

OPINION: BIDEN'S SOTU ADDRESS P.22

FEATURES: CHATBOT CONVERSATIONS P.33

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Revving up support for the private sector

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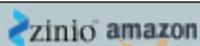
A Tanzanian reporter marvels at China's evolution

Cover Design: Wang Yajuan

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## Leveling the Field

The private sector is an important part of China's economy and China would not have witnessed the astounding development it has without its contributions. Today, the private sector is responsible for more than 50 percent of the country's tax revenue, 60 percent of its GDP, 70 percent of its tech innovation and 80 percent of urban jobs.

In the past three years, the COVID-19 pandemic delivered a blow to both the Chinese economy and entrepreneurial confidence. Many private enterprises have had to manage a host of business complications. The Chinese Government, for its part, has adopted supporting policies offering critical assistance and relief options. For instance, commercial banks have been encouraged to increase credit granted to private enterprises in the manufacturing sector as well as extend bigger medium- and long-term loans to this industry to satisfy its financing demand. Companies encountering severe pandemic-induced difficulties became eligible for social insurance premium payment deferral. Tax cuts and rebates have also been introduced, reaching a record high in 2022.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, also General Secretary of the Communist Party

of China (CPC) Central Committee, has clearly stated that China supports the private sector. "We will provide an enabling environment for private enterprises, protect their property rights and the rights and interests of entrepreneurs in accordance with the law, and facilitate the growth of the private sector," he said at the opening of the 20th CPC National Congress, a milestone event that set the tone for China's development over the next five years and beyond, in Beijing on October 16 last year.

And the Central Economic Work Conference two months later once again highlighted the equal treatment of state-owned and private enterprises. Considering the aforementioned, the assumption that the government wants to exclude private enterprises from China's economic paradigm proves incorrect.

Regulatory measures aim to address problems that have caused public resentment, such as certain businesses holding monopoly positions. For China, the most pressing issue remains the continuous improvement of its legal system to ensure both government and enterprises operate within the legal limits. **BR**



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# HOPS AND HOOPS

A basketball game is in full swing in Majiaxiang Village in Yuncheng, Shanxi Province on February 13. College students were invited to partake in the match, allowing villagers to catch a sports competition close to home.

The recently released No.1 Central Document, the first policy statement issued by the central authorities each year and usually dedicated to rural development, has outlined priorities ranging from grain security to sports and culture in rural areas.



## Under the Magnifying Glass

Workers produce glassware at a company workshop in Hejian City, Hebei Province, on February 11. The city's glass production industry involves more than 200 companies and over 60,000 staff members, with the glassware exported to more than 50 countries and regions.

### Travel Rush Figures

This year's Spring Festival travel rush saw more than 1.5 billion passenger trips by rail, highway, water, and civil aviation, official data showed. The travel rush, the country's typical 40-day transportation peak around the Chinese New Year, ended on February 15.

Railway passenger flow continued to rebound. Statistics showed that railway passenger transport has recovered to 90 percent of the pre-pandemic figure in the 2019 corresponding travel rush period.

Road transport was the most favored choice for short- and medium-distance travel. Data from online ride-hailing company Didi showed that ride-hailing and taxi orders continued to increase from January 7 to February 14, recovering to more than 90 percent of the number

for the same period in 2019.

The civil aviation sector also welcomed more passengers over the seven-day Spring Festival holiday from January 21 to 27. In Hainan Province in south China, the Sanya civil aviation authority reported a new high of 3,024 in- and outbound flights during the week-long holiday, an increase of 5.8 percent over the same holiday period in 2019.

### Archaeological Discoveries

China announced breakthrough archaeological discoveries in its northern region on February 15, showing humans' transition from a nomadic lifestyle in the Paleolithic Age to a settled life in the early Neolithic Age.

More than 40 dwelling sites and 800 pieces of artifacts made of stone, bones, and shells have been discovered at the Sitai

ruins, which cover an area of about 150,000 square meters in Shangyi County, Hebei Province, according to the National Cultural Heritage Administration.

The sites and remains fall into five groups of cultural relics of different ages, the administration said, noting that two groups date back to the transitional period from the Old Stone Age to the New Stone Age.

A major discovery is that the dwellings were organized in groups, which serves as evidence of the emergence of early settlements in north China, and shows people's transition from a nomadic lifestyle in the Paleolithic Age to a settled life in the early Neolithic Age, the administration added.

### Big Data Expo

The China International Big Data Industry Expo 2023 will take place

in Guiyang, capital of Guizhou Province, from May 26 to 28, according to a provincial big data conference on February 13.

The offline exhibition will feature six pavilions covering an area of 60,000 square meters, with preparations for the event in full swing.

The expo has taken place in Guiyang since 2015 and is the first of its kind in China, creating a communication platform for vital achievements in the big data industry.

As the country's first national big data comprehensive pilot zone, Guizhou has been promoting the big data industry as the backbone of its high-quality social and economic development.

In 2022, the province accelerated the development of the big data industry, with the added value of its electronic information manufacturing industry subsequently rising by more than 60 percent, according to a government work report.

### Wind Power Generation

Wind power generation by large-scale enterprises in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region reached 101.99 billion kilowatts per hour in 2022, up 8.8 year on year, according to the regional bureau of statistics, Xinhua News Agency reported on February 14.

Among all Inner Mongolian leagues and cities, Xilin Gol League reported the highest wind power generation, accounting for 26.7 percent of the region's total. Hinggan League posted the fastest growth in wind power generation with a year-on-year increase of 57.3 percent.

Xilin Gol is rich in wind and solar energy resources. By late 2023, Xilin Gol is projected to become the first league in Inner Mongolia where the installed

power capacity of new energies will exceed thermal power.

In recent years, Inner Mongolia has accelerated its transformation from a fossil energy base to a clean energy base. Its wind power generation has recorded an average annual growth rate of 15.6 percent over the past five years, 8.1 percentage points higher than that of all other forms of power generation.

## Smartphone Use

Half of China's population aged 65 to 69 are smartphone users, according to survey results released at a national population and development forum, Xinhua reported on February 13.

The survey, jointly launched by the China Population and Development Research Center, the China Family Planning Association and the National School of Development at Peking University, collected more than 17,000 samples of seniors aged 65 and above across 26 provincial-level regions.

According to the survey, 31.2 percent of the 70-to-79 age group and 1.3 percent of the 100-and-older age group use smartphones. Instant messaging is the major function for senior users, followed by other functions such as news and video streaming.

## Water Diversion

Wanjiashai, a major reservoir in the middle reaches of the Yellow River, will continue to replenish water this year to the Yongding River, a primary river flowing through Beijing, according to Wanjiashai Water Holding Group Co. Ltd. on February 14.

Twice a year, in spring and autumn, 165 million cubic meters of water will be diverted from Wanjiashai to the Yongding River to help restore the ecological environment in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei area.

Around 100 million cubic meters of water will be diverted during spring at an average speed of 10 cubic meters per second.

The Yongding river basin is one of the most important water conservation areas and an ecological barrier and corridor in Beijing and surrounding areas.

## Museum and Park Construction

A batch of museums and parks will be built or opened in Beijing this year, the Beijing Municipal Cultural Heritage Bureau said on February 12.

The construction of a new branch of the Capital Museum, featuring the ancient Beijing-



## Back to the Future

A young boy wearing a virtual reality headset tries his hand at a driving simulator at an ice and snow metaverse experience center in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province, on February 12. The center at the Harbin Ice and Snow World amusement park allows visitors to enjoy some ice and snow scenery all year round.

Hangzhou Grand Canal, is scheduled for completion in Tongzhou District, Beijing's sub-center, and will open to the public by the end of this year.

A demonstration area for the protection and utilization of the national historical and cultural heritage sites of the Three Hills and Five Gardens will also be completed. The sites include many historical cultural sites, including royal gardens from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

A museum reconstruction project will be implemented at the Dabaotai tomb site, dating to the Western Han Dynasty (202 BC-AD 25), while the construction of the Liulihe national archaeological park will be launched this year.

Chen Mingjie, Director of the Beijing Municipal Cultural Heritage Bureau, said that the capital has 215 registered museums, altogether hosting nearly 500 exhibitions and other activities throughout 2022.



## Espresso Express

A barista makes coffee at a coffee-themed post office in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, on February 15. Featuring a coffee bar, the post office has turned itself into a place where customers can enjoy a hot beverage with their postal services, from standard mail to express package delivery.

## Charging Infrastructure

The number of charging infrastructure facilities nearly doubled in China in 2022, thanks to the country's commitment to boosting its new energy vehicle (NEV) industry, National Energy Administration official Liang Changxin said on February 13.

The cumulative number of charging infrastructure facilities nationwide now stands at 5.2 million, Liang told a press conference.

Some 650,000 public charging points for electric vehicles were added last year, bringing the total to 1.8 million, he said.

Last year saw the installation of 1.9 million private charging facilities and the total number of these facilities topped 3.4 million, he added.

After years of rapid expansion, China features the world's largest and most extensive charging infrastructure network, according to Liang.

The administration said it will work with related government departments to further improve the top-level design and policy coordination, optimize the charging network layout, and enhance government oversight to better develop the charging industry.

## Express Delivery Expansion

The express delivery development index for January came in at 265, up 1.5 percent year on year, according to the State Post Bureau.

The sub-index for the development scale grew 19.4 percent from a year earlier, and the express delivery industry handled about 410 million parcels during the recent Spring Festival holiday from January 21 to 27, approximately doubling the pre-pandemic figure of the same holiday period in 2019.

The sub-index for development capacity picked up 0.9 percent year on year, as China

ramped up efforts to accelerate the construction of intelligent infrastructure and improve cross-border delivery capacity.

Compiled on the basis of data from major logistics firms' operating delivery services, the development index reflects the overall business activities and trends in China's courier sector.

## Nonferrous Metal Industry

The nonferrous metal industry registered stable performance last year with growing production, profits and revenues, the China Nonferrous Metals Industry Association said.

Last year, China produced over 67.74 million tons of 10 common nonferrous metals, up 4.3 percent from 2021, the association said.

The value-added output of major companies, each with an annual business revenue of at least 20 million yuan (\$2.93 million), rose 5.2 percent last year.

Major companies recorded a combined revenue of nearly 8 trillion yuan (\$1.17 trillion) last year, an increase of 10.5 percent year on year. Their total profits reached 331.5 billion yuan (\$48.5 billion).

The association estimated the production of 10 common nonferrous metals will grow around 3.5 percent this year and the industry's fixed assets investment will see an increase of 5 to 10 percent.

## Current-Account Surplus

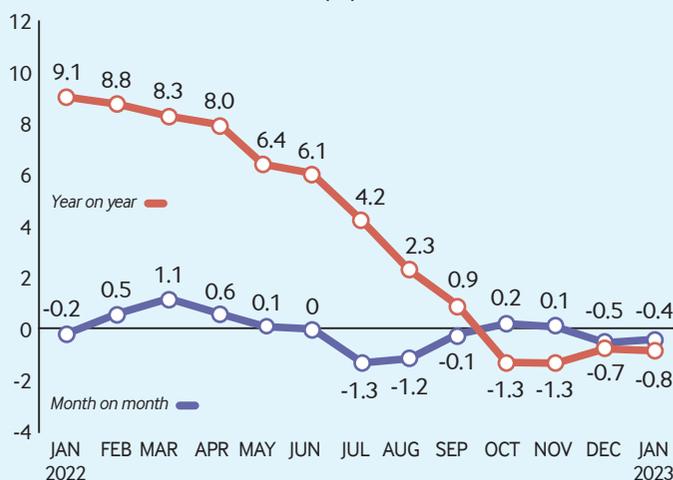
China reported a current-account surplus of \$417.5 billion in 2022, up 32 percent from the previous year, the State Administration of Foreign Exchange said.

The figure, only second to that recorded in 2008, accounted for 2.3 percent of its GDP during the same period, Wang Chunying, a spokesperson for the administration, said.

Trade in goods posted a

## NUMBERS

China's Producer Price Index Growth (%)



China's Consumer Price Index (CPI) Growth (%)



record surplus of \$685.6 billion in 2022, up 22 percent year on year, Wang added.

Trade in services saw a deficit of \$94.3 billion, down 6 percent year on year. The shortfall in the tourism sector rose 14 percent year on year to \$107.6 billion as expenditure in cross-border tourism and overseas education gradually recovered.

Direct investment logged a net inflow of \$32.3 billion during the period.

Despite external uncertainty, Wang expected international payments to remain balanced in 2023 as China's economy retains its robustness, massive potential and sound long-term fundamentals.

## Auto Exports

The first month of the year saw the export of 301,000 vehicles, up 30.1 percent from a year ago, the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers announced.

Passenger car exports rose 35.6 percent year on year to 250,000

units, while commercial vehicle exports climbed 8.1 percent year on year to 50,000 units.

Exports of NEVs jumped 48.2 percent year on year to 83,000 units.

## Luxury Market

China's luxury goods market is expected to grow to 816 billion yuan (\$119.38 billion) by 2025, or approximately 25 percent of the global total, a report from accounting firm PwC China read on February 9.

The Asia-Pacific region has become an important growth engine for the global luxury goods market and China, as a major driver, will continue to unleash its potential, according to the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong luxury industry analysis report.

Offshore duty-free shopping in the southern Chinese island province of Hainan has boosted the country's burgeoning luxury goods market, with offshore

duty-free shopping in Hainan accounting for about 13 percent of Chinese consumer spending on luxuries in 2021, raking in 49.5 billion yuan (\$7.24 billion), the report stated.

As the Chinese mainland has fully resumed normal travel to and from Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions, luxury consumption in Hong Kong will gradually embrace a rebound, it said.

"China's luxury market is rapidly recovering from the pandemic with greater strength, resilience and flexibility," Steven Zhong, ESG Strategy Lead Partner at PwC China, concluded.

## Outbound Direct Investment

China's outbound direct investment (ODI) grew steadily last year despite external headwinds, rising by 5.2 percent year on year to 985.37 billion yuan (\$144.16 billion), the Ministry of Commerce said on February 9.

In U.S. dollar terms, the period's ODI rose 0.9 percent from a year earlier, according to the ministry.

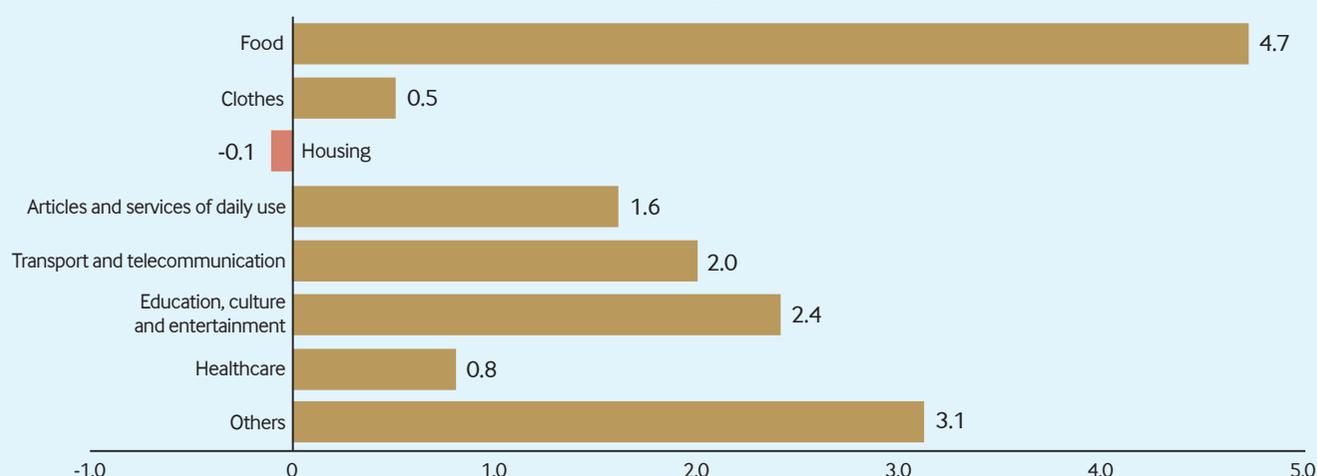
In 2022, China's non-financial ODI reached 785.94 billion yuan (\$114.98 billion), up 7.2 percent year on year.

Completed turnover of foreign contracted projects grew 4.3 percent year on year to 1.04 trillion yuan (\$152.15 billion), while the contract value of newly signed overseas projects amounted to 1.7 trillion yuan (248.71 billion), up 2.1 percent.

Non-financial investment into countries along the Belt and Road routes increased 3.3 percent year on year to \$20.97 billion in 2022, accounting for 17.9 percent of China's total non-financial ODI in the period.

Outbound investment in the wholesale and retail sector rose 19.5 percent from a year earlier, while the manufacturing sector, leasing and business services also reported growth momentum.

China's CPI Growth by Type  
January (% y.o.y.)



(Source: National Bureau of Statistics)



## UNITED STATES

Train wreckage lies next to the tracks on the outskirts of the village of East Palestine, Ohio, on February 14 after about 50 Norfolk Southern train cars, including 20 carrying hazardous materials, had derailed on February 3



## FRANCE

A visitor enjoys a wine tasting as the Wine Paris & Vinexpo Paris kicked off on February 13. The annual wine and spirits event concluded on February 15



## NEW ZEALAND

People carry a slow down sign across a flooded road in Auckland on February 14. The government declared a National State of Emergency after cyclone *Gabrielle* unleashed its full fury across the North Island that same day





## PORTUGAL

Minister of Environment and Climate Action Duarte Cordeiro sits in the driver's cab of a China-manufactured subway train inside the Trindade Metro Station in Porto on February 11



## ETHIOPIA

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa Acting Executive Secretary Antonio Pedro speaks at the opening ceremony of the 42nd ordinary session of the Executive Council of the African Union in Addis Ababa on February 15, which kicked off with a call for increasing efforts to deepen continental integration and move toward realizing Africa's development aspirations



## UGANDA

People walk past smoldering debris on February 13 after a fire rose through shops and houses in the suburbs of Kampala earlier that day



## ↓ TENNIS ACE MAKES HISTORY

**Wu Yibing** made tennis history on February 12, when he became the first Chinese men's player to win an Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) Tour event in a thrilling comeback victory at the Dallas Open in Texas, the U.S.

The 23-year-old saved four match points to defeat U.S. favorite John Isner, triggering celebrations across China's tennis community for the breakthrough in the men's division, and following the great strides made by the nation's women's players.

The win helped Wu climb to No.58, his highest position on the ATP men's world rankings, and propelled him toward his goal of cracking the Top 30 by the end of the season.

Before Wu, no men's player from the Chinese mainland had ever reached a tour-level final in the Open Era or defeated a Top 10 opponent.



## Growing Intelligence

**People's Daily**  
February 13

A plant factory is an indoor farm where all environmental factors, from light and temperature to humidity and nutrition, are automatically and precisely controlled to enable a year-round production of vegetables.

Though a latecomer, China has become a plant factory powerhouse driven by the fast development of core technologies, including LED lighting, hydroponics and intelligent control.

There are many reasons why this new trend is the future of agriculture. By breaking the physical limitations of field cultivation,

these plant factories not only prevent major contaminants from interfering with crop growth, but also allow food production to enter cities, drylands and deserts—places previously unsuitable for cultivation.

The capacity for smart control of artificial light and air quality comes at a price, which is high energy usage. Therefore, ample funds should be invested in the creation of a low-carbon and energy-efficient indoor farming system that presents a greener, more sustainable approach to agriculture.

Over the past decade, China has seen great progress in the modernization of agriculture, which, having gone indoors and into oceans and deserts, is now venturing into other new, exciting settings.



## Signs of Recovery

**Lifeweek**  
February 13

The year 2022 was a difficult one, rife with massive waves of COVID-19 infection, geopolitical conflicts and other unpredictable changes. It was against this global backdrop that China's GDP grew by merely 3 percent, hitting a record 40-year low. Finally coming out on the other side of the pandemic, China is destined to see great economic growth in 2023.

Positive signs were already appearing in the country's consumer market during the seven-day Spring Festival holiday in late January.

“China played a very strong role at the COP15, making sure that we did get an agreement by the 196 parties to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030.”

**Jessica Battle**, senior global ocean governance and policy expert of the World Wide Fund for Nature, in an interview with Xinhua News Agency on February 14

“The center of gravity of the global new energy industry is shifting further to China.”

**Wang Dapeng**, deputy head of the new energy and renewable energy department of China's National Energy Administration, at the administration's press conference on February 13

According to data released by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the holiday saw 308 million domestic tourism trips, up 23.1 percent from the same period last year, and a revenue of 375.843 billion yuan (about \$55.4 billion), which marks a recovery to 73.1 percent of the pre-pandemic number in 2019.

Despite a strong uptick in consumer demand, China still faces major challenges, for example, a decrease in exports as it picks up speed in economic recovery. The continuous growth of the country's exports against a global economic downtrend is partly rooted in a surging demand for Chinese products in countries where the pandemic halted domestic production. However, as these countries resume regular production activities, overseas demand for China's exports is bound to shrink.

In the face of cooling global demand, China urgently needs to tap into the undiscovered potential of the domestic market. While focusing on the short-term stimulation of consumer demand, people should not forget the long-term project of industrial upgrading. The true challenge lies not in post-COVID recovery, but in a transition from low-end manufacturing to high-quality, technology-driven growth, which will give China a real edge in global competition.

## The Lazy Economy

*Guangzhou Daily*

February 13

Recent years have seen the rise of the “lazy economy,” as many young Chinese are seeking hyper-convenient services to simplify their daily routines at home.

The so-called “lazy economy” is an umbrella term that includes services such as home manicures, pre-cooked meals, smart home devices, and dog-walking. Despite great market potential, the “lazy economy” has been accused of dragging consumers into a vicious circle of laziness.

Although the word, “lazy,” may be misleading, the “lazy economy” is essentially the purchase of a convenience-driven lifestyle, which not only affords young Chinese consumers more quality leisure time, but also leads to the emergence of new professions and the creation of new job opportunities.

In fact, the “lazy economy” has its origins in multiple products and services that have already taken a strong hold in daily life. Predecessors of this new trend include designated driver services, robot vacuum cleaners, and housekeeping services. Therefore, it should be understood as a logical product of the continuous specialization of labor and a sign of progress.



### NATIONAL SOCCER CHIEF UNDER INVESTIGATION

Chinese Football Association (CFA) President **Chen Xuyuan** is under investigation for suspected disciplinary and legal violations.

Chen's investigation is linked to former Team China head coach Li Tie, who was placed under investigation in November 2022 by the national disciplinary inspection team as well as the supervision commission of Hubei Province, also for suspected serious disciplinary and legal violations.

Chen, who was president of Shanghai International Port Group, was elected CFA president in 2019. With the 66-year-old as head of Chinese soccer's governing body, the men's national squad has delivered a series of disappointing performances, while the development of the nation's soccer leagues is facing major difficulties.

In January, Chen Yongliang, the CFA's Executive Deputy Secretary General, and Liu Yi, the CFA's former Secretary General, were both placed under investigation for the same reason. No details of the investigation have been released.



“Commitment and bold action are needed to promote laws, policies, budgets and institutions that advance gender equality in science.”

**Csaba Korosi**, United Nations General Assembly President, at an event to celebrate the International Day of Women and Girls in Science on February 11

“It is expected that Chinese consumers' pent-up demand in regional economies will help support ASEAN economies' domestic activities.”

**Low Kian Chuan**, President of the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia, in a recent interview with Xinhua



COVER STORY

# PRIVATE POWER

China ramps up support for private businesses  
By Zhang Shasha