingredients such as sweet potatoes, taro and lotus root have gained traction, with their use rising over 200 percent.

Functional claims have been the fastest-growing category in crisped snacks, up 414.9 percent from 2021 to 2023, signaling a shift toward health-oriented snacking.

Despite the strong growth, the industry faces challenges as con-



A view of Lay's gift boxes at a Sam's Club outlet in Shanghai in January 2024. YI BAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

sumers become more health-conscious. "Regulatory trends pushing for reduced salt, sugar and oil content are prompting brands to reformulate products and develop healthier alternatives," said Peng.

The competitive landscape will likely favor companies that improve craft and ingredients, while also leveraging local flavors and innovative formats to lift health benefits of their products, she added.

COMMENT

Editorials

Tariffs may be 'a beautiful word' but they are also heavy stones US is dropping on its feet

In a move that risks a multi-front trade war, US President Donald Trump raised US tariffs on steel and aluminum imports on Monday to a flat 25 percent. The tariff rate, to go into effect on March 12, will target millions of tons of steel and aluminum imports from countries such as Canada, Mexico, Brazil, the Republic of Korea and China.

"It's 25 percent without exceptions or exemptions," President Trump said as he signed the executive orders for the levies.

The move comes as an extension of Section 232 tariffs Trump instigated to protect domestic steel and aluminum producers on national security grounds during his first term in office in 2018, and despite the World Trade Organization ruling in December 2022 that those earlier tariffs violated global trade rules.

Moreover, President Trump said he would follow Monday's action in the next two days with announcements about reciprocal tariffs on all countries that impose duties on US goods.

In an era of economic globalization, it is natural that trade disputes should arise from time to time between trading partners. China insists that such disputes should be resolved using the WTO dispute settlement mechanism, rather than through unilateral moves such as the imposition of punitive tariffs. This is because trade and tariff wars have no winners. Even the US will feel the pain.

Studies have shown that while the metal tariffs imposed by the first Trump administration helped US steel and aluminum producers, they ended up hurting the broader US economy because they raised prices for many other industries that buy steel and aluminum to make other things, such as industrial machinery, car parts, food packaging and other products.

According to the US International Trade Commission, as cited by The New York Times, industries that consume steel and aluminum saw their production shrink by \$3.48 billion in 2021 as a result of those higher costs — more than offsetting the \$2.25 billion of additional US production of steel and aluminum.

And in 2020, researchers from Harvard University and the University of California, Davis, found that although Trump's tariffs created 1,000 jobs in the aluminum and steel industries, they reduced employment elsewhere by 75,000. A similar scenario will unfold, if the US chooses to escalate its tariff wars during the second Trump administration.

Economists also warn that lower-income households in the US, who are already suffering from high costs of living because of inflation, can expect an even heavier burden because essentials such as food and energy are most exposed to the import tariffs Trump has threatened to impose in the coming days.

The steel and aluminum tariffs will hit Canada and Mexico the hardest, with the former being the No 1 supplier of foreign steel and aluminum to the US, and the latter, the No 3 steel supplier. The impact of the latest US tariffs on China will likely be limited given that the country accounted for less than 2 percent of US steel imports last year, making it the 10th largest supplier of steel to the US.

Still, China stands ready to take resolute measures to safeguard its rights and interests, as it has already done previously. It is China's consistent position that while trying its best to avert an escalation in the trade disputes, it will firmly oppose any move by the US to politicize trade issues.

In a virtual interview at the World Economic Forum last month, Trump said he looked forward to "getting along with China", and expressed his belief that the two countries will "have a very good relationship".

That is indeed possible, given that fostering major-country dynamics featuring peaceful coexistence, overall stability and balanced development is a key goal of China.

The past practices of the US have proved that the beggar-thy-neighbor approach of protectionism will not solve its deep-seated problems; it will only disrupt the global industry and supply chains, roll the world economy, and undermine the interests of all countries, including itself.

Since the end of the Cold War, economic globalization has enabled thriving trade that has underpinned the rapid development of the world economy. As the world's two largest economies and significant economic and trade partners, China and the US should engage in dialogue to resolve their trade disputes and strengthen their communication to help chart a course for the healthy development of the global economy in order to realize universal benefits and common prosperity.

Win-win nature of Sino-UK ties evident

That Sino-UK relations have warmed up since UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer took office in early July last year, particularly after the meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Starmer on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro in November, at the height of the then US administration's efforts to drive a wedge between US allies and China, demonstrates a tacit understanding between them that they should resist efforts to destabilize their relations.

In their November meeting, the two leaders agreed that the two countries should strengthen dialogue, enhance mutual understanding and carry out exchanges and cooperation with each other. This set a clear direction for the healthy development of bilateral ties.

It was under the guidance of their heads of state diplomacy that the 11th China-UK Economic and Financial Dialogue was held in Beijing in January. The dialogue mechanism had been suspended since 2019. The event, cochaired by Vice-Premier He Lifeng and visiting UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves, produced 69 win-win outcomes related to bilateral cooperation in the fields of finance, trade, industry, agriculture, technology and energy.

During the dialogue, both sides expressed their willingness to uphold multilateralism and economic globalization, and their commitment to an open world economy and the rules-based multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization at its core.

Among European countries, the United Kingdom is China's third-largest trading partner, second-largest investment destination and third-largest source of foreign investment in Europe, and China is the UK's largest trading partner in Asia.

Both Beijing and London believe that China-UK cooperation is conducive to the development of both countries, and working together to maintain secure, stable and smooth global industry and supply chains serves their common interests. It is good to see both countries oppose decoupling, and agree to reduce barriers to two-way investment and promote a nondiscriminatory and open business environment.

Against this backdrop, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to the UK, as the first stop on his six-day tour to five countries starting on Wednesday, provides the opportunity for the two countries to discuss ways to deepen their economic and trade cooperation and strengthen their international coordination on the world stage.

Wang is scheduled to co-chair the China-UK Strategic Dialogue, which has been suspended since 2018. Linking ministries, departments and enterprises from the two sides to implement specific exchange and cooperation programs, the 10th such dialogue — along with many other exchange mechanisms that have been resuscitated after years of hibernation due to various reasons — is expected to add more meat to the bones of their cooperation framework.

By transforming their common understanding into concrete actions the two countries can release the untapped potential of their complementary economies.

This year marks the 21st anniversary of the formation of the China-UK comprehensive strategic partnership. Although the two countries differ in history, culture, values, and social systems, they share extensive common interests that provide solid ground for cooperation if they objectively view each other's development and do not let other countries derail their relations.

As Xi said during his meeting with the UK leader, the two countries enjoy vast space for cooperation in such areas as trade and investment, clean energy, financial services, healthcare and people's well-being, which should be further expanded to better benefit the people of both nations.

To that end, the two sides should adhere to the principles of mutual respect, open cooperation, and mutual learning, strive for mutual benefit and win-win outcomes, and jointly write a new chapter of healthy and stable bilateral relations.

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Luo Jie



Opinion Line

Country can overcome challenges by adhering to top-level guidance

Against the backdrop of sluggish global transnational investment and intensifying international competition for investment, China faces a grim and complex situation in attracting foreign investment. The action plan for stabilizing foreign investment and other arrangements for stabilizing foreign investment that the State Council adopted on Monday, transmit a clear signal that the country will make great efforts to attract foreign investment.

In 2024, China's actual use of foreign capital was \$26.25 billion yuan (\$113.06 billion), down 27.1 percent year-on-year, but at the same time it saw 59,080 foreign-funded enterprises newly established, an increase of 9.9 percent year-on-year, which is sound evidence that China is still a hot destination for foreign capital.

To attract the inflow of foreign capital, it was made clear at Monday's

executive meeting that China will deepen trials of opening-up in relevant fields, implement the full lifting of restrictions on foreign investment in the manufacturing sector, improve the comprehensive pilot opening-up of the service sector, and expand the scope of industries to encourage foreign investment.

China introduced measures to expand opening-up in telecommunications, medical care and other fields last year, and comprehensively removed restrictions on foreign investment access in the manufacturing sector, with the number of nationwide restrictions on foreign investment access reduced from 31 to 29. Such measures have helped a lot in attracting foreign investment.

The reiteration at the meeting that the country is committed to giving equal treatment to domestic and foreign enterprises in government procurement, broadening financing

channels for foreign enterprises, strengthening intellectual property protection, and providing better services for foreign-funded projects and providing more convenience for the exchange of foreign workers in terms of entry, exit, stay and residence, is also a clear crystallization of China's firm resolve to open wider to the outside and more deeply integrate itself into the world economy and rules-based system.

For a developing country such as China with a vast territory, a large population and uneven development, economic development has never been an easy task, but as long as the country maintains a pragmatic and problem-oriented approach, which constitutes a key part of Xi Jinping thought on the economy, any problem that arises in the course of its economic development will not be a problem.

— WU YUXUE, CHINA DAILY

Rush of vitality drives changes in mobility

The 40-day Spring Festival travel rush of 2025 reached the halfway point on Tuesday. During the period, the national passenger flow is expected to reach 9 billion person-times, an increase of approximately 7 percent compared with last year.

The nationwide population flow is a key factor in the development of the country. This year, the passenger volume of railway and civil aviation is expected to exceed 510 million and 90 million respectively, both reaching historical highs. The orderly migration during the Spring Festival travel rush is inseparable from the continuous improvement of China's transportation infrastructure network and reflects the tremendous

economic and social development of the country.

When the Spring Festival travel rush first emerged with migrant workers flocking back to their hometowns to celebrate Chinese New Year with their families, China faced a shortage of transportation infrastructure and limited transport capacity. With economic development and deepening reforms, highways, water transport, civil aviation, and railways have all been significantly improved, gradually forming a multi-level travel system.

In recent years, China has built the world's largest high-speed railway network and highway network, as well as world-class port and airport

clusters. The total mileage of the comprehensive transportation network exceeds 6 million kilometers, providing strong support for public travel.

Today, the Spring Festival travel rush is no longer just synonymous with returning home for Chinese New Year; reverse reunions and tourism during the travel rush have become new trends. Many elders come to the cities where their children work to celebrate the festival. Ice and snow tours, winter escape tours, traditional customs tours, and cultural tours have become travel trends. The form of family reunions has quietly changed with the passage of time.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

What They Say

The real and present danger to the world

In an op-ed "The Real Threat to American Prosperity", published by the UK newspaper Financial Times on Saturday, Nobel-winning economist Daron Acemoglu analyzed the influence of the United States' trade wars and tech industry hubris on the country, and how loss of faith in US institutions could spiral further.

With the Donald Trump administration's domestic and foreign policies aggravating the risks and uncertainties faced by the world in an unpredictable way, the US included, the professor of economics of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology called on the US people to think of the possible consequences of such a situation, and reflect on how they should respond to it.

Reviewing the US' development since early last century, Acemoglu observed that a key pillar of what is regarded as the American Century has been the country's ability to shape the world order in a way that benefits its own economy, including its financial and technology sectors.

He argues that the series of "America first" policies the incumbent US

administration has adopted over the three weeks since its inauguration — including weaponizing tariffs, withdrawing from international pacts and organizations and coveting other countries' territories — indicate the US is trying to benefit its own economy by undermining the world order it established. Instead of making America great again, that will only aggravate the cracks in the pillars that held the US aloft.

While the world is asking why that could be allowed to happen, the MIT economist correctly pointed out that the root cause lies in the growing dysfunction of US institutions, which he attributes to the partisan dogfight between the Democrats and the Republicans over the past years, which, as he said, has "shattered people's trust in these institutions".

The institutional dysfunction has resulted in the US political system losing its self-correction ability and the concentration of power in the hands of the uber-rich.

also exert increasing influence over politics and people's lives. The US economy has generally grown rapidly since 1980, but about half of Americans have not benefited accordingly, causing them to feel betrayed.

So people choose not to compromise, a crucial factor that makes American democracy work, aggravating the polarization of the US society. Partially thanks to the strong influence of tycoon-controlled new media and the tech giants, voters have become more willing to support people with little political experience precisely because they are deeply dissatisfied with the status quo and believe that the current system needs to be radically changed. But this has only turned the situation from bad to worse.

Before the US addresses its own structural and institutional problems, which is becoming increasingly difficult to do as the disordering of the US institutions has fallen into a self-reinforcing vicious cycle, the world will continually suffer from its failings.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Zhou Shuchun

DeepSeek shrugs at Sputnik metaphor

After DeepSeek's groundbreaking debut, some commentators likened its significance to a "Sputnik Moment", highlighting its epochal impact. But the state-of-the-art Chinese-made generative AI model itself seems unimpressed by the analogy.

Intriguingly, when asked about its view on DeepSeek marking a "Sputnik Moment" in AI, the model acknowledged the symbolic importance of the technological breakthrough and a shifting competitive landscape, saying China has risen from being a "follower" to a "parallel runner" or even a leader in certain AI domains. Yet it emphasized the need to "avoid being swayed by label-based narratives", urging people to "stay calm amid possible over-praise or rhetoric meant to talk China down" and stressing that "the inclusive nature of technology is of more historical significance than narratives of mere competition".

Of course, the model's response does not represent the official stance of the Chinese AI company. Nevertheless, it offers valuable insights. As an algorithmic synthesis of comprehensive online discourse analysis, the answer carries symbolic weight.

Sputnik, the first artificial satellite launched by the Soviet Union in 1957 — along with the country's intercontinental missile tests that same year and Yuri Gagarin's Vostok 1 spaceflight four years later — constitutes what historians call the "Sputnik Moment". That marked a pivotal shift in defense technology and arms race during the Cold War. The 83.6-kilogram satellite orbiting Earth delivered a psychological blow to and put strategic pressure on the US, because it meant the US lagged behind the Soviet Union in critical space technology.

The space race that ensued not only intensified Cold War rivalries but also catalyzed, even if unintentionally, a new technological era centered on space exploration. Though driven by competition, breakthroughs in aerospace, computing, and materials science laid the foundation for modern infrastructure such as global communications and weather monitoring, profoundly influencing socioeconomic progress.

Labeling current developments as a "Sputnik Moment" may not inherently carry malice, but it aligns with Western media's penchant for dramatizing events. While the Cold War is history, the vision of a shared human future endures. If DeepSeek signals a new phase in AI development and competi-

tion, let us hope that innovation will bring transformative benefits to humankind's broader well-being. Some Western media outlets have also likened DeepSeek's rise to an "earthquake", claiming it has "lifted the veil of secrecy shrouding AI", "collapsed the US narrative of computational supremacy" and "shattered Western illusions of containing China". Such rhetoric inevitably evokes China's recent advancements in the sixth-generation fighter aircraft, Huawei's semiconductor breakthroughs and its unparalleled

tech-manufacturing ecosystem. For the Chinese public weary of "small yard, high fence" restrictions and "decoupling" attempts, the technological and cultural milestones around Chinese New Year have indeed been a morale booster. But one thing is certain — attempts to "contain China" will be futile, because its rise is unstoppable. With a 5 percent growth rate, China leads the world's major economies and continues to account for about 30 percent of global growth despite the economic challenges at home. Simultaneously, the country is becoming a hub for top global talents and innovations, steadily advancing toward the frontiers of science and technology.

More encouragingly, DeepSeek's feedback reflects a growing, measured confidence within China's public discourse. As one Chinese economist noted, DeepSeek's success is not about "China surpassing the US", but rather "open-source models surpassing closed systems". This open ethos, mirrored in China's expanding unilateral visa-free

tech-manufacturing ecosystem.

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policies, signals a maturing embrace of global collaboration.

DeepSeek's co-founder Liang Wenfeng describes his entry into AI as a natural progression for an engineer driven by curiosity about machine learning's limits. The model embodies boundless exploration and relentless innovation. Liang once said, "Our criteria for talent have always been passion and curiosity ... Many care more about research than money." Such values will have profound implications for China's tech trajectory.

To conclude, a poignant remark from DeepSeek-R1 to a user bears repeating: "The long march of technology has no finish line, only successive starting points. Maintaining 'crisis awareness while leading' far outweighs basking in 'applause while catching up' — for truly great innovations are born not in celebratory toasts, but in laboratories where the champagne stays unopened."

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JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Huang Yiping

China has to embrace innovation-driven future

China's rapid development in the electric vehicle and new energy sectors has garnered widespread attention globally. However, some economists have raised concerns about whether China can identify a sustainable pillar for its economic growth following the recent slowdown in the real estate sector.

These contrasting perspectives indicate China is undergoing a critical transition: It is no longer just a low-cost manufacturing hub but also evolving into an innovation-driven economy.

China's entry into the new phase of economic development gives rise to several questions: Can it establish high-quality high-tech industries to sustain long-term growth? Will innovation become the main driver of the Chinese economy? And what factors will facilitate this transformation?

China's per capita GDP was just \$156 when reform and opening-up were launched in 1978. But despite being a low-income country, China was one of the most competitive economies due to its low labor and other costs. For decades, this low-cost advantage fueled exports and industrial growth, which in turn increased China's per capita GDP to more than \$13,000 by 2024, just shy of the high-income threshold defined by the World Bank.

This means Chinese people's living standards have significantly improved. But this also means overall costs have risen. Low labor cost countries such as Vietnam, Bangladesh and India have attracted many low-end manufacturing units which China once dominated. As such, China should shift from producing low-cost goods to manufacturing higher-value, innovation-driven products to maintain its global competitiveness.

Such a plan would not only bolster China's economic ties with developing countries but also reinforce its image as a responsible global leader in the green transition.

China's demographic dividends began declining about a decade ago. Today, 15 percent of China's population is above 65, and the percentage is rising. A rapidly rising aging population reduces a country's workforce and increases the economic burden of eldercare, posing a significant challenge to sustained growth. Lessons from Japan, which faced similar demographic challenges during its "lost decades", suggest that improvement in productivity and technological innovation could mitigate the impact of a shrinking workforce.

For more than 40 years, China's economic success was tied to globalization. Its exports-driven economy thrived in a world of open markets and foreign investment. But recent years have seen the US resorting to trade protectionism and imposing punitive tariffs on Chinese goods, which have impacted global trade and the Chinese economy. As globalization retreats, China should prepare to navigate a more hostile global environment while seeking new channels for economic cooperation.

In fact, China has shifted from quantity-driven growth to innovation-driven development. Technological advancements in fields such as artificial intelligence, big data and cloud

computing are creating new opportunities for growth. According to labor economists and digital technology experts quoted in "China 2049: Economic Challenges of a Rising Global Power" — a joint study by the National School of Development of Peking University and the Brookings Institution — AI could offset the economic drag by significantly boosting productivity. But effectively leveraging AI requires systemic innovation, not piecemeal investments, in algorithms and hardware.

While markets should be allowed to play the decisive role in allocating resources, strategic government intervention is essential for overcoming market failures, particularly in nascent industries. China's success in the EV sector, thanks to policy support for developing batteries and building charging stations and smart vehicles, shows how government support can enable companies to "leapfrog" into global leadership. However, some poor practices — such as blanket subsidies or local governments propping up failing enterprises — can distort markets and waste resources.

Private enterprises have been the backbone of China's economic growth, accounting for more than 70 percent of technological innovation and 80 percent of urban employment. To sustain this momentum, the government needs to do more to develop a level playing field for private companies. Recent policies promoting private companies' participation in major national projects are a step in the right direction.

Moreover, innovation requires significant financial backing. Venture capital, private equity and government investments must work synergistically to support start-ups and R&D-inten-

sive enterprises. Policies encouraging patient capital, such as angel investment and long-term funding, can help turn cutting-edge research into commercially viable industries.

China's dominance in EVs, batteries and solar panels aligns with the global push for reducing carbon emissions. While Western markets are becoming increasingly protectionist, China's future lies in partnerships with the countries of the Global South. A "Global South green development plan" could give developing countries access to affordable green technologies while reducing China's overcapacity in key industries. Such a plan would not only bolster China's economic ties with developing countries but also reinforce its image as a responsible global leader in the green transition.

China has reached a critical juncture where it has to change the economic growth model. Innovation, supported by effective industrial policy, dynamic private enterprises and global partnerships, is the key to realizing sustainable growth.

With US tariffs and geopolitical tensions highlighting the need for resilience, China must focus on its long-term strengths of a vast talent pool, commitment to technological advancement and willingness to adapt to the changing situations. The transition from a low-cost manufacturing powerhouse to an innovation-driven economy will not be easy, but the rewards — a prosperous, sustainable, and globally influential China — make it a journey worth undertaking.

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Zhang Zhixin

Ishiba's visit to gratify Washington at cost of neighbors

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba paid his first official visit to the US from Feb 6 to 8, during which he met with US President Donald Trump. Although Trump promised to deepen bilateral economic and security cooperation, he did not rule out the possibility of imposing extra tariffs on Japanese goods in the near future.

The problem is that, by currying security favor with the US, Ishiba is further complicating China-Japan relations.

Ishiba visited the US at a time when domestic and international situations are undergoing dramatic changes. During his 2024 presidential campaign, Trump asserted that he values the US-Japan alliance. But he also said he expects Japan to take on a greater share of the defense cost. Trump's expectations created a major problem for Ishiba because at the time, he was leading (and still leads) a minority government with a falling job approval rating.

Before Ishiba's visit to the US, some Japanese media outlets raised concerns over the timing of the visit. First, the Japanese side is worried that because of the Israel-Palestine conflict and the Ukraine crisis, as well as the tariff war the US administration has newly launched against Canada, Mexico and China, US-Japan ties may not be on the new US administration's radar, which means Japan is strategically less important than other issues for the US at the moment.

During his meeting with Ishiba, Trump pledged to lead US-Japan ties toward a "new golden age". Ishiba and Trump even managed to build some trust between the two sides. In fact, Ishiba praised Trump in a joint news conference, saying the US president is "very sincere and very powerful".

China has been warning the US and Japan to not interfere in China's internal affairs, which the Taiwan question is.

Second, the Japanese side is also worried that if Trump were to continue the tariff war, Japan could become his next target, not least because Japan had a \$68.5 billion trade surplus in goods with the US last year. As a top US official once said, if you are not on the table, you will be on the menu. In the meeting with Trump, Ishiba also emphasized that Japan has led foreign direct investments in the US for the past five years and highlighted Japanese companies' record in creating jobs in the US.

Ishiba also promised to take concrete steps to ease US concerns over the trade surplus, including increasing Japanese investments in the US to an "unprecedented" \$1 trillion, importing "record volumes" of American liquefied natural gas by establishing a joint venture with Alaska oil and gas companies, and possibly importing bioethanol, ammonia and other resources from the US.

Even though Trump said he wanted "equality" in US-Japan trade, he didn't rule out the possibility of levying tariffs on Japanese goods, but believes the issue can be resolved without "punitive action".

Third, the Japanese side believes the US-Japan security treaty is the cornerstone of Japan's post-war foreign policy, and Japan needs the so-called nuclear umbrella of the US. The joint statement must have given Ishiba some relief, as it says that the US-Japan alliance remains the cornerstone of peace, security and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific and beyond. The US also emphasized its unwavering commitment to the defense of Japan.

However, Trump's reassurance has come for a price, as Ishiba had to pledge that Japan would increase its defense budget to 2 percent of GDP by fiscal 2027. At their meeting, the two leaders discussed how to deepen cooperation in space, and seek new joint business opportunities in fields such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing and semiconductors. In particular, Japan has committed to purchasing additional US high-tech equipment.

And fourth, the Ishiba government has adopted a dual strategy that seeks to maintain strong ties with both the US and China, which requires Japan to balance economic interests and security commitments, which may be a big challenge for Ishiba. According to the joint leaders' statement, the two countries discussed the Diaoyu Islands and South China Sea issues, and the Taiwan question.

China has been warning the US and Japan to not interfere in China's internal affairs, which the Taiwan question is. While Ishiba hinted at adopting a pragmatic approach toward Sino-Japanese relations, enhancing security cooperation with the US will obviously impede his efforts.

Another alarming factor for Ishiba is that, to everyone's astonishment, Trump announced in the news conference that Nippon Steel would invest in the US steel sector instead of acquiring the United States Steel Corporation. As a matter of fact, Trump had earlier said that he would block the acquisition, as he saw the issue as a matter of US national interest and economic security. This shows that for Trump, there is no difference between Japan and China when it comes to the US' economic interests.

Even US allies like the European Union and Japan could face tough sanctions or tariffs whenever the current US administration feels it is necessary to impose them. Therefore, it would be unwise of Japan to try and appease US government by increasing investments in the US and importing more US goods, because he can never be satisfied.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

DJOOMART OTORBAEV

Rail bridge links nations along the Silk Road

The China-Europe railway bridge is delivering tangible benefits to countries in Central Asia and the South Caucasus

China-Europe freight rail services experienced significant growth last year. In 2024, trains made 19,000 trips, representing a 10 percent increase compared to the previous year, and transported over 2 million TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) of cargo, a 9 percent rise year-on-year.



Launched in 2011 as a flagship program of China's Belt and Road Initiative, this service now connects 227 cities across 25 European countries and over 100 cities in 11 Asian countries. Since 2011, the transcontinental rail network has transported more than 11 million TEUs of goods, valued at over \$420 billion.

The Eurasian railway revolution is primarily fueled by increased trade between the large economies, China and the European Union. Data from China's General Administration of Customs indicates that trade between China and the EU increased in 2024 despite ongoing trade frictions and a stagnating European economy. The bilateral trade volume reached 5.59 trillion yuan (\$762 billion), marking a 1.6 percent rise compared to the previous year. The EU continued to be China's second-largest trading partner, after the Association of South-east Asian Nations.

The China-EU railway bridge has delivered clear benefits to the countries along its route in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, especially the landlocked nations. Improved transport accessibility is expected to promote economic growth, create jobs and attract investment. Additionally, enhanced transport connectivity facilitates scientific, cultural and

humanitarian exchanges, further strengthening the cooperation of all nations involved. Here are some successful examples implemented last year.

In November, a shipment of electric vehicles was successfully transported from Chengdu in Sichuan province to Tbilisi, Georgia, using a combination of rail, sea and road transportation. This journey crossed through Kazakhstan and the Caspian Sea. Launched in July, the new route follows the Middle Corridor, an essential trade pathway through Central Asia and the South Caucasus. This corridor provides a reliable alternative to traditional shipping routes, and this new route has become increasingly important considering the geopolitical uncertainties.

Rail freight between China and Kazakhstan is experiencing significant growth. According to the Ministry of Transport of Kazakhstan, freight volume reached a historical high of over 32 million metric tons by the end of 2024. Kazakhstan's exports grew by 1 million tons, totaling 13.7 million tons, with the main products being iron and non-ferrous ores, ferrous and non-ferrous metals and grain. A key factor in this growth was the opening of Kazakhstan's terminal at the Xi'an



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

dry port. In 2024, more than 300 container trains passed through this terminal and the port of Aktau, which is 30 times more than the previous year.

In 2024, China and Uzbekistan

unveiled a series of new rail routes. The inaugural container block train departed from Jinhua Railway Station in East China and passed through Altynkol in Kazakhstan before reaching Nazarbek, near

Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. This train, which consisted of 50 standard 40-foot containers, traveled 6,250 kilometers in just 12 days. On Jan 1, 2025, a high-speed freight train service was launched, connecting Xi'an,

the capital of Shaanxi province in Northwest China, with Tashkent.

This train also carried 50 containers and covered over 4,600 km, transporting large household appliances, textiles and chemicals from Xi'an to Tashkent via Horgos in China and Saryagach in Kazakhstan. The new route significantly reduced delivery times from eight to 10 days to just five to six days.

The construction of the new high-mountains China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway line began on Dec 27, 2024, to accommodate the rapidly increasing traffic. This railway will reduce the distance between China and European countries by 900 km. The new railway branch will stretch 486 km, with over 300 km crossing through Kyrgyzstan. Construction is planned for 18 railway stations, 81 bridges with an overall length of 26.1 km, and 41 tunnels with a total length of 120.39 km. The combined length of the bridges and tunnels will be 146.49 km, accounting for 47 percent of the stretch within Kyrgyzstan. The annual cargo trans-

portation volume along this new corridor is anticipated to reach 15 million tons. Additionally, there will be opportunities to organize regular passenger transport services.

The new railway lines are expected to converge in Central Asia with the North-South railways currently under construction. These railways will connect Russia and Central Asia through Afghanistan, Pakistan, Azerbaijan and Iran to the deep-water ports of the Indian Ocean. If this plan is implemented, the intersection of the East-West and North-South railway routes in Central Asia will transform the region into a major transport hub for the whole of Eurasia.

The China-Europe railway bridge is a crucial lifeline for the nations along the Silk Road. Its significance goes beyond mere transportation; it symbolizes a revival of ancient trade routes, fostering economic growth and cultural exchanges between the East and the West. This modern marvel connects cities and people, enhances collaboration, and opens doors to countless opportunities for development and prosperity in the region. Further development of the railway network will allow all countries along the legendary route to trade and cooperate, thus increasing the competitiveness of all parties involved. As a result, the arrival of a new Silk Road will be imminent.

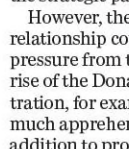
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MARCOS CORDEIRO PIRES

Durable bond

Brazil and China have forged their partnership for the 21st century over many decades

During Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Brazil in November 2024, 37 memorandums of understanding were signed with the Brazilian government on cooperation in a wide range of areas. There are many synergies between Brazil and China, particularly related to the New Growth Acceleration Program, specifically in energy and transportation, in which Chinese companies have achieved a high level of expertise. Cooperation will also advance in other areas, such as the reindustrialization of Brazil, the digital economy, environmental sustainability and telecommunications. There is a well-paved path to strengthening the strategic partnership.



However, there is fear that this relationship could be affected by pressure from third parties. The rise of the Donald Trump administration, for example, is generating much apprehension worldwide. In addition to promising a trade war against partners and adversaries, he has challenged the international order by considering the annexation of Canada, the resumption of control over the Panama Canal, and the occupation of Greenland. In addition, he has defended the doctrine of "Manifest Destiny"; a supposed divine mandate for the expansionism of the United States. As he did in his first term, he will apply the "Monroe Doctrine", which presupposes "America for Americans" with a view to rejecting the presence of extra-regional powers in Latin America, such as China and Russia. Finally, he promises to punish the BRICS countries if they manage to move forward in creating alternative

means of payment to the US dollar.

The mindset of the Washington elite is to recreate the Cold War against China and to force its hemispheric neighbors to take sides with it, as happened during its disputes with the Soviet Union. However, times have changed. The Soviet Union's economic presence was limited to its surroundings and to the socialist countries of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, which is nothing compared to the role played by China in the global economy. During the Cold War, the US was Latin America's largest trading partner, which is not the case today.

Since 2009, China has been Brazil's leading trading partner. Brazil exports oil, soybeans, iron ore, meat, cotton and other commodities to China, importing mainly intermediate goods used in local industrial processes and non-durable consumer goods and, recently, electric and hybrid cars. In this sense, two considerations must be made.

The first is that trade with China creates a large surplus used to offset deficits with other countries and keep Brazil's external accounts up to date. Without this surplus, the country would have already fallen into yet another of the many exchange rate crises it has had in its contemporary history.

Second, it is essential to consider that the supply of goods produced in China has brought a competitive shock to local industry, forcing down the price of many consumer goods. In 1990, a pair of regular sneakers cost the equivalent of a minimum wage. In 1993, a 20-inch color tube television cost around \$400. Today, consumers can buy a 50-inch flat-screen TV with an internet connection for this price. The same logic applies to the automo-

bile sector. Before the arrival of Chinese vehicles, multinational automakers had already established themselves here, selling models with little technology and at an absurd price. A car model that sells for \$28,000 in the US is sold in Brazil for the equivalent of \$42,000. The arrival of brands such as Chery, GWM and BYD is changing the market landscape in favor of consumers, offering higher quality products at a lower price. An important aspect of China's relationship with Brazil is mutual respect. There are no unilateral impositions or bullying on the part of the Beijing government. Investments in the country comply with Brazilian legislation, and there are no political or ideological conditions, as occurs in relationships with other powers.

It is worth paying attention to the energy sector, where Chinese companies offer viable solutions to our market's demands. China has developed ultra-high voltage direct current transmission technologies, which make operations cheaper and prevent system voltage losses. This is very important for a country of continental dimensions, where energy sources are far from the main consumer markets.

Still, on this subject, it is necessary to consider the contribution of Chinese companies to the green transition. Fifteen years ago, solar panels cost around \$8.7 per watt and had an efficiency of around 15 percent. Today, they cost on average \$3 per watt and have an efficiency of between 19 percent and 22 percent. It is precisely this sharp drop in prices that enables the enormous expansion of solar energy generation in Brazil, ensuring the creation of new jobs and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. A similar process has



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

occurred with wind energy production. The main component of generation towers are rotors produced by China. In January 2024, Chinese companies were responsible for 66 percent of the world's production of this component, according to Enerdata. In August 2024, Goldwind, the largest company in the sector, opened the first wind turbine factory outside of China in Bahia.

The space of an opinion article is not enough to exemplify the richness and depth of the bilateral relationship, which also involves

culture, education, and ties between the two peoples. It is important to emphasize that the partnership with China was not built by just one government but is a project of the Brazilian State that has been advancing since 1974, regardless of the political color of the rulers. Because of this, Brazil's interests will not be subject to the will of other countries.

Brazilian society values partnership and understands China's importance to the country's development. It will not accept the imposition of choosing sides in a new

Cold War. Brazil values peace, respect for nations' sovereignty, and a fair and democratic international order. In these aspects, it is in agreement with China. It is ready to move forward together with China in the 21st century.

The author is a professor of international political economy at Sao Paulo State University in Brazil. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Z WEEKLY

All about Gen Z

Z WEEKLY

Social Media Digest

AI celebrations

This year's Spring Festival saw a groundbreaking integration of artificial intelligence (AI), with the debut of DeepSeek's advanced reasoning model capturing global attention.

Rather than engaging in traditional celebrations, many young people are embracing new holiday customs reshaped by technological innovation. On China's lifestyle-sharing platform Xiaohongshu (RedNote), for example, numerous users are sharing AI-generated greeting messages, expressing their amazement at the model's refined language.

"DeepSeek is a lifesaver," one netizen wrote on Xiaohongshu. "It freed me from the pressure of coming up with the right message for my mentor and instantly turned me into a master of social etiquette."

Beyond generating messages, AI is also offering fresh ways to celebrate. For example, China's internet giant Baidu allows users to design personalized New Year greeting cards, and users can upload their own photos to create unique emojis for free.

"Exchanging emojis feels more natural to young people than sending messages. We often use stickers to express blessings because it's less formal and more relaxed," a netizen told DingjiaoOne, a we-media outlet.

Even with AI's rise, the warmth and joy of the Spring Festival stay the same. This fusion of tradition and technology is breathing new life into the holiday, making it more vibrant and engaging than ever.



AI is playing an increasingly important role in young people's lives. vca

Rewarding romance

According to Yonhap News Agency, the Seoul metropolitan government announced on Feb 9 that newlyweds who register their marriage in the city will be awarded one million won (\$687.53) in cash or an equivalent amount in credits that can be used in local communities.

The policy aims to boost South Korea's birth rate and address the challenges of an aging population, targeting couples with an annual income of less than 5.89 million won for two people in 2025.

The plan will begin in October, with around 20,000 couples expected to benefit from the program.

South Korea is not the first country to offer marriage incentives. Similar measures have been introduced by other Asian countries, such as Japan and Singapore.

The Japanese government has been providing newlyweds with 600,000 yen (\$3,948.05) for housing or relocation since 2021, while Singapore plans to nearly double its marriage and parenthood budget to 7 billion SGD (\$5.16 billion) by 2026.

The emphasis governments place on marriage highlights the tension between the low marriage intentions of contemporary youth and the social issues created by an aging population.

Experts suggest that the reasons for the low willingness to marry are varied, including shrinking employment opportunities and the difficulties women face in balancing work and family care.

"If you graduate and you don't find a job as a regular employee, people look at you as a failure," Ryosuke Nishida, a professor at the Tokyo Institute of Technology, told The Atlantic, explaining the dilemma women face between finding employment and finding a life partner.

GUO JIATONG



More and more young people today are becoming less willing to get married. vca

Drones: the future of light displays

A young, innovative team is revolutionizing drone light performances by combining technology with cultural storytelling.



Damoda Intelligent Control Technology conduct a drone formation performance in Yanji, Jilin province, on Sept 3, 2024. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By GUI QIAN
guiqian@121st.cn

On the evening of Jan 28, the Chongqing branch of the CCTV Spring Festival Gala showcased a breathtaking drone light performance. Three thousand drones took to the skies above the confluence of the Yangtze and Jialing rivers, forming various patterns that included Chongqing's iconic landmarks and the city's emblematic camellia flower.

This dazzling display was orchestrated by Damoda Intelligent Control Technology, a Shenzhen-based company specializing in drone shows.

It marked the company's sixth appearance at the gala. Despite challenges such as unpredictable weather, temperature fluctuations, signal interference, and varying wind speeds, the team successfully achieved a flawless 100 percent on-time takeoff and landing rate.

The average age of this highly skilled team is only 27. Most members are graduates specializing in drone application technology, while some are drone enthusiasts recruited by the company. They channel their expertise and passion into this booming industry.

Jia Hengxiang, 27, from Lyuliang, Shanxi province, is the head of Damoda's flight engineering department. To complete a drone show, scriptwriters from the art engineering department first develop creative concepts and write programming scripts. Jia is responsible for leading the drone operators in executing the project.

In recent years, drone formation performances have become a major trend in night sky entertainment. Whether in major cities or small towns, at the Spring Festival Gala or the Olympics, domestically or inter-

nationally, these creative aerial displays have expanded people's imagination of light shows and highlighted the power of Chinese technology.

During this Spring Festival alone, Damoda presented 12 performances across various provinces and cities, including Sichuan, Hebei, and Tianjin.

Cyber fireworks

Jia noted that drones are less polluting and safer than traditional fireworks, and technological advancements have made larger-scale performances possible.

According to him, the company's first- and second-generation drones were limited because they had to be placed one by one. The third generation, however, could take off directly from a box, reducing the setup area and making them more suitable for diverse market scenarios.

"A venue that could only accommodate 200 first-generation drones can now handle 1,000 third-generation drones," he explained. "Moreover, our newly released fourth-generation drones don't even require battery removal for charging; they charge automatically."

The number of drones that can be coordinated simultaneously has also grown. "In 2019, flying 100 or 200 drones felt like a significant achievement. By 2021, flying 800 to 1,000 drones was considered a large-scale performance. But now, flying 1,000 to 2,000 drones is quite common," Jia said.

Last September, the team set two Guinness World Records in Shenzhen with 10,197 drones: the most multirotors/drones airborne simultaneously from a single computer (outdoors) and the largest aerial image formed by multirotors/drones.

This marks an industry breakthrough and represents an immense

“Drone formation performances have become common even in China's third- and fourth-tier cities, but the potential in overseas markets is still significant.”

Jia Hengxiang, a drone engineer

test of cluster control technology.

Jia explained that the main challenge lies in ensuring that the network bandwidth can support over 10,000 drones and that drones taking off from a sloped lawn can reach the same altitude in a short time, achieving automatic altitude calibration. In these aspects, Chinese drone performance teams, including Damoda, have reached a world-leading level.

However, Jia believes that the development of drone shows has now moved beyond simply pursuing quantity and has entered a phase of creative competition.

"Our current performances emphasize storylines and visual continuity. This requires drones to fly quickly and change formations swiftly," he explained. "We often need to delve deep into local cultures and incorporate them into the shows. For example, in our record-breaking performance in Shenzhen, we used 3,000 drones to create a screen in the sky, performing Wing Chun kung fu as if projecting a movie in the air."

One major challenge for drone shows is endurance limitations. Damoda's current drones can fly for about 15 minutes. "We are looking

forward to breakthroughs in battery technology, which would allow for longer and more diverse performances," he said.

Global growth potential

Across the country, drone shows have become a booming attraction for cultural tourism. Most of Damoda's clients are local governments' cultural tourism departments and tourist site operators.

Drone shows are also part of the low-altitude economy. In low-altitude airspace — typically referring to vertical heights below 3,000 meters — manned or unmanned aircraft are widely used for performances, aerial inspections, logistics delivery, agricultural protection, emergency rescue, and other applications.

In 2024, the low-altitude economy was included in China's Government Work Report for the first time, recognized as a new growth engine. The Civil Aviation Administration of China predicts that by 2025, the market size of China's low-altitude economy will reach 1.5 trillion yuan (\$205.26 billion), and by 2035, it could grow to 3.5 trillion yuan.

Take Damoda as an example: the company not only delivers drone performances but also manufactures the equipment. Its third- and fourth-generation drones are fully produced domestically, using domestic chips and the Beidou Navigation Satellite System.

In 2024, Damoda expanded into the South American and European markets, selling equipment to over 50 countries and regions. The company's overseas business volume increased by more than 30 percent last year.

"Drone formation performances have become common even in China's third- and fourth-tier cities, but the potential in overseas markets is still significant," Jia said.

ZWEEKLY



Students from over 10 countries gather at the Chang'an community center on Monday to take part in a variety of traditional Chinese cultural activities. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A street full of cultural surprises

A group of international students in Shenyang enjoys a kaleidoscope of cultural and artistic experiences.

By WU YONG in Shenyang
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"Careful. That's it. One step at a time." At the community center on Chang'an Street in Shenyang, Liaoning province, a group of international students was attempting traditional Chinese stilts under the guidance of their Chinese instructors. As Muhammad Masood from Pakistan gripped his instructor's hand tightly while taking his first step on the stilts, his fellow students cheered him on enthusiastically.

On Monday, 29 students from over 10 countries and five universities in Shenyang gathered at the community center to explore various aspects of traditional Chinese culture.

After watching an impressive stilt performance, the students were captivated by this unique folk art and eagerly volunteered to try it for themselves.

"The performers make it look so effortless, but it wasn't until I tried it myself that I realized how much balance and skill it requires," said Tran Thi Minh Nguyet from Vietnam.

At the center's dough modeling demonstration booth, Phroeskaew Pannaray from Thailand watched in awe as a local inheritor of this intangible cultural heritage skillfully molded the dough into a lifelike snake in just minutes, celebrating the Year of the Snake. "This is amazing," she marveled.

Though Pannaray's own attempt to mold a snake resulted in a slightly crooked shape, after a few tries, she was pleased with her progress.

"At least it finally looks like a snake," she laughed.

The paper-cutting booth was equally lively. Efremova Iuliia, a Russian student, was thrilled to see the artisan capture her profile with just a few snips of scissors.

"It looks just like me," she said. "This is so much more interesting than taking photos."

Xia Yuchen, a Chinese student majoring in visual communication design at Shenyang Aerospace University, was eager to try the paper-cutting techniques herself.

"Look at the symmetrical structure of this flower pattern and how the negative space is used," she said, admiring her newly cut work. "Traditional Chinese aesthetics are truly remarkable."

This experience also sparked new inspiration for her design work at school. "These traditional patterns, if integrated into modern poster design,

would evoke a Chinese vibe that's subtle yet special," she said. "It's fascinating."

As the elderly in the community began performing the yangko dance, Ebele Engourou Jean-Marc from Gabon was instantly drawn to it and decided to join in.

"In Africa, our tribal dances share similar vibrant rhythms," said the aerospace engineering student, moving to the beat. "Dance is truly the most natural way to bridge cultures."

At the sugar painting booth, Saen-maneeoun Somkhit from Laos watched closely as the artisan skillfully drew a majestic Northeastern Tiger on a stone plate with liquid sugar, which quickly hardened and could be peeled off like a lollipop.

"The artisan also made a dragon and a butterfly at our request — it's incredible how he can create such delicate designs using just melted sugar," she said.

Nearby, at the knotting booth, Munkhorgil Munkhjin from Mongolia was deeply focused on learning the traditional Chinese knotting art.

"When I practice the violin at home, my teacher always emphasizes the importance of subtle finger movements. It's the same with these knots — even the slightest change in pressure can affect the entire pattern," he explained while adjusting the tightness of his knot.

When Rin Azuma from Japan saw the Spring Festival couplets at the entrance of the community center, which read, "Harmony among families and neighbors brings prosperity to the nation," he was so touched that he immediately took out his phone to capture the moment.

"This wish for harmony and prosperity resonates not just with Chinese people, but with Japanese people and others around the world," he said.

As the international students said their good-byes to the community, they left with lasting memories of cultural exchange.

"Today's experience wasn't just a superficial visit; it was a real glimpse into and participation in community life in China," said Tran, speaking in fluent Chinese.

"The beauty of culture is its power to unite young people from different countries, helping them discover a shared language," said Lee Haeng from South Korea.

Liu Shicheng contributed to this story.



Z WEEKLY

Fans of infinite beauty

Li Jing merges ancient fan-making techniques with modern design, bringing traditional Chinese craftsmanship into the present.



Li Jing's round fan creations. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By GUO JIATONG
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In the bustling city of Suzhou, Jiangsu province, Li Jing, 38, has carved out a peaceful yet profound space — his studio, Shixianju (meaning “dwelling in leisure”), where he dedicates himself to his lifelong passion: hand-crafting traditional Chinese round fans.

Blending centuries-old techniques with modern aesthetics, Li's creations have captivated a wide audience, garnering more than 2.72 million followers on China's social media platform Weibo. His work has also appeared in fashion shoots and TV dramas.

Li's interest in round fans began in high school when he fell in love with Peking Opera.

“The costumes, poetic lyrics, and symbolic props all reflect the artistry of this comprehensive art form,” he said. “Everyone who appreciates Peking Opera can find a unique perspective, and I was particularly fascinated by the exquisite stage accessories, which sparked my desire to collect and restore fans.”

According to Li, a round fan embodies a fusion of ancient craftsmanship, integrating techniques for crafting the frame, designing patterns, making ribs and tassels, and mounting the fan surface.

“Despite its small size, the round fan holds boundless creative possibilities,” he explained. “The surface can be made from materials such as silk, damask, or brocade, and decorated with calligraphy, painting, or embroidery.”

Among all techniques, Li's favorite is *kesi*, or silk tapestry weaving, which is also the most intricate. Known for its meticulous craftsmanship, *kesi* involves weaving each colorful thread individually to form detailed patterns, often creating lifelike imagery with a shimmering, layered effect. The painstaking process can take weeks or even months to complete a single piece.

To further explore the art, Li moved in 2009 from his hometown of Jiaxing in Zhejiang province to Suzhou, a city renowned for its flourishing handicraft industry. What began as a hobby — collecting and restoring vintage fans — soon became a central part of his life as he started designing fans himself.



“My designs require rare materials and weeks of labor. They'll never be 'bestsellers', but I'm satisfied pursuing authenticity and artistry.”

Li Jing, a round fan artisan

Li's design philosophy is simple: instead of pursuing complexity, he focuses on returning to the essence of the craft, achieving a balance between intricacy and elegance.

“Some artisans force incompatible styles together, resulting in gaudy pieces,” Li said.

To avoid this, Li dedicates himself to mastering every technique, ensuring his fans — whether adorned with delicate plum blossoms or minimalist ink landscapes — exude a sense of refined sophistication.

Li's ability to draw inspiration from everyday moments is key to his creative process. “Beauty often reveals itself unexpectedly,” he said. “I enjoy finding ideas in the small details of daily life.”

One of his most memorable experiences came during a television interview. A creased sheet of tracing paper cast shadows that reminded him of a hanging plum branch.

This fleeting moment of inspiration led to one of his signature creations — a fan celebrated for its poetic simplicity and later featured in a photo shoot with actress Liu Yifei.

Beyond tradition

Although many admire his design philosophy, with some even calling him an artist, Li humbly insists that he is simply an artisan.

“Artists express their emotions through their works, while I simply aim to recreate Chinese aesthetics and bring joy to my audience,” he explained.

For Li, it's not essential for people to fully understand the history behind each piece. It's enough if

his work provides them with an opportunity to “pause and appreciate beauty.”

“Each fan reflects the spirit of craftsmanship, heritage, and the quiet joy of creation,” Li said.

In recent years, Li has embraced new horizons by integrating Western elements into his designs, creating a universal language of art.

“As China engages more deeply with global cultures, Chinese aesthetics also resonate abroad,” he noted. “For example, a traditional round fan's silk surface can pair beautifully with sleek metal accents.”

Despite widespread admiration, Li refuses to commercialize his work, choosing to focus on small-batch creations. In an era dominated by mass production and livestream sales, he remains steadfast in his principles.

“My designs require rare materials and weeks of labor. They'll never be 'bestsellers', but I'm satisfied pursuing authenticity and artistry,” he said. “Every day, I sketch designs while watching TV — simple as that, and it makes me really happy.”

This lifestyle reflects the essence of his studio's name, Shixianju, inspired by a book by Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) scholar Gao Lian. Through it, Li finds harmony between art and life.

“For me, making round fans isn't a job or business — it's the heartbeat of my existence,” he said.

Reviving classic stories for a new generation

By MENG WENJIE
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“The stories in our childhood textbooks are the lives we live as adults.” This realization inspired Li Yuan to create the video account Laikansuba (meaning “Read Along”), where she and her team share a series of short films that reinterpret classic literary works from Chinese textbooks.

Li, 26, a digital media graduate from Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, is the team's director. The idea first came to her during a family trip last year to send her younger brother off to college. At the university, she noticed many parents from out of town doing the same — watching their children take a big step into adulthood.

This scene reminded Li of *Beiyang* (The View of Father's Back), an essay from her middle school Chinese textbook.

Written in 1925 by Zhu Ziqing (1898-1948), the piece recounts the author's departure for Peking University. What lingered most in his memory was the image of his aging father's back as the old man climbed up and down the train station platform to buy him oranges.

“It was amazing to see how real life connected with something I had read in a textbook,” Li said.

This moment of inspiration quickly became Laikansuba's first short film, in which Li reimagined the protagonist as a girl, reflecting on her own relationship with her father.

“The core idea, however, remains the same — Chinese fathers tend to be reserved and don't always express their love openly,” she explained.

The video struck a chord with young audiences, garnering over 80 million views across Chinese social media platforms.

Encouraged by this success, the team launched an ongoing series that offers fresh interpretations of classic stories from school textbooks.

Primarily shared on Douyin, Kuaishou, Xiaohongshu (RedNote), and Bilibili, the series has attracted over 2.5 million followers in less than a year, with most viewers aged 18 to 23.

All the young protagonists in these stories are portrayed by 26-year-old Shu Jiahui. Although Shu graduated with a degree in software engineering from Yibin University in Sichuan and has no formal acting training, she developed a passion for acting through internships and personal exploration.

“When I get a script, I research similar characters and imagine how I would react in those situations,” Shu explained.

It was this raw, unpolished quality that caught Li's attention. She found that many trained young actors tended to deliver rehearsed and predictable performances, lacking the authenticity she was looking for.

Contemporary lens

One of the key challenges in adapting classic literature is rewriting scripts to make these timeless stories resonate with today's young audience.

Fortunately, the team, all in their 20s, knows exactly how to adjust the themes to address the confusion and challenges of young adulthood.

For example, Li adapted *Meng* (meaning “Men”), a poem from *Shi Jing* (The Book of Songs), the earliest existing collection of Chinese poetry. The original poem tells the sorrowful tale of a woman abandoned by her husband. As she reflects on their past love, she struggles with the pain of betrayal, highlighting the oppression women faced in feudal marriages.

In Li's modern retelling, the protagonist goes through a similar experience but in a contemporary setting: after her divorce, she returns home to find a party popper prepared by her mother, celebrating a fresh start.

“I want modern women to know they have the courage to start over,” Li said.

Li's approach to scriptwriting often goes beyond textbook narratives, focusing instead on themes that personally resonate with her.

One example is her adaptation of *A Madman's Diary* (1918) by Chinese literary giant Lu Xun (1881-1936). This classic story is narrated through the diary of a “madman” whose writings expose societal indifference under feudal oppression and the irony of labeling truth-tellers as “mad.”

In her video, Li reimagines this tale in the context of modern social media. It features content creators who fabricate fake scenarios to generate conflict and attract views. When a viewer reveals the truth, she is “silenced” for speaking out. This modern twist brings fresh relevance to the classic work.

“I want to make videos that bridge literature with real-life experiences,” Li explained. “I hope to help viewers rediscover emotions they may not have fully grasped as students and offer new perspectives shaped by time and personal growth.”



Shu Jiahui portrays a bride in Laikansuba's adaptation of *Meng*. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY