

FEATURES: A NEW TAKE ON HUMAN RIGHTS P.28 | FEATURES: MEGACITY NOSTALGIA P.40

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Cover Photo: A courier en route to his next destination on a snowy day in Zhangjiagang, Jiangsu Province, in December 2023 (VCG)

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EDITOR'S DESK



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Delivering the Future

China's express delivery industry has revolutionized the way goods are transported and delivered. In recent years, this sector has experienced remarkable growth, fueled by innovation, technological advancements and an expanding economy.

China's vast population and booming e-commerce have created a massive demand for fast and reliable delivery services. With the rise of online shopping platforms, consumers expect speedy doorstep deliveries, and the express delivery industry has risen to meet the demand. Through the use of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data analytics and robotics, related companies have optimized their logistics networks, reducing delivery time and increasing accuracy.

In 2023, the sector handled 132.07 billion parcels, a year-on-year increase of 19.4 percent. Its sales revenue stood at 1.2 trillion yuan (\$168.78 billion), up 14.5 percent year on year, according to figures released by the State Post Bureau (SPB) on January 22.

The growth of China's express delivery industry has created millions of jobs, from couriers to warehouse workers and administrative staff. This sector has been a driving force behind employment opportunities, contributing to poverty alleviation, rural development and the country's overall economic transition.

Moreover, to further increase efficiency

while reducing carbon dioxide emissions, drones and autonomous vehicles are being used for last-mile deliveries.

China's express delivery services have not only transformed domestic logistics but also played a crucial role in facilitating international trade.

The country has led the world in annual express delivery volume since 2014. China Post and SF Express are on the *Fortune* Global 500 list. Other leading players, each with an annual delivery volume exceeding 10 billion parcels, include ZTO Express, Yunda Express, YTO Express and STO Express.

Chinese delivery giants have been expanding overseas, forming partnerships in different countries. Cainiao and JD Logistics, the logistics arms of e-commerce titans Alibaba and JD.com, respectively, are both eyeing an international logistics network.

With a global vision, Chinese companies aim to provide efficient cross-border services and support international trade. According to SPB figures, the volume of their Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan as well as international business totaled 3.07 billion pieces in 2023, surging 52 percent year on year. China's express delivery industry looks poised to help connect manufacturers and sellers with consumers around the world. **BR**



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A RACE AGAINST TIME

Workers carry out rescue operations in Liangshui Village, Tangfang Town in the city of Zhaotong, Yunnan Province in southwest China, on January 23.

A landslide struck the mountain village on January 22, killing 44 people. Preliminary investigations indicated that the collapse of a steep cliff top area had caused the landslide.



En Route!

Vehicles to be exported and a roll-on/roll-off ship at the Dongdu Port area in Xiamen, Fujian Province, on January 23. More than 3,700 vehicles were loaded onto the vessel. The ship left Xiamen for Europe on January 24, carrying by far the largest batch of automobile exports from Xiamen Port in a single voyage.

Stable Employment

China created 12.44 million jobs in its urban areas in 2023, official data showed on January 23.

Last year's 5.2-percent GDP growth was pivotal to job creation, with the service sector leading the economic recovery, Yun Donglai, an official with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, told a press conference.

The country has scaled up policy support for employment, with financial assistance from central and local governments exceeding 300 billion yuan (\$41.8 billion) throughout 2023, Yun said.

In the subsequent steps,

the country will maintain employment as its top priority by increasing fiscal subsidies and tax incentives, providing greater financial assistance and reducing the social insurance burden, the official said.

It will encourage advanced manufacturing, along with the digital, eco-friendly and senior care sectors, to play a greater role in creating jobs while intensifying support for major employment drivers such as private, small and medium-sized companies.

An employment promotion campaign will also be launched from January to April, aimed at creating jobs for key populations nationwide, according to the official.

Civil Aviation Recovery

Airports on the Chinese mainland reported increased passenger numbers in 2023, according to a report released by VariFlight, a China-based civil-aviation data service provider, Xinhua News Agency reported on January 21.

These airports handled more than 4.85 million outbound passenger flights last year, surging 95.11 percent year on year, the report said.

The figure also represented an increase of 1.32 percent compared with that registered in 2019, said the report.

In 2023, 38 airports had an annual passenger throughput of 10 million or above, up by 11

compared with 2022. Among them, 17 airports reported increased outbound passenger numbers compared with the 2019 level, the report said.

Naval Symposium

The 19th biennial meeting of the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) will be held in the coastal city of Qingdao in Shandong Province in April, according to a meeting of the WPNS working group that ended on January 18.

During the three-day meeting in Nanjing, capital of east China's Jiangsu Province, delegates engaged in discussions and exchanges on 10 topics, including the revision of the WPNS Business Charter, the application of the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea, and the symposium's future activities. Board consensus was reached on several levels.

The outcomes of this meeting will be submitted to the upcoming WPNS biennial meeting for review and voting, the working group said.

Ren Xiaofeng, a senior officer with the Naval Research Academy and Chinese delegate to the working group meeting, expressed the hope that the meeting will help WPNS member countries to promote and deepen exchange, further manage disputes and eliminate risks.

Cultural Industry Boom

Beijing experienced a robust recovery in its cultural industries in 2023, registering a record number of exhibitions and commercial performances, Huo Zhijing, deputy head of the municipal publicity department, said on January 22.

Throughout 2023, more than

49,000 commercial performances were staged in Beijing, generating ticket sales of over 2.3 billion yuan (\$320.6 million), with both figures setting new records. The former doubled the 2019 pre-COVID level.

Last year, Beijing also strived to transform itself into a “city of museums,” with the addition of 11 newly registered museums and 27 museum-like institutions.

A record-breaking 87 million visitors attended more than 700 exhibitions.

New Findings

Two archaeological sites have been unearthed in the city of Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang Province in east China, shedding light on stone processing dating back to the Liangzhu civilization around 5,000 years ago, according to a meeting on the province’s archaeological work that concluded on January 21.

The two relic sites are the Shenjiali relic site in the city’s Xiaoshan District and the Shenjiafan relic site in Tonglu County.

The Shenjiali relic site, spanning approximately 15,000 square meters with an excavated area of 325 square meters, revealed the remains of a sophisticated stone processing plant

from the Liangzhu culture, where archaeologists uncovered tens of thousands of stone processing byproducts.

The Shenjiafan site, covering around 40,000 square meters with an excavated area of 1,500 square meters, has revealed over 200 sites, including ash pits, tombs and column pits. The excavation has also yielded 37,000 relics, predominantly stone products from the Liangzhu civilization.

The new findings not only provide archaeological evidence for understanding the origin of stone tools in the Liangzhu civilization, but also contribute to the overall analysis and research of the production and circulation of stone tools within this ancient civilization, Wang Ningyuan, an expert from the Zhejiang Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, said.

Panda Conservation Center

Visitors are expected to see more giant pandas as the construction of the first phase of a new giant panda national conservation and research center is underway in Beijing, *China Daily* reported on January 24.

The first phase of construction



A Safe Haven

Earthquake-affected children enjoy a cup of milk tea at a temporary shelter in Akqi County, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, on January 23. Three people were killed and five others injured when a 7.1-magnitude earthquake struck Wushi County and its surrounding areas in Aksu Prefecture, Xinjiang on January 23.

is projected to be completed by the end of this year.

According to a statement from the city government, the project is located in the Qinglonghu Forest Park, which is well-known for its natural environment.

“The goal of the project is to promote the revitalization of the wild population, enhance the protection of giant pandas and

create a world-class giant panda research and education base, as well as a cultural exhibition platform,” the statement said.

Qinglonghu boasts superior ecological conditions, as it is home to mountains, forests, fields and lakes. It already has a forest park covering thousands of hectares, making it a suitable habitat for giant pandas in Beijing.



Drone Delivery

A drone carrying blood takes off from the Shenzhen Blood Center in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, on January 19 for the Shenzhen Traditional Chinese Medicine Hospital. A drone platform for transporting blood, the first of its kind in Shenzhen, was officially launched on the same day. The platform, which integrates 5G technology and artificial intelligence, has helped ensure the safety and improve the efficiency of blood transportation.

Capital Market

China has sent a clear signal that it will make more efforts to stabilize the capital market and improve investor confidence.

Policy makers were briefed on the operation of the capital market and considerations for related work at a State Council (China's highest state administrative organ) executive meeting on January 22.

The country will further improve the capital market's fundamental system, pay more attention to maintaining a dynamic balance between investment and financing, enhance the quality and investment value of listed companies, increase flows of medium- and long-term funds into the market, and strengthen the market's inherent stability, according to the meeting.

Zhang Wangjun, an official with the China Securities Regulatory Commission, said more will be done to reform the investment side of the capital market, promote counter-cyclical investment by institutions, and

improve the investment channels of social security, insurance and annuity funds in a bid to foster long-term stable investment forces.

The meeting pledged to take stronger, more effective measures to stabilize the market and improve confidence.

The government policies related to the capital market will be more coordinated, continuous and stable, Zhang said, adding that efforts will be made to prevent the rollout of policies unfavorable to improving market expectations, while work will also be done to defuse risks in the property sector and those associated with local government debts.

To create a transparent environment, it is necessary to strengthen market supervision with zero tolerance for illegal activities, according to the meeting.

Expanded Imports

The country provided increased market access for imports of agricultural and food products

from over 51 countries and regions in 2023, the General Administration of Customs of China (GACC) said on January 23.

In its statement, the administration said the approval of 146 shipments of various types of imported agricultural and food products helped meet the diversified needs of Chinese consumers.

The GACC continued to deepen its global partnerships in 2023. It signed 156 cooperation documents with foreign partners last year, including 84 documents on market access for agricultural and food products with its Belt and Road cooperation partners, according to the statement. The Belt and Road Initiative, proposed by China in 2013, aims to boost connectivity along and beyond the ancient Silk Road routes.

In 2024, customs authorities will deepen international cooperation on inspection and quarantine measures, optimize and improve quarantine and access procedures for agricultural and food products, and continue

to create new growth points for the trade of such products, the statement read.

Furthering Opening Up

The National Administration of Financial Regulation (NAFR) on January 20 announced that China will steadily expand the institutional opening up of its financial sector.

The NAFR said it supports foreign-funded institutions with exceptional expertise in wealth management, senior care and general healthcare, and non-performing asset management in conducting business in China.

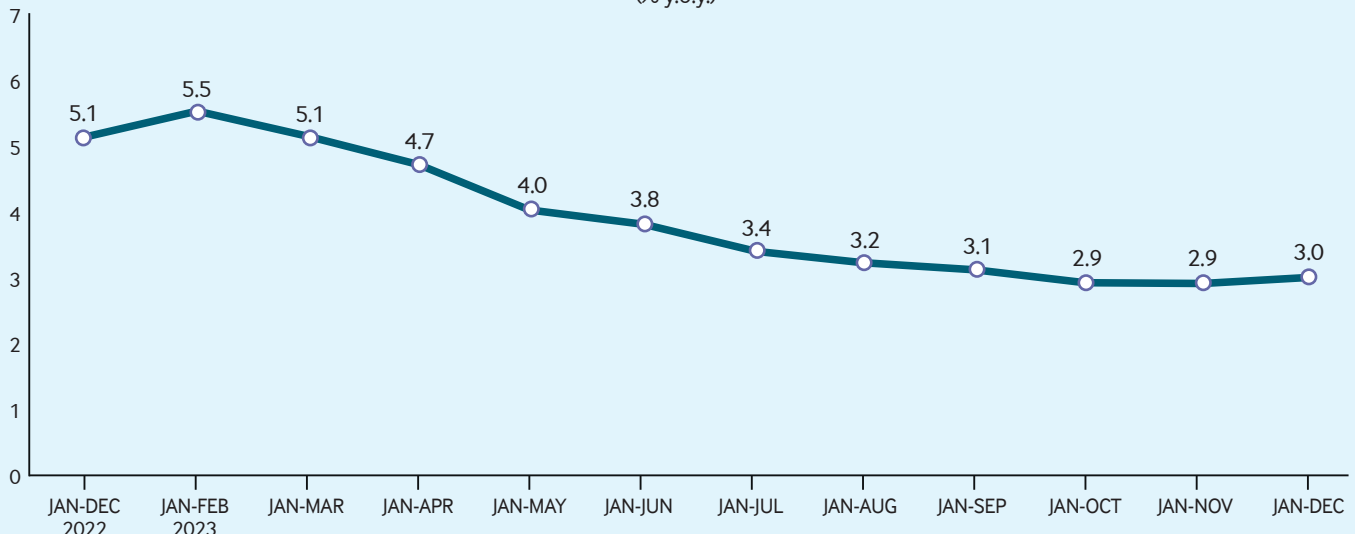
The country will give full play to the advantages of its ultra-large market and pool global, high-quality financial resources, it said.

The administration reiterated the significance of effectively preventing and defusing major financial risks and ensuring there will be no systemic financial risk.

The NAFR will intensify su-

NUMBERS

Fixed Assets Investment Growth in China
(% y.o.y.)



pervision of the financial sector and coordinate with other related authorities to place all financial activities under legal oversight.

Foreign-Invested Firms

The number of newly established foreign-invested enterprises reached 53,766 in 2023 in China, representing a growth of 39.7 percent year on year, the latest data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

Paid-in foreign direct investment (FDI), which remained at a high level, hit more than 1.13 trillion yuan (\$157.6 billion), down 8 percent year on year, according to the data.

In terms of sectors, FDI, an ownership stake in a foreign company or project made by an investor, company or government from another country, in the manufacturing industry reached 317.92 billion yuan (\$44.3 billion) in 2023, down 1.8 percent, even though hi-tech manufacturing registered a

6.5-percent increase in FDI.

The ministry, in a statement, specified that hi-tech industries attracted 423.34 billion yuan (\$59 billion), accounting for 37.3 percent of the total amount of FDI last year. Its share in total FDI also expanded by 1.2 percentage points compared to the 2022 level.

Actual FDI in the service industry reached 776.08 billion yuan (\$108.2 billion), down 13.4 percent. In contrast, FDI in the construction sector, as well as research and development and design services, increased by 43.7 and 4.1 percent, respectively.

FDI originating from France, Britain, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Australia increased by 84.1, 81, 31.5, 21.4 and 17.1 percent, respectively, the data said.

Manufacturing Hub

China has remained the world's top manufacturing hub for 14 consecutive years, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology said on January 19.

The country's large manufacturing enterprises, each of which has an annual main business turnover of at least 20 million yuan (\$2.8 million), saw their combined value-added output increase by 5 percent year on year in 2023, Xin Guobin, Vice Minister of Industry and Information Technology, said at a press conference.

Total value-added industrial output went up 4.6 percent year on year in 2023, up 1 percentage point from that of 2022, Xin said.

By late November last year, the number of large industrial enterprises reached 483,000, up 32,000 from that at the end of 2022, he added.

Private Sector Support

The National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), China's top economic planner, on January 18 pledged to roll out further pragmatic measures to boost the development of the private sector.

Yuan Da, Deputy Secretary General of the NDRC, told a press conference that the commission will push ahead with the legislation on promoting the development of the private sector and enshrine the equal status of state-owned enterprises and private businesses in law.

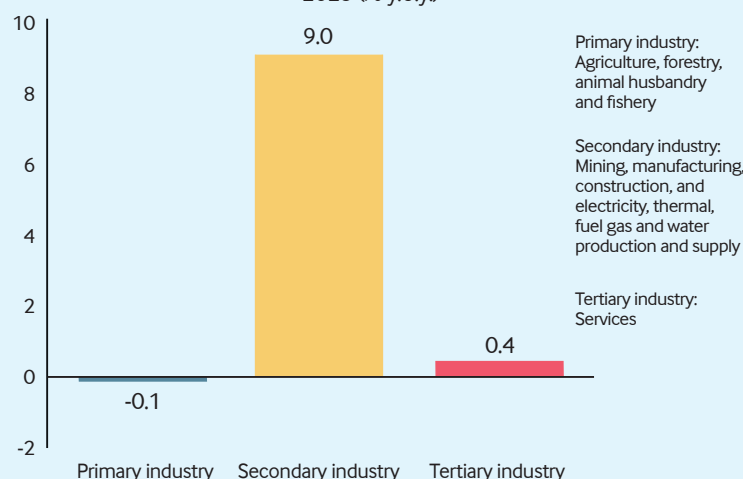
He said the NDRC will act to ensure the implementation of policies supporting the private sector, encourage more private investment in the country's significant projects, and back private companies in conducting research and development in key and core technologies.

The NDRC will make efforts so that the voices of private firm owners are heard and their problems get solved, Yuan added.

According to him, the commission will also actively create a favorable environment for the development of the private sector, where entrepreneurship is praised and private businesses are respected.

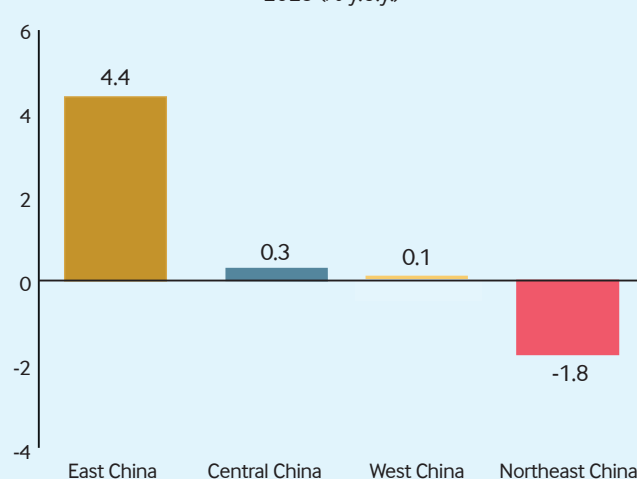
Fixed Assets Investment Growth in China by Sector

2023 (% y.o.y.)



Fixed Assets Investment Growth in China by Region

2023 (% y.o.y.)



(Source: National Bureau of Statistics)

THIS WEEK WORLD



MONACO

Acrobats perform at the 46th International Circus Festival of Monte-Carlo on January 19. The annual festival concluded on January 28



TÜRKİYE

Lawmakers attend a vote on Sweden's NATO bid at the Grand National Assembly in Ankara on January 23. They approved a long-delayed bill on Sweden's bid to become the 32nd NATO member



UNITED KINGDOM

A woman walks her dog by the seaside near the city of Blackpool on January 22 after storm *Isha* swept across the country. Tens of thousands of homes were left without electricity and hundreds of trains were canceled



UGANDA

Delegates attend the opening ceremony of the 19th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Kampala on January 19. The summit opened with a call to focus on unity as the world grapples with a continued push for unilateralism



REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Torchbearer Lee Jeong-min lights the cauldron during the opening ceremony of the 2024 Gangwon Winter Youth Olympic Games in Gangneung, Gangwon Province, on January 19



FRANCE

Models present creations from the Spring/Summer 2024 haute-couture collection by French fashion house Chanel during Paris Fashion Week on January 23



THIS WEEK PEOPLE & POINTS

↓ DESERTIFICATION CONTROL EXPERT CLAIMS TOP AWARD

Xu Xianying, a researcher on desertification, received the National Engineering Award, the nation's highest honor in the field of engineering, on January 19.

Xu, 61, grew up in a village on the rim of a desert in Gansu Province. After college graduation, he chose fighting desertification as his lifelong career, working on taming sand for almost four decades.

Gansu in northwest China is one of the regions most severely affected by desertification. Xu has led his team to introduce sand-stabilizing vegetation and develop equipment and technologies such as machines for installing sand barriers. Xu headed the Gansu Desert Control Research Institute in Lanzhou and holds a Ph.D. from the School of Soil and Water Conservation, Beijing Forestry University.

Eighty-one individuals were granted the National Engineering Award this year, and 50 groups were named National Outstanding Engineering Teams.



Delivery Dash for Cash

Rednet.cn
January 15

Chen Si, a 26-year-old food delivery courier based in Shanghai, has recently become famous on Chinese social media for claiming to have made 1 million yuan (\$139,600) in three years. To do so, he would have needed to deliver more than 100 orders per day consistently over 1,000 days. In one of the many videos he posted on Douyin, TikTok's Chinese version, Chen said that the money has helped him pay off the debt he had accumulated from a failed restaurant startup.

These videos have sparked heated online debate. While some question whether

the whole thing was an advertisement for the delivery platform for which Chen worked, others applaud him for his diligence.

Chen's story also exposes the many challenges facing millions of food delivery couriers in China. While juggling the interests of consumers and restaurants, delivery companies often forget that their drivers are entitled to proper care. They often have to work overtime and deal with complex road traffic, sometimes under adverse weather conditions.

Therefore, while people find strength in Chen's self-made success, attention should also be directed toward how delivery companies can better safeguard the welfare of their couriers.



Chinese Tech Goes Global

China Newsweek
January 15

With auto exports topping 5 million units in 2023, China overtook Japan to become the world's largest exporter of cars. According to data published by the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers, the top destinations for China's car exports are Russia, Mexico, Belgium, Australia and the United Kingdom.

"Americans should realize that in some areas, China's ahead of the U.S., and there's much that each side can learn from the other."

John Charles Thomson, a retired American diplomat who served in Beijing at the U.S. Liaison Office in China from 1978 to 1981, in a recent interview with Xinhua News Agency

"That's a synonym of trust, of confidence."

Natalia Bayona, Executive Director of the UN World Tourism Organization, in an interview with Xinhua, commenting on China's recent extension of the visa-free policy to Switzerland and Ireland, in addition to five EU countries and Malaysia

In addition to automobiles, China is also continuing its rapid expansion into global new energy markets, with exports of solar panels, wind turbines, lithium-ion batteries and energy storage facilities soaring to record highs. A report released by the International Energy Agency shows that China's share in all the key manufacturing stages of solar panels exceeds 80 percent today.

A series of Chinese cross-border e-commerce platforms, including Temu, SHEIN, TikTok Shop and AliExpress, are also rapidly reshaping the global online retail landscape. During last year's Black Friday shopping spree, a traditional high season for online sales in the United States, a slew of Chinese e-commerce titans entered the scene with a dazzling array of promotional strategies, including 90 percent-off deals and limited free standard shipping offers.

Together, these new growth engines signal a broader repositioning of China in the global market. The phrase, "made in China" is taking on a new meaning, as the country is shifting away from the export of home appliances, furniture and clothes toward the overseas expansion of hi-tech industries.

Dining Out at Home

Eastday.com
January 15

Now that the Year of the Dragon, which begins on February 10, is only a few days away, restaurants across China are quickly running out of booking slots for *nianyefan*, a family reunion dinner that falls on Chinese New Year's Eve. While restaurant bookings are soaring high, private chef services are also on the rise as a popular option for the occasion.

This type of door-to-door catering service includes not just the preparation of meals, but also menu planning,

shopping for ingredients, serving and washing up.

The newfound popularity of door-to-door cooking services has led to widespread concerns over the many hidden risks involved in booking an in-home chef, such as food hazards and personal security risks.

To keep these potential risks at bay, authorities should support this nascent sector with clear health and safety guidelines as well as strict qualification standards. Consumers should also be mindful of the risks involved and book private chef services through certified agencies.

↓ THE ACTOR WHO PLAYS MAO

Wang Renjun has starred in a popular TV series commemorating the 130th anniversary of Chairman Mao Zedong's birth. The series, titled *The Forerunner*, is currently airing on multiple platforms following its premiere in December last year.

It is the fifth time that Wang, 40, has played the role of Mao on screen. "The more I play him, the more admiration I have for him," Wang said in a recent interview. A graduate of the prestigious Beijing Film Academy, Wang made his screen debut in 2008. He has since played diverse roles in TV dramas and movies.

The Forerunner follows Mao's transformative journey from a young delegate at the First National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 1921 to a pioneering leader of the Chinese revolution in 1927. It has been rated 8.9 points out of 10 on Chinese movie and TV reviewing platform Douban.



"International cooperation has provided more opportunities for all parties involved to explore space."

Yuan Weimin, Principal Investigator of the *Einstein Probe*, a new astronomical satellite jointly developed by Chinese and European scientists, after it was launched on January 9

"Efforts will be made to improve the monitoring, early warning and response mechanism for cross-border capital flows, strengthen market communication and guidance on expectations, and keep the renminbi exchange rate basically stable."

Zhu Hexin, Deputy Governor of the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, and head of the State Administration of Foreign Exchange, at a press conference on January 24



COVER STORY

SUPERCARGED

Express couriers meet China's ever-evolving need for delivery speed

By Elsbeth van Paridon

Jingdong ayi lai la! Or “The Jing Dong auntie is here!” in plain English.

With rosy cheeks, unmistakably the result of spending a lot of time outdoors in the ice box that is Beijing winter, He

Fang emerges from behind a long line of delivery karts, wrapped in several layers. Her outer layer is a perfect match for the tiny three-wheeled vehicles: red and emblazoned with “JDL.” The three letters stand for JD Logistics, the shipping and delivery arm of JD.com, launched in 2004 and now one of China's three key e-commerce players, together with Alibaba and PDD.

On this January day, this writer finds herself at a JD delivery center in east Beijing, ready for a Q&A with He, right before her third and final delivery round of the day late in the afternoon.

A mother of two teenagers, He is one of a growing number