

FEATURES: 2023 ECONOMY IN REVIEW P.28 | FEATURES: SAVING THE STURGEON P.34

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Cover Photo: Yundang Lake in Xiamen, Fujian Province (ZHANG WEI)

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EDITOR'S DESK

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Clean Waters and Clear Skies

Yundang Lake, in Xiamen, Fujian Province, is a refuge for locals, visitors and wildlife.

Several decades ago, however, the seriously polluted lake was repellant to animals and humans alike. In the 1980s, the city began to address its dismal state, halting the discharge of untreated sewage. Now, Yundang Lake has been restored to its former pristine state and has become one of the crowning achievements in Xiamen's campaign to become a garden city and to achieve harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

President Xi Jinping has put forward a series of ideas that guide the nation's sustainable development efforts. Xi worked in Fujian from the 1980s to the early 2000s, holding a number of posts including vice mayor of Xiamen and provincial governor. The province has been a pioneer in the implementation of Xi's "green is gold" philosophy. The restoration of Yundang Lake is one of the many success stories arising from it.

In recent years, China has been accelerating the restoration and protection of its natural environment in the belief that economic growth and environmental protection are not conflicting goals but can be mutually reinforcing.

In 2016, the Chinese Government

launched the Shan-Shui Initiative, which translates to "mountains and rivers," to restore ecosystems across the country. The initiative was recognized as a World Restoration Flagship by the United Nations in December 2022, and more than 5.33 million hectares had been restored as of December 2023.

China has also put in place a protected area (PA) system, which focuses on national parks. Around 10,000 PAs have been established, accounting for 18 percent of the country's total land area. In addition, redlines have been drawn around areas that perform critical environmental functions, applying stringent measures to protect them from the potentially harmful effects of urbanization.

Xi envisions a new model for human progress that calls for coordinated development on economic, political, cultural, ethical, social and eco-environmental fronts. The "green is gold" philosophy is a core concept in eco-environmental progress. It represents a break with the idea that economic growth and environmental protection cancel each other out. Instead, protecting the environment is an important path to economic development, and new technologies and resources generated by economic development can further enhance environmental governance. **BR**



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HEAVENLY TREATS

The Long March-7 Y8 rocket, carrying the *Tianzhou-7* robotic cargo spaceship, blasts off from the Wenchang Spacecraft Launch Site in China's southernmost province of Hainan on January 17, according to the China Manned Space Agency.

The cargo spaceship, tasked to deliver propellants, science payloads and daily necessities such as food for the *Shenzhou-17* astronauts, is the first spacecraft to visit China's *Tiangong* space station this year.

The food items it carried include Chinese New Year treats. This year, the Lunar New Year falls on February 10.



Drive Safely!

Outbound vehicles at Hemu Village in the Kanas scenic area, Altay Prefecture, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, on January 16. Earlier that day, the snow-covered section of a road leading in and out of the village was cleared after avalanches had hit the area days earlier.

Chunyun

China is expected to see 9 billion passenger trips during the annual Spring Festival travel rush or *chunyun*, the Ministry of Transport said on January 16.

Considered the largest annual human migration in the world, *chunyun*—the 40-day period when hundreds of millions of Chinese head home to celebrate the Lunar New Year with their families—will last from January 26 to March 5 this year as the holiday will fall on February 10.

Passenger trips by rail, highway, waterway and civil aviation are expected to reach 1.8 billion during the period, Vice Minister of Transport Li Yang said at a

press conference.

About 80 percent of the trips will be self-driving, which is expected to reach a new high, Li said.

The ministry has set up a special working group comprised of multiple departments to oversee transportation during the holiday rush. The working group pledged efforts to ensure that transportation capacity is sufficient to meet demand.

Safety supervision will also be strengthened to ensure that personnel, vehicles, ships and aircraft are kept in good condition, Li said, adding that refined plans will be made to deal with bad weather and massive passenger flows to improve emergency response capabilities.

Ski Resort

Xizang Autonomous Region celebrated the opening of its first ski resort this snow season, with the resort established at an elevation of 4,500 meters, Xinhua News Agency reported on January 15.

Located in Lhalung Village, Maizhokunggar County, under the administration of the regional capital of Lhasa, the ski resort is just 120 km away from the Lhasa city center.

The resort broke ground in August 2023 and began trial operations on November 28, 2023. It is designed to handle a daily maximum of 3,000 people.

Blessed with mountainous terrain and a long winter season, Xizang has great potential as a

snow sports hub. The new resort there boasts a ski season of more than six months, said Chen Jundan, the resort's general manager, who has more than 10 years of experience in managing ice-snow tourism projects.

"We plan to regularly open it to children free of charge to let them experience the fun of skiing," Chen said, adding that the resort will be used for camping activities in summer.

The opening of the ski resort is the latest move by the Xizang authorities to ride the wave of the country's burgeoning ice-snow economy.

Living Allowances

In the third quarter of 2023, the monthly basic living allowance for orphans living in welfare institutions and foster homes across China was 1,885.4 yuan (\$262) and 1,439.9 yuan (\$200), respectively, up 5.2 percent and 6.6 percent year on year, according to the National Civil Affairs Work Conference held on January 14.

A total of 146,000 orphans and 388,000 de facto unattended children in China were covered by the country's support system as of the third quarter of 2023, according to the conference.

An official with the Ministry of Civil Affairs said that the ministry will step up efforts this year to register information on migrant children and left-behind children, those who remain in rural areas while their parents migrate to cities for work, and provide support for them.

Minimum Wage

The booming eastern Chinese provinces of Zhejiang and Jiangsu raised their minimum wage by about 9.2 percent in January to attract workers and offset rising living costs, Xinhua

News Agency reported on January 16.

The minimum monthly wage for full-time workers in Zhejiang was raised to 2,490 yuan (\$346), 2,260 yuan (\$314) or 2,010 yuan (\$279) in different cities in the province, depending on their level of economic development, the provincial government said in a circular.

This is the 18th increase since the minimum wage system was introduced in Zhejiang in 1994. The province last raised its minimum wage in August 2021.

In neighboring Jiangsu, the minimum monthly wage for full-time workers was also raised to 2,490 yuan, 2,260 yuan and 2,010 yuan in different cities, according to the provincial human resources and social security department.

Great Wall Scenic Area

Beijing's Yanqing District plans to build a comprehensive world-class scenic area around the Badaling Great Wall UNESCO World Heritage Site and integrate surrounding sections of the Great Wall, according to a Xinhua report published on January 16. Starting this year, the district will build scenic trails

connecting surrounding sections of the Great Wall and improve the business models of the China Great Wall Museum and nearby commercial areas to better meet tourist demand for accommodation, dining and shopping. It will also launch a range of activities, including a Great Wall Culture Festival, a related forum and a concert, according to the district government.

The Great Wall has a total length of more than 20,000 km and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site consisting of many interconnected walls. Beijing features an approximate total of 520 km of Great Wall sections, of which the Badaling section is the most visited.

Since the Badaling Great Wall was opened to tourists in 1958, it has received more than 200 million visitors from China and abroad.

Livestreaming Jobs

The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security has issued a circular encouraging building livestreaming bases for recruitment to boost high-quality, sufficient employment.

Localities are required to set up such bases at public employment service venues. They are encouraged to work



Towering Over the City

The construction site of the second-phase project (east section) of the Nanjing Financial City in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, on January 16. The main structure of the project was capped that day. The project is designed as an architectural complex comprising office, hospitality, residential and commercial facilities.

with universities, industrial parks, enterprises, recruitment agencies and social media platforms to meet demands of job hunters and employers alike, the circular said.

The ministry urged local authorities to make full use of the interactive strength of livestreaming to raise the efficiency of matching demand and supply in

the job market.

Some online platforms have, for example, already organized livestreamed job fairs in recent years. Through site visits, livestreaming hosts introduce enterprises and vacant positions to job hunters in a comprehensive, visual and interactive way to connect employers and job seekers more directly and efficiently.



Adding the Final Touch

A painter colors festive lanterns in Hongze District of Huaian in Jiangsu Province on January 16, in preparation for the upcoming Spring Festival, which falls on February 10 this year.

Shipbuilding Strength

China maintained its top position in the global shipbuilding market in 2023, with strong growth in both output and new orders, industry data showed.

The country's shipbuilding output in 2023 climbed 11.8 percent year on year to 42.32 million deadweight tons (DWTs), a measurement of a ship's total contents, accounting for 50.2 percent of the world's total, according to data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

New orders surged 56.4 percent year on year to 71.2 million DWTs, taking up 66.6 percent of the world's total during the period, figures from the ministry showed.

The sector's holding orders totaled 139.39 million DWTs as of late last December, expanding 32 percent year on year. The volume represented 55 percent of the global market share.

Foreign-Funded Projects

The National Development and Reform Commission said on January 12 it had launched the seventh batch of major projects with foreign investment.

The commission said the batch includes 11 projects involving biomedicine, automobile manufacturing, batteries for new-energy vehicles (NEVs) and chemicals, with the total planned investment exceeding \$15 billion.

So far, the first six batches of 40 major foreign-invested projects have completed a total investment of \$73 billion.

RMB Cross-Border Settlement

Renminbi (RMB) cross-border settlement under the current account reached 14.03 trillion yuan (\$1.95 trillion) in 2023, data from the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, showed.

It involved 10.69 trillion yuan (\$1.49 trillion) in the settlement

of trade in goods and 3.34 trillion yuan (\$464.5 billion) in the settlement of trade in services and other current account items, the central bank said.

RMB cross-border settlement of direct investment stood at 7.6 trillion yuan (\$1.06 trillion) in 2023.

Of this total, outbound direct investment stood at 2.6 trillion yuan (\$361.6 billion), and foreign direct investment stood at 5 trillion yuan (\$695.3 billion).

Auto Exports

China's auto exports surged 57.9 percent year on year to a record high of 4.91 million vehicles in 2023 as the country's automakers expanded their presence overseas, data from the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers (CAAM) showed.

It marks another significant increase after the country exported more than 3 million vehicles in 2022 and over 2 million in 2021.

The massive growth was

propelled by a surge in the exports of NEVs, which soared 77.6 percent to more than 1.2 million units in the past year. Exports of pure electric vehicles expanded by 80.9 percent while that of hybrid ones increased by 47.8 percent year on year.

Total auto sales surged 12 percent year on year to top 30.09 million units last year, while output exceeded 30.16 million units, up 11.6 percent compared with the 2022 level, CAAM data showed.

In 2023, production and sales of NEVs exceeded 9.58 million and 9.49 million units, surging 35.8 percent and 37.9 percent year on year, respectively. The market share of NEVs stood at 31.6 percent.

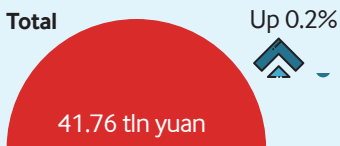
Chen Shihua, Deputy Secretary General of the association, said with the overall economy continuing to recover, China's auto market is likely to maintain a sound momentum this year.

The CAAM said it expects China's NEV sales to reach 11.5

NUMBERS

China's Foreign Trade in 2023

(All changes are y.o.y., \$1=7.11 yuan as of January 18)

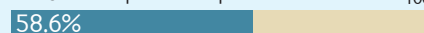


Exports of major products

Mechanical products



% of China's imports in the period



Solar batteries, lithium-ion batteries and electric vehicles



Total exports of ships



Imports of commodities

Agricultural products



million in 2024. Total auto exports are projected to hit 5.5 million units.

Real Estate Financing

Authorities have announced a plan to establish a financing coordination mechanism for the real estate sector.

The mechanism will aim to satisfy the legitimate financing needs of real estate projects precisely, while also supporting the stable and sound growth of the country's real estate market, according to the plan released by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and the National Financial Regulatory Administration.

Based on comprehensive assessments of real estate projects and their developers, the mechanism is expected to generate lists of projects eligible for financing assistance, according to the plan.

Financing approval processes will be expedited for projects that are making smooth progress and have sufficient

collateral, reasonable liabilities and guaranteed repayment sources, per the plan.

For projects that are experiencing temporary difficulties but maintaining a basic fund balance, the mechanism will prevent the hasty withdrawal, suspension and withholding of loans. It will provide support by means of loan extensions, rescheduled repayments and the issuance of new loans.

The plan also encourages real estate developers to enhance cash flows and utilize credit funds in compliance with regulatory requirements.

SME Performance

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Index, based on a survey of 3,000 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from eight major industries across China, came in at 89.2 in 2023, higher than 88.4 in the previous year, the China Association of Small and Medium Enterprises said in a report.

The index contains multiple sub-indexes to gauge the performances and expectations of SMEs. A reading above 100 reflects an upward trend in business, while a reading below that mark indicates dented vitality.

The report attributed the increase to booming consumption, fixed assets investment, and hi-tech industry development.

The sub-index for accommodation and catering climbed 1.6 points in 2023, the sub-index for construction gained 1.3 points, and that for information transmission, computer services and software edged up 1.1 points.

The data mirrored both improving confidence of enterprises and their better performances, the report said.

Offshore Oilfield Output

Bohai Oilfield, China's largest offshore crude oil producer, saw its annual oil and gas output top 36.8 million tons of oil

equivalent in 2023.

This milestone includes record highs 34 million tons of crude oil and 3.5 billion cubic meters of natural gas, according to the Tianjin branch of the China National Offshore Oil Corp. (CNOOC) on January 12.

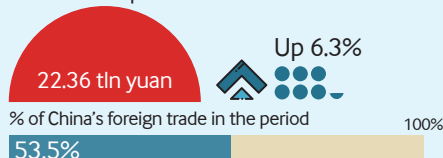
The increase of crude oil output from the year before neared 2.3 million tons, accounting for about half of the total increase of crude oil in China.

Since the construction of the base in 1965, more than 50 oil and gas fields and nearly 200 production facilities have been developed, making Bohai Oilfield the main oilfield with the highest output and the largest scale in Chinese waters. Its daily oil and gas output has exceeded 100,000 tons of oil equivalent.

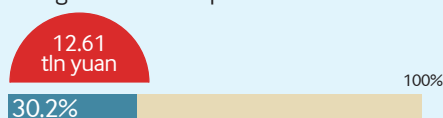
The oilfield aims to achieve annual oil and gas output exceeding 40 million tons by 2025. This year will be crucial in achieving this goal, according to Yan Hongtao, General Manager of CNOOC Tianjin.

Imports and exports

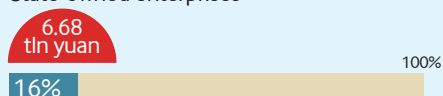
Private enterprises



Foreign-funded enterprises

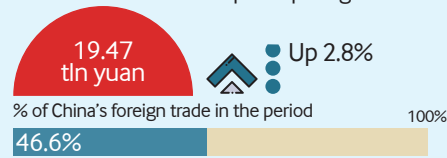


State-owned enterprises

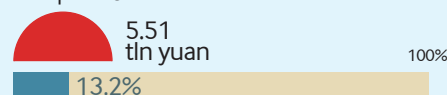


China's trade with:

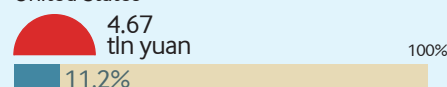
Belt and Road Initiative participating countries



European Union



United States



(Source: General Administration of Customs of China)



SWITZERLAND

Attendees at the World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting 2024 in Davos on January 15. The 54th WEF Annual Meeting ran from January 15 to 19, aiming to enhance cooperation and cultivate partnerships



KYRGYZSTAN

The wreckage of a helicopter in Bishkek on January 17. The Mi8 combat helicopter crashed on the grounds of an airbase in Bishkek that day, killing one and injuring eight



UNITED STATES

The Philadelphia Orchestra brings together Western and Chinese music to celebrate Chinese New Year at the Verizon Hall inside the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts in Philadelphia on January 12



QATAR

Qatari and Lebanese players take to the pitch for the opening match of the 2023 AFC Asian Cup at Lusail Stadium, Lusail, on January 12



REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Visitors pose for pictures in front of sculptures created by ice sculptors from China's Harbin City, Heilongjiang Province, during the Hwacheon Sancheoneo Ice Festival in Gangwon Province on January 13



TANZANIA

Rescuers search for survivors after a gold mine collapsed following heavy rains in the Simiyu Region on January 14. The disaster killed 22 people



↓ NEW MAYOR OF GUANGZHOU

Sun Zhiyang has become mayor of Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong Province and one of China's economic powerhouses.

Born in Fuyu, Jilin Province, in May 1974, Sun spent more than two decades in the automobile industry, assuming several positions at China's leading automaker FAW Group in Changchun, Jilin's capital. His roles at FAW included product planning engineer from 2001 to 2002 and vice president from 2018 to 2021.

Later, he was appointed vice governor of Guangdong. In October 2023, Sun became Guangzhou's acting mayor. The city's GDP is estimated to have exceeded 3 trillion yuan (\$422 billion) in 2023, making it a member of the "3-trillion-yuan club," following Shanghai, Beijing and Shenzhen, which hit the mark in 2017, 2018 and 2021, respectively.



Plastic-Free Hotels

Guangzhou Daily
January 16

Recently, China has launched a new initiative aiming to reduce single-use plastics in the hospitality industry. The initiative was issued to curb the provision of toothbrushes, combs and other small-packaged toiletries in hotels and bed-and-breakfasts. Despite their small sizes, these hotel items, which are often made of non-degradable plastics, can cause serious plastic pollution.

In fact, this is not the first time that authorities have attempted to stop the industry from churning out plastic waste. In 2020, the Ministry of Commerce required that all the star-rated hotels in China stop providing disposable plastic items by the end of 2022, and that the no-plastics policy

be extended to cover all hotels nationwide by the end of 2025.

However, the policy was not successful. One obvious reason is that customers are already used to asking for these items. What's more, hotel brands have sought to differentiate themselves from competitors by investing in higher-quality bath products, which have become the most attractive value-added service a hotel can provide.

Amenities are essential to the guest experience, but that doesn't mean they have to come in the form of plastics. Hotel brands should consider replacing plastic items with reusable or refillable glass or ceramic bottles. Further legal regulations and more refined standards are also needed to effectively promote and implement plastic reduction policies.



The Good, the Bad And the Hopeful

China Newsweek
January 8

China recorded its hottest year in 2023, with a succession of record-breaking temperatures throughout the year. According to data recently released by the National Climate Center, the national average temperature last year reached 10.7 degree Celsius, the highest since records began in 1961.

The country is not alone in combating surging temperatures. A report released by the World Meteorological Organization shows that the year was about 2.4 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial 1850-1900 baseline. The report also finds that global sea levels reached

"Restoring and developing diplomatic relations and carrying out practical cooperation in various fields with China promise broad prospects and will bring unprecedented development opportunities for Nauru."

Foreign Ministry spokesperson **Mao Ning**, commenting on the Pacific island country's break of "diplomatic ties" with Taiwan authorities, at a press briefing on January 17

"We are on the brink of a technological revolution that could jumpstart productivity, boost global growth and raise incomes around the world. Yet it could also replace jobs and deepen inequality."

Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), commenting on an IMF prediction that artificial intelligence will affect almost 40 percent of jobs worldwide

a new record high in 2023, while Arctic sea ice coverage hit an all-time low.

Equally disconcerting is that a global united front against climate change has not yet fully formed. Originally scheduled to close in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), on December 12, 2023, the annual UN Climate Change Conference was forced into overtime as fossil fuel phase-out divided countries. After a day of fierce negotiations, the event closed on December 13, with an agreement that pledges a swift, just and equitable transition away from fossil fuels.

Experts are worried that the consensus does not have enough power to commit the world to phasing out oil and gas. Among the 196 countries that attended the conference, some, including the UAE and Venezuela, are major exporters of fossil fuels, while many others, such as Indonesia and South Africa, are heavily dependent on coal.

To close the enormous gaps, all countries should jointly work on how to address their conflicting interests and how not to let their differences divide the world. International think tanks, nongovernmental organizations and businesses should also facilitate dialogue beyond the political level to accelerate the clean energy transition.

Vying for Visitors

Ce.cn

January 16

Harbin, capital of the country's north-easternmost province of Heilongjiang, has recently emerged as a viral online sensation following a surge in tourists to its many winter attractions. The city's sudden popularity has set provinces across China on a heated race for attention. A slew of tourism bureaus have rebranded their social media accounts, on which they are now posting extensively about local attractions. Several provinces have launched polls to collect public views on how to boost

local tourism.

The public is deeply divided over whether these promotional campaigns will work. On the one hand, it is almost impossible to replicate the unexpected fame of Harbin, as social media trends often occur in a random pattern. On the other hand, cities should be keenly aware of the power and influence of social media and be fully prepared to handle online virality once it hits.

However, virality supported by clever marketing strategies is likely to fade. After all, cities should focus on investing in infrastructure and public facilities to offer visitors a better travel experience, instead of simply chasing after fragile fame.

↓ SPECIAL ENVOY FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

Senior diplomat **Liu Zhenmin** has been appointed China's special envoy for climate change.

Born in August 1955, Liu was UN under secretary general for economic and social affairs from 2017 to 2022, and was charged with helping advance its sustainable development agenda.

Liu began his diplomatic career at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1982. He served the ministry in multiple capacities, including ambassador and permanent representative of China to the UN Office at Geneva and other international organizations in Switzerland. He was vice minister of foreign affairs from 2013 to 2017. He was involved in negotiations on the Paris Agreement adopted in 2015 with the aim of limiting global warming.



Liu succeeded Xie Zhenhua, a veteran official who has been engaged in international climate talks for 16 years.

"We are cautiously optimistic that things will look better."

Borge Brende, President of the Geneva-based World Economic Forum, in a recent interview with Xinhua News Agency, saying the global economy is in a better shape than a year ago

"High-value patents account for over 40 percent of the total, which shows that China has become a veritable intellectual property power and has consistently contributed to global innovation."

Hu Wenhui, deputy head of the National Intellectual Property Administration, at a news conference on January 17, noting that China owned about 4.02 million such patents by the end of 2023

GO-GREEN GOVERNANCE

Yundang Lake, a shining example of China's ecological culture By Tao Xing



The 1.6-square-km Yundang Lake, located in the heart of Xiamen City in the southeastern province of Fujian, is a saltwater lake that reflects the surrounding urban landscape like a gleaming mirror. But this beautiful lake, today considered Xiamen's eco-signature, wasn't built in a day.

Formerly an open port, the lagoon was created through a series of land reclamation projects. However, the construction of embankments blocked the flow of

water, and the construction of factories around the lake caused a sharp decline in water quality. The area's stench could be smelled from afar.

But since the mid-1980s, the local government has managed to transform it into a prime tourist destination and a popular place for locals to relax. And the lagoon's small, lush green islands are now home to the egret, Xiamen's signature bird.

Pouring in support

The management of Yundang Lake is a continuous effort. Over the past 40 years, Xiamen's successive municipal governments have diligently implemented intensive measures.

Previously, 45 percent of the city's industrial wastewater and 50 percent of its domestic sewage were

discharged directly into Yundang Lake, so controlling the sources of pollution was a top priority, according to a 2021 report by local newspaper *Xiamen Daily*.

Cleaning the water was the first step.

The polluting factories were either shut down or relocated. Then the sludge that had accumulated on the bottom of the lake for decades was dredged. In general, the lake is dredged about every 10 years. Over the past 30 years, 4.7 million cubic meters of sludge have been dredged, and 14 km