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Visitors check out the demonstration zone for pharmaceutical and healthcare players during the fourth China International Import Expo in Shanghai on Nov 9.

PHOTOS BY ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

Expo a key channel for trade collaboration

One hundred and twenty thousand cans of pine nuts from Afghanistan, along with a dazzling array of imported products from more than 20 countries and regions, were sold out within minutes in livestreams at the fourth China International Import Expo, which was held from Nov 5 to 10 in Shanghai.

While the small pine nuts whetted the appetite of Chinese consumers, they also offered a vivid example of how China facilitates trade and drives economic development globally, especially for developing countries, industry experts said.

On the night of Nov 6, e-commerce livestreamers partnered with presenters from CCTV and Xinhua News Agency to conduct several special livestreaming sessions, selling imported goods from 20 countries and regions including Indonesia, Serbia, Slovenia and South Africa.

"It vividly showed that China, with its huge market and economic vitality, has brought broad development opportunities for countries worldwide, especially for developing countries," said Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

"The stable development of the Chinese market is not only to achieve the country's own development goals, but can also create more value for the world."

In a report last month the

International Monetary Fund said aggregate output of emerging markets and developing economies (excluding China) was expected to remain 5.5 percent below the pre-pandemic forecast in 2024.

Liu Qing, vice-dean of the National Academy of Development and Strategy of Renmin University of China in Beijing, said broadening access to opportunities in China has provided a way out for many emerging markets.

"China's vast domestic consumer market, its pivotal role in global supply chains and unwavering advocacy of opening-up offer other emerging markets a key export destination in the harsher environment of globalization."

During this year's expo the State Development and Investment Corp signed import contracts with 19 foreign companies worth a record total of \$1 billion. The company bought commodities including barley, cotton, manganese ore and edible oils from 15 economies, including Argentina, Benin, Russia, Ukraine and Uruguay.

This year's expo also proved to be a premier platform for companies worldwide to showcase their latest products and services.

A total of 422 new products, technologies and services were featured during the expo, a record high, said Sun Chenghai, deputy director of the CIIE Bureau.

The medical equipment and



A visitor wears augmented reality glasses during the fourth China International Import Expo in Shanghai.

healthcare products exhibition area had 135 technology and product debuts, the most out of all the other areas.

One of the most high-profile exhibits was from the Swiss pharmaceutical company Novartis, a first-in-class hyperlipemia therapy called Inclisiran that reduces cholesterol levels. Patients need only two doses of Inclisiran a year.

Carbon neutrality and green development was also a major theme of the expo this year, and service provider EY launched a carbon management tool kit at the exhibition. The kit can help companies keep up to date with carbon prices and trends in reaching carbon neutrality and help tailor paths to green development.

The six-day CIIE attracted nearly 480,000 professional visitors. The

total exhibition area was a record 366,000 square meters, up 6,000 sq m from a year earlier.

A total of 281 Fortune 500 companies and industry leaders attended this year's exhibition, with 40 joining the CIIE for the first time and another 120 taking part in the exhibition for the fourth consecutive year.

Affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the value of intended deals reached at this year's CIIE totaled \$70.72 billion, down 2.6 percent year-on-year.

Up to 150,000 sq m of exhibition area has already been booked for next year's expo, a considerable increase in sign-up rate compared to last year, said Sun.

CHINA DAILY

Fresh initiative poised to boost global growth

Countries join Xi's call for rolling out inclusive vision to advance prosperity.

Zhang Yunbi reports

First put forward by President Xi Jinping no more than two months ago, a fresh Chinese solution for tackling countries' bottlenecks in growth — the Global Development Initiative — is rapidly winning support across the globe.

In particular, the initiative has won acclaim in a number of developing countries in regions including Asia, Africa and Oceania.

"The United Nations stands ready to support its implementation and provide technical assistance," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Oct 24, the eve of the 50th anniversary of the restoration of the People's Republic of China's lawful seat at the UN.

During a virtual meeting with Xi on Oct 25, the UN chief said this vision is of great and positive importance in promoting global equality and balanced, sustainable development.

The initiative is the latest powerful tool added to Beijing's policy toolbox for fixing common challenges in the pandemic era, and behind its popularity are countries endorsing the Communist Party of China's consistent, century-long efforts to help advance global peace, unity, shared growth and justice, senior officials and experts said.

"Development is a master key to addressing all problems, and also the common will of people in countries all over the world," State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said of the initiative's worldwide popularity when speaking to reporters on Oct 31.

Xi first unveiled the initiative while addressing the general debate of the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Sept 21 via video link.

The initiative calls for concerted action in six aspects: prioritizing development, a people-centered approach, benefits for all, innovation-driven development, harmony between man and

nature, and a commitment to results-oriented actions.

"We must revitalize the economy, pursue more robust, greener and more balanced global development, and work together to steer global development toward a new stage of balanced, coordinated and inclusive growth," he said.

Welcoming the move, Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister James Marape told Xi in phone talks last month that his country admires Xi's outstanding global leadership and expressed appreciation for the initiative.

Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev told Xi that he highly appreciates and firmly supports the people-centered philosophy and the initiative.

The initiative will help accelerate the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, diplomatic envoys of Association of Southeast Asian Nations member states based in China said at a meeting with Wang Yi on Nov 14.

The recently issued communique of the sixth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee listed "maintaining a global vision" as one of the 10 aspects of the Party's valuable historical experience explored and accumulated over the past 100 years.

Dong Guanpeng, a professor and dean at the Communication University of China's School of Government and Public Affairs, noted that this initiative "is a remarkable continuation of the CPC's lasting efforts over the past 100 years in 'maintaining a global vision' and looking to benefit more countries and their peoples".

Xi's vision on global development has convinced countries that "moving on and improving people's livelihoods proves to be a premium choice" at a time when global growth has been frustrated by protectionism, moves against globalization and the COVID-19 pandemic, Dong said.

SEE "IMPETUS" ON PAGE 2

Dots, lines and voices keep bookworms content

By ZHANG ZHOUXIANG and YANG XIAOHENG

It is three o'clock in the afternoon. Golden sunshine tumbles through the southern window of the main reading room of the Braille Library of China, yet there is not a single reader in sight.

Make no mistake: that does not mean the custodians of this literary trove are doing nothing. On the contrary, the librarian on duty is busy. She simultaneously keeps one eye on the social media app WeChat while checking another app, QQ, for new messages with the other, as well as standing ready to answer the phone. All calls and messages come from visually impaired people or their families seeking access to knowledge.

Since the library was founded in 1994 it has operated a mailing service for the visually impaired so they can just write or pick up the phone to request the books they need, then wait at home for them to arrive. After finishing the books, they need only attach a prepared address card to the mail bag that comes with the books, then put it in the mailbox, and it is all free of charge, thanks to government funding.

The mailing service has enabled many visually impaired people to fulfill their dreams of learning at home without needing to travel to the library, something increasingly useful since COVID-19 broke out.

Cheng Donghao, 22, is one of more than 20,000 people a year who directly benefit from the services the library provides. A registered

member for about 10 years, Cheng has borrowed Braille books since primary school and acquired the knowledge he needed by running his fingers across the raised dots that lined the pages. "Now, I am preparing for next year's college entrance exam, and my dream is to study traditional Chinese medicine," he said.

Mailing books is just one of the remote services the library provides. Another is a smart listening device, which looks like an old-fashioned cellphone. The user just needs to press the buttons under the audio guidance to gain access to all 20 terabytes of audiobooks stored on the library website, making access even easier.

The smart listening device is part of a blind reading project

established by the China Disabled Persons' Federation in 2017. As part of the program, the government bought 200,000 such devices and distributed them to the more than 400 Braille libraries and barrier-free reading rooms nationwide to be lent out.

As the market for wearable devices grows, the library and its research teams have also been trying to tap into the trend. One wearable device they have developed, with outside help, is a smart-route detector. Attached to a pair of sunglasses, often worn by the visually impaired, it can take photos of the path ahead, recognize objects and inform the user via audio.

Like all public libraries, as well as lending books, the Braille Library of China holds cultural activities.



A device to help readers with weak eyesight read. It puts books under a camera that magnifies the text. YANG XIAOHENG / CHINA DAILY

Every Tuesday it shows a film, during which a narrator stands to the right of the audience and describes the images on screen in between dialogues. The library is now buying the copyright of the films, incorporating its own narration soundtrack and adding footage of a dactylography narrator, so

as to make a barrier-free version of the films for all audiences.

"The most effective way of improving the lives of the visually impaired is to help them gain knowledge," said Zhu Bing, the library's head. "That's where we can help, and with smarter tools, we hope to be of even greater assistance."

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Efficient use of energy key to carbon goal

Growing demand makes minimizing coal consumption more difficult.

Hou Liqiang reports



Wind turbines in Rong'an county, Liuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, are examples of the nation's progress in generating cleaner energy. TAN KAI XING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Energy use in China, the world's largest emerging market, is expected to continue to grow as it strives to achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.

Even though new-energy development has been robust, there is still plenty of room for further growth, making it essential for the country to promote energy conservation as it speeds up such development, experts say.

Only that way can China minimize its coal consumption and meet the growing demand for energy and have its carbon dioxide emissions peak as soon as possible, they said.

They made the remarks following the recent publication by the State Council Information Office of a report detailing the country's low-carbon transition achievements.

Published on Oct 27 and titled "Responding to Climate Change: China's Policies and Actions", the report said the country's energy consumption per unit of GDP had fallen rapidly.

"Preliminary calculations show that the reduction from 2011 to 2020 reached 28.7 percent, one of the fastest in the world," it said.

From 2016 to 2020 China fueled average annual economic growth of 5.7 percent with average annual energy consumption growth of 2.8 percent, it said.

"The amount of energy it saved accounted for about half the global energy savings in the same period," the report said.

China has been ranked among the leading countries in the efficiency of

its coal-fired power generation units, it said. Carbon dioxide emissions in the country's coal-fired power generation sector last year were 370 million metric tons lower than they were 10 years earlier.

Sixteen mandatory energy consumption quota standards were set in the country between 2016 and 2020, helping it achieve annual energy savings of 77 million tons of standard coal, equivalent to 148 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

Teng Fei, deputy director of the Institute of Energy, Environment and Economy of Tsinghua University in Beijing, said work to improve energy efficiency will play an important role as China forges ahead to meet its climate targets.

The country needs a comparatively stable low-carbon transition not only to honor its commitments, but also to ensure energy security and power supply, he said.

China plans to rigidly control the growth of coal consumption from 2021 to 2025 and gradually reduce consumption over the following five years. The design of the plans is in line with a stable transition, Teng said.

The development of renewable energy in the country is not yet robust enough to address its still growing energy demand, he said, making it necessary to consume coal or other fossil fuels to fill the gap.

Enhanced efficiency in coal consumption and energy conservation could help minimize the gap and make carbon dioxide emissions peak earlier, Teng said.



Technicians check solar panels in Zhoushan, Zhejiang province. YAO FENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Over time, China has managed to become a world leader in coal consumption efficiency.

"But it will be increasingly difficult for the country to reduce coal consumption by further improving efficiency," Teng said.

However, there is still potential to improve energy efficiency in other sectors, he said.

For example, China can increase the energy efficiency of home appliances by 30 percent. Another way of further reducing electricity consumption for the country is to optimize its industrial structures by reducing the size of its heavy and chemical industries, he said.

Pan Jiahua, director of the Institute for Urban and Environmental Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that with the proportion of coal in China's total energy consumption mix more than

twice the world average, the country is confronted with a much more complicated situation in phasing out coal consumption than developed countries.

China has resorted to a multipronged approach in managing coal consumption, improving energy efficiency being a key element, Pan said.

China has been shutting smaller coal-fired power plants so that high-efficiency ones can play a full role in meeting demand for socioeconomic development, he said.

The phasing out of coal-fired power plants cannot happen overnight and should take place in an orderly manner, he said. Priority should be given to phasing out outdated capacity and excess capacity in some regions, while more leeway should be given to plants with high levels of efficiency.

How honey bees help turn on the lights

By YANG WANLI

Bees are a tiny but vitally important species for Earth.

The World Wide Fund for Nature says that almost 90 percent of the globe's wild plants depend on insects to be pollinated, along with 75 percent of leading crops worldwide.

Bees account for many pollinators. However, the insects face many complex, interacting threats.

In addition to climate change, one of the deadliest threats comes from humans in the form of pesticides and the expansion of residential areas, which is leading to a loss of habitat.

In China, the indigenous species, the eastern honey bee (*Apis cerana*), is one of the most-threatened families, said Kuang Haiou, an expert with the Apis cerana Research Institute at Yunnan Agricultural University.

The eastern honey bee is also threatened by the western honey bee (*Apis mellifera*), an invasive species widely introduced for crop pollination purposes in the 1930s, Kuang said.

"Unlike the eastern honey bee, which pollinates various plants with scanty levels of distribution, the western honey bee is accustomed to focusing on single crop flowers. That is why the eastern honey bee plays a more crucial role in maintaining the ecosystem."

In addition, western honey bees are larger than their eastern counterparts, which can easily be driven out of their original habitats.

"In the fight for food, the invasive western honey bees have become dominant, with little hindrance," Kuang said. "Worse still, the western bees' quest for the queen disrupts the mating process of the eastern queen bee, which results in reproductive failure."

Queen bees usually mate once a year, during spring, with multiple partners from the same species. However, the chemicals they release attract drones, both the eastern and western kinds.

"The bigger western honey bees mate with the queen, but they cannot fertilize her eggs because they are members of a different species," Kuang said. "As a result, eastern honey bee groups face the threat of extinction (because of missed mating opportunities)."

In recent decades eastern honey bee numbers have fallen sharply across a large part of China's

central plains, he said.

"The number of eastern honey bees has fallen more than 70 percent or 80 percent, the lowest the numbers have ever been."

Conversely, Kuang said, the number of eastern honey bees in mountainous areas has gradually risen.

That is a result of strengthened environmental protection, such as stronger controls on the use of pesticides and measures to protect environmentally fragile areas. Furthermore, contributions from private groups and members of the public have also been important for the species' recovery.

In the southwestern province of Yunnan, where mountainous forests are the last habitat for native bee species, the Society of Entrepreneurs and Ecology has been working to protect the eastern honey bee since 2015 by promoting beekeeping among villagers.

Experts, including Kuang, were invited to train local residents, design hives and provide professional guidance on disease control and reducing the use of insecticides.

Nearly 800 residents of 20 villages in the region have received training. Now about 500 people run bee farms independently.

So far, farmers in the Society of Entrepreneurs and Ecology program who own eight to 14 beehives can earn 8,000 yuan (\$1,250) a year on average, equal to income from selling two cows that would take four years to raise from calves to adults.

Conserving biodiversity can only operate sustainably with a scientifically planned green business and the support of local residents, Kuang said.

Recalling his work training beekeepers over the past 10 years, he said the improvement in local farmers' living standards brought about by running bee farms is the most rewarding result.

"Years ago many impoverished villagers in northwestern Yunnan only turned on a single lightbulb at night to save the cost of electricity. But now, when I visit those same bee farmers I find their newly renovated houses are so bright, with beautiful ceiling lights."

"As a bee expert, nothing was sweeter than the moment I noticed that the species I've been studying for decades (the eastern honey bee) had become so dear to the local people, and is greatly loved by the general public, thanks their hopes of a better future."

Impetus: Initiative applauded by leaders, experts

FROM PAGE 1

"The initiative is of great theoretical value as it constitutes a powerful development theory representing developing countries, helping to break the monopoly of developed countries in defining development. In practice, it will further boost the influence of developing countries and benefit them considerably in the long run as it develops," Dong added.

During a videoconference on Oct 25 with the International Department of the CPC Central Committee, Essam Sharaf, a former Egyptian prime minister, said that the initiative is perfectly timed, and it shows China's great sense of duty as a major country as the gap between developing and developed countries is widening.

"The COVID-19 pandemic is disrupting the world's supply chain and posing imminent challenges to economic globalization, and many countries are struggling to recover," said Su Xiaohui, deputy director of the China Institute of International Studies' Department of American Studies.

As the world and the UN are seeking a robust, sustained impetus for the global economy, the initiative "represents China's

strong belief in development as a shared goal of mankind and the same direction the world should work for", she added.

At the first session of G20 Rome Summit on Oct 30, Xi further elaborated on the initiative and called for its synergy with the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

He underscored China's goal to make global development more equitable, effective and inclusive so that "no country will be left behind".

The initiative "takes care of countries' dire needs in reality" and "offers fresh ideas, methods and impetus for tackling their problems and growth", said Chen Xulong, a professor of multilateral diplomacy and UN reform studies at the University of International Business and Economics' School of International Relations.

The initiative "is the latest theoretical brainchild of China's major country diplomacy as guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy, and it epitomizes what a major country and a major political party should do", he said.

"It is a continuation of Beijing's efforts in building a new type of international relations and a community with a shared future for mankind," Chen added.

Behind the initiative's popularity

is first and foremost the great need for development among all countries and globally, he said.

Chinese diplomats, including many ambassadors based overseas, recently on multiple occasions highlighted the fact that the initiative is open to the world and is not exclusive, calling it "an important public good and cooperation platform that China provides to the international community".

"So far, dozens of countries and many international organizations have expressed their support for or made positive statements on the initiative," Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters on Nov 8.

The initiative "is open to the world and welcomes the participation of all countries", he added.

"It will coordinate with and improve its efficacy simultaneously with other initiatives including the Belt and Road Initiative," Chinese Ambassador to Georgia Li Yan said when introducing the initiative to local media on Oct 28.

The initiative will also synergize with Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development, and it will build consensus and pool together the strengths of multilateral cooperation mechanisms such

as the UN, the G20 and BRICS, according to officials including Wang Yi.

As one of the initial steps taken by Beijing to realize the initiative, the China International Development Cooperation Agency signed a memorandum of understanding with the UN Industrial Development Organization on Oct 28 at a virtual ceremony, with the aim of helping developing countries achieve inclusive and sustainable industrial development.

Dong, from Communication University of China, said the initiative "bears both openness and inclusiveness", and it shows that China's global vision "benefits not only developing countries but also more countries beyond".

"History tells us that China will not shut its door and disregard the world's chaos and disorder. The country has been sincere in holding trade fairs, including the China International Import Expo, while many similar events have come to a grinding halt worldwide," Dong said.

"In short, China's global vision and the initiative take the world seriously just like our ancestors led the ancient Silk Road to prosperity with their great credibility and treating others on an equal footing," Dong added.



Kuang Haiou shows villagers how to choose suitable areas for beekeeping in Xinzhu village, Lijiang, Yunnan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW
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Business | 3

Winds of change give new feel to shopping festival

Singles Day focuses on inclusive growth and green future. **He Wei** reports

In past years, the Singles Day shopping festival on Nov 11 has been a celebration of consumerism in China, with eye-catching discounts, star-studded sales promotions and impressive revenue figures championing the power of spending.

This year things were different. Instead of astonishing sales figures, the main considerations for the gala, started by the e-commerce company Alibaba Group 12 years ago, were inclusive growth and eco-friendliness.

Sales growth was recorded, but at a slower pace. The 24-hour sales figure, or gross merchandise volume in e-commerce terms, was 540.3 billion yuan (\$84.5 billion), 8.45 percent more than last year. In previous years, sales growth of between 20 percent and 50 percent had been recorded.

Alibaba did not disclose the transaction totals via its platforms until the festival concluded on Nov 12, unlike in previous years, when each sales milestone was celebrated in real time.

Jason Yu, general manager of the consultancy Kantar Worldpanel and an expert on China's consumer market, said that this year e-commerce platforms focused on reporting category-based revenue changes in order to assess consumption trends.

However, the passion for the festival is here to stay because it is a pivotal event in unleashing consumers' potential to spend more and pursue quality lifestyles, he said.

Yu's remarks are supported by the results of a survey conducted by the

global consultancy Bain & Co. Of about 3,000 people asked about their attitude toward this year's festival, 52 percent said they planned to spend more than last year, while only 8 percent said they were slashing their budgets.

As the festival has grown to become an international event, global labels have long cashed in, with the sales list topped by companies such as the cosmetics manufacturer L'Oréal Group and the computer company Apple.

Newcomers are looking to the event to make themselves more relevant to the Chinese market.

At this year's event, the upscale extreme weather clothing brand Canada Goose debuted its footwear collection before the global launch, a move aimed at celebrating local culture, said the company's president and chief executive, Dani Reiss.

"We are excited to celebrate this launch during a pivotal time in the market from a business perspective... and we know consumers are in the mindset of exploration and discovery," Reiss said, explaining the thinking behind launching the new product line in China.

This year a vast array of items was on shoppers' lists, such as skateboards, outdoor power tools, toys, prepared meals, coffee and alcoholic drinks.

Cao Lei, director of e-commerce at the consultancy the Internet Economy Institute, said: "Nov 11 is increasingly becoming a retail encyclopedia and a compass,



Top: Workers sort parcels at a Shunfeng Freight Co delivery center in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, on Nov 11. CHEN JIMIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE
Above: E-commerce trader He Bin stages a livestreaming session on Nov 11 in Liucun village, Yiwu, Zhejiang province. WANG GANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

providing a clue to the latest and bite-sized consumer insights. Interest in individualistic, original designs is quickly gaining momentum."

This momentum is producing opportunities for small- and medium-sized companies in the customer-to-manufacturing market.

Gu Liang, founder of Warm Studio, a Chinese designer handbag brand, said, "We estimate that we sold 70,000 bags in this year's

festival, tripling last year's record." This estimate included presales that started on Oct 20, Gu said.

"Rising orders are also helping our manufacturing partners. We've mobilized about 1,000 workers and about two-thirds of production capacity to meet orders generated from the festival on Alibaba."

Such success stories are music to the ears of Alibaba Group, which, regardless of sales figures, is focusing

on its role as a key e-commerce company by empowering merchants through multiple access points.

Chris Tung, the group's chief marketing officer, said: "I believe the value that (Singles Day) offers is more than just the general merchandise volume figures. The festival is about how best to leverage Alibaba's latest technology to support brands and merchants in driving sustainable and inclusive growth in more efficient ways."

Alibaba has also launched its going green initiative, with the volume of parcels generated during the festival posing a potential threat to the environment.

The company distributed 100 million yuan worth of green vouchers to more than 2.5 million customers who bought merchandise that have lower carbon emissions in their production.

Cainiao Network, the logistics arm of Alibaba Group, also seized the environmental initiative, saying it had contributed to reducing carbon emissions by about 18,000 metric tons by using electronic delivery sheets, recycled and reused parcels, and algorithms to optimize delivery routes.

Yu of Kantar Worldpanel said, "After developing for years, the Nov 11 festival should find new sources of inspiration to attract shoppers, such as the green initiative and allowing people to enjoy substantial discounts without staying up all night."

Alibaba painted a rosy picture of sales growth in rural areas.

Sales of agricultural produce from the 12 relatively less-developed provinces in western China rose 20 percent at this year's festival; and 160 poor counties realized revenue growth of 44.2 percent for all items sold on Tmall and Taobao.

Luo Zhendong, an expert at Nanjing University on urban and rural development, said in an online post, "This put in focus a prolonged version of the Singles Day campaign, showing ample room for growth by integrating the digital economy and development of the countryside."

"Against this backdrop, the Taobao Village model will provide a viable path to common prosperity," Luo said, referring to the cluster of retailers within an administrative village where residents adopted e-commerce primarily by using Taobao Marketplace.

Gig world opens the door to new lifestyles



Deliverers at work in Dongguan, Guangdong. ZHAN YOUBIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

By ZHANG YUE

Li Wenjing, 36, said she was close to despair in June when she decided to quit her full-time job with a multinational company because of the numerous business conferences she had to attend.

"I felt as though I was drowning in an endless wave of meetings that had extremely limited outcomes," Li, a talent management expert, said. "I didn't see any meaning in my work. This made me feel bad."

For the first time in 12 years she quit a job without having another to go to. She spent two months traveling in China with her family, she said, which was her longest holiday since she embarked on her career. When the holiday ended she decided to enter the world of flexible employment, and now owns a human resources consulting business, which has two other full-time employees.

Working with two other professionals, one in the United Kingdom and the other in Denmark, she offers consulting services on organizational design and development, using the experience gained from all the companies she has worked for. Her income has risen and she works flexible hours, she said.

She spends more time with her 5-year-old son, and does not have to commute or attend numerous meetings.

She also works with a number of consultants.

Collectively, Li and the

consultants are known as gig workers.

When Diane Mulcahy, author of *The Gig Economy: The Complete Guide to Getting Better Work, Taking More Time Off, and Financing the Life You Want*, was asked to define the idea of the gig economy during an interview in 2017, she said anyone who is a consultant, contractor, freelancer, part-time worker or on-demand worker, is part of this economy.

Basically, there are many ways to describe gig workers, but they all point toward a shift in the way people operate, with more of them deciding their working hours.

In China, while the concept of flexible employment is increasingly favored, particularly by younger people, gig workers are mostly fostered through robust development of the internet and technology.

Bao Chunlei, associate researcher at the Chinese Academy of Labor and Social Security, said flexible employment refers to working hours, locations and payments that are not fixed, different from a conventional employment format based on industrialization.

At a Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security news conference in May it was disclosed that China had about 200 million workers in flexible employment.

China is advancing its economic transition, and these workers reflect a nationwide trend. The services sector has the most flexible employment, and it contributes 54.5 percent to China's GDP.

According to labor economists, although tough starts are commonly experienced by those working flexible hours, the strong growth of technology and the internet has helped greatly in making gig employment an ideal choice.

The fast-growing, internet-based platform economy has produced tens of millions of gig jobs, providing workers with a cushion when they switch careers. Educational qualifications and age requirements for such jobs are far more relaxed compared with other employment, making it easier for migrant employees to find employment in cities.

Zhang Yongqiang, 38, who works for food delivery company Meituan in Beijing, failed twice as a snack bar owner before deciding to become a full-time deliverer in 2016.

Initially, Zhang worked part-time for Meituan, but as his earnings soon exceeded those he made from working eight hours a day as a chef, he had no hesitation in becoming a full-time deliverer.

To earn more, Zhang takes as many delivery orders from the Meituan platform as possible.

He bought a two-bedroom apartment in Shanxi, he said, and plans to pay off his mortgage by 2024.

Labor economists in China are paying increasing attention to workers such as Zhang. They believe that while solving livelihood problems, flexible employment has also relieved pressure on urban labor.

Economic partnership to the rescue

By ZHONG NAN and LIU ZHIHUA

The imminent implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement, due on Jan 1, will effectively boost economic recovery and consolidate the supply chain network in the Asia-Pacific region, economists and business leaders say.

The Secretariat of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations has confirmed that six member countries of the bloc and four non-ASEAN countries — Australia, China, Japan and New Zealand — had formally submitted their RCEP ratification, meeting the conditions for the deal to come into force in the 10 countries at the start of next year, China's Ministry of Commerce said on Nov 3.

Apart from showing their willingness to further expand trade flows, the RCEP, the world's biggest trade pact by GDP, will help the signatory countries ensure the opening of their markets as well as uninterrupted supply chains in the Asia-Pacific region, said Zhang Jianping, director-general of the China Center for Regional Economic Cooperation in Beijing.

The six ASEAN countries that have approved the RCEP are Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The deal comes into force 60 days after ratification by at least six ASEAN countries and at least three non-ASEAN countries, according to the agreement signed last November.

Once the RCEP takes effect, local and global companies will enjoy a regional business environment with fewer investment barriers and low tariffs. The implementation of the agreement will help the regional supply chain better respond to external impacts, said Jiang Feng, director of the General Administration of Customs' Department of Duty Collection.

The value of China's foreign trade rose 22.7 percent on a yearly basis to 28.33 trillion yuan (\$4.4 trillion)



Thai beverage company TCP showcases its latest collection of brands and products at the fourth China International Import Expo in Shanghai. XING YI / CHINA DAILY

from January to September, and the volume of its exports and imports with other RCEP participants rose 19.3 percent year-on-year, the administration said.

China, one of the main drivers of the deal, completed the ratification process for the agreement on April 15 and applied to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, another trade agreement among 11 economies, including Australia, Canada, Japan, Malaysia and Singapore, in September.

"In the next growth stage, innovations in trade policies, products and practices will be the cornerstones of progress for China and its partners to persevere on the path of development," said Lawrence Loh, director of the Center for Governance and Sustainability in the business school of the National University of Singapore.

Despite the adverse effects of the pandemic on the region's economic growth, the RCEP will pave the way for global companies to invest and export more products to various markets within the region, said Donny Yu, president and chief executive for China at Nexans SA, a French cable manufacturer for power and data transmission.

Lensey Chen, president of the China arm of Novozymes, a Danish biological solutions provider and a second-time exhibitor at the China International Import Expo in Shanghai this month, said the company exports many products made at its factories in Tianjin and the provinces of Jiangsu and Liaoning to other RCEP economies.

"For example, our products applied in the detergent industry are exported to more RCEP countries, such as Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam."

The company is studying RCEP policies and hopes to make full use of incentives brought about by the framework, Chen said.

Deserine Lim, assistant general manager of branding and strategic marketing (North Asia) at the Singaporean health product company OSIM, said: "We are pleased to see the RCEP is about to take effect, especially as global trade has been under severe impact from the pandemic."

The RCEP will create a better business environment and more opportunities for Singaporean companies, reducing trade costs, making customs clearance easier and making government policies more transparent, she said.

Beijing all set for Olympic encore

With fewer than 100 days to go to Winter Games, optimism as high as trial events run like clockwork. **Sun Xiaochen** reports

With the torch relit, venues being tested and operational drills underway, Beijing is all set for its encore as an Olympic host after the 100-day countdown to the opening of the Winter Olympics began.

Thirteen years after the curtain was lowered on the 2008 Summer Games, the Olympic flame returned to the Chinese capital as Beijing's preparations for the Winter Olympics enter the home stretch, with operational details, legacy and, most importantly, safety amid the pandemic, given priority.

As part of the 100-day countdown celebrations, organizers unveiled designs of the Olympic and Paralympic medals on Oct 26, just a week after welcoming the torch back from Greece, the birthplace of the ancient Games where it was lit, triggering worldwide anticipation for the opening ceremony on Feb 4.

The medals for the 2022 Winter Olympics, inspired by *yu bi*, a circular Chinese jade artifact dating back 5,000 years, have carvings of the Olympic rings on one side and inscribed with "XXIV Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022". Engravings of cloud patterns, an element used on the torch of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, snowflakes and ice markings fill the outer rings.

The concentric rings around the center of the medals represent the pursuit of unity and harmony, common in Chinese culture, while echoing the Olympic values of solidarity, inclusiveness and promoting peace.

The other side of the medals has the Beijing 2022 emblem at the center. The outer rings are dotted with 24 stars strung together by circles, representing the 24th edition of the Winter Olympics.

Sharing the same design, but with slight changes, the 2022 Paralympic Winter Games medals were also unveiled the same day, with the International Paralympic Committee's logo carved on one side and the Beijing 2022 Paralympic emblem on the other.

"Hopefully, by enriching the Winter Olympic elements with Chinese characteristics, we can leave a Chinese mark on the promotion of the Olympic spirit and build more excitement around the opening of the Games," said Cai Qi, secretary



The Big Air Shougang is seen on Oct 27 at Shougang Park in Beijing, which will host the big air freestyle skiing and snowboarding competitions of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games. GAO ZEHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

SNOW MAKING BEGINS FOR START OF WINTER GAMES

Snow making for Alpine skiing events at the Winter Olympics started on Nov 15 in Yanqing district of Beijing and is expected to be completed by mid-January, in time for the arrival of the world's top winter athletes.

"The meteorological conditions in Yanqing have met the requirements for making snow," said Liu Lifeng, an official in the construction department of the Beijing Major Projects Construction Headquarters Office.

"The snow-making equipment was tested five days ago."

The snow-making team has 20 people from both China and abroad. They have been divided into two teams, working 24 hours a day in two shifts. The area for the Olympic events will be about 800,000 square meters and covered by 1.2 million cubic meters of snow.

Alpine skiing is one of the most high-profile Winter Olympic sports, and Beijing officials are doing all they can to provide quality infrastructure to ensure it is a standout event of the Games which open on Feb 4.

The National Alpine Skiing Center, where 11 gold medals will be up for grabs, is in Yanqing, northwestern Beijing. It has seven runs with steep slopes, which were difficult to build. The combined length of the runs is 9.2 kilometers, with a vertical drop of 900 meters.

The center is China's first for Alpine skiing that meets Olympic standards.



Snow-making equipment to prepare venues for the 2022 Winter Olympic Games is tested in Beijing on Nov 10. TAO RAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

It's also expected to be one of the most challenging in the world for competitors.

Li Xinggang, chief designer of the Yanqing venues, said innovation and technological breakthroughs have helped his team build world-class facilities. "The big vertical drop and high speed for the Games (events) have raised the high requirements for safety," Xinhua News Agency quoted him as saying.

Construction of the center has been done in an environmentally sensitive way to minimize interference with the trees and vegetation, he said.

Other facilities in Beijing are also taking shape for the 2022 Beijing Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

Special dedicated traffic lanes with Olympic signs started being set up on Nov 12, transport officials said.

Du Juan and Xin Wen

of the Beijing Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China and president of the organizing committee.

International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach said in a video message played at the ceremony: "With all these great efforts and the outstanding preparations we can already see now, we can really say 'together for a shared future', and this shared future will be a bright one for winter sports worldwide."

To ensure that operations at all the 12 competition venues meet Olympic standards, the Beijing 2022 organizing committee began evaluating facilities, organization and services across three zones — downtown Beijing, Yanqing district in the city's northwest and the co-host city Zhangjiakou, Hebei province — through a series of international test events beginning on Oct 8.

From Oct 21 to 24 the Capital Indoor Stadium, a 53-year-old arena that has been renovated for Beijing 2022, impressed athletes and officials alike when it staged a spectator-less leg of the International Skating Union short-track speed skating World Cup.

Canadian skater Courtney Sarault heaped praise on the venue's readiness, citing ideal ice conditions during the test event.

"I love this rink; I really love the ice," said Sarault, a silver medalist in the women's 1,500m at the world championships in March. "It's really grippy. I feel like I can hold my corners ... so I'm loving the ice. I'm excited that the Olympic Games are here."

Earlier, international test events in

long-track speed skating and figure skating were staged at the newly built National Speed Skating Oval and the Capital Indoor Stadium to resounding acclaim from foreign athletes, technical delegates and officials.

About 90 kilometers northwest of downtown, an international testing program for bobsled and skeleton was held at Yanqing National Sliding Center, with foreign athletes experiencing the 1.9-kilometer Olympic track for the first time since its completion this summer.

"The first responses we have from the athletes taking part in these test events are extremely positive," Bach told Chinese Central Television in Greece after the flame was lit on Oct 18.

"Therefore, we are even more confident in the success of these Olympic Winter Games."

"The test events have been progressing well in the sense of helping us identify areas to improve, either in the function of facilities or in service details, for better experiences when the real business gets going in February," said Yao Hui, venue management director of the organizing committee.

"Even having received a lot of positive feedback, we still need to stay clear-headed in our review of the test events and make quick fixes wherever needed as carefully as we can."

About 2,900 athletes representing about 85 countries and regions are expected to compete in the Games, the most gender-balanced Winter Olympics in history.

Tea leaf tourism revives village

By YANG FEIYUE

The tea terraces resembled giant shining steps, glowing under the heavy autumn sun, as the green tea plants that adorned them sprouted tender shoots in Liubao town in late October.

It was right after Frost's Descent, the 18th of 24 solar terms, fell on Oct 23. Locals were busy harvesting the leaves. This was an auspicious time for the ritual. The fragrance of the leaves is considered to be at its sharpest due to the temperature difference between day and night at this time of the year and little rainwater.

It was not just farmers who were shuttling among the trees, but also visitors exploring the rural charm of the town that sits in Cangwu county, Wuzhou, the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

The visitors usually bring a sense of activity to the normally quiet town in October, according to the local authority. Many of them do what the locals do: carry a bamboo basket on their shoulders and pick tea leaves.

At the end of the day, travelers can refresh themselves with the tea, learning to fry and roll the leaves the old-fashioned way, while the aroma spills from heated pots and permeates the air.

Kosima Weber Liu, from Germany, visited the town in October and was impressed by the tea there, especially its therapeutic effects.

"I had only heard of the tea-making processes before, but I got to experience what it was like to roast tea myself," Liu said.



A couple from Iran pick tea leaves at a tea garden in Liubao, whose tea is considered one of the best in the country and was served in tribute to Emperor Jiaqing during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

She has a better understanding of the process and the ritual surrounding it.

"I felt I've been to a special, mystical place in China."

Liubao town has been known for its dark tea that, for 1,500 years, has been a brew to savor. It has ideal conditions for tea production, with an equilibrium of humidity, sunshine, soil and an elevation about 600 meters above sea level.

Liubao tea is considered one of the best in the country and was served in tribute to Emperor Jiaqing during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

It was also used as a herbal medicine to counter hot and humid conditions when Chinese people emigrated to Southeast Asia in the late 19th century.

Liubao tea can be produced from spring to fall. Although the leaves from early spring are considered the most tender and thus top quality, they carry a unique flavor when harvested in late fall.

The local authority has been integrating tea and tourism over the years.

From 2017 to 2020, the Liubao tea plantation area in Cangwu county increased from 71,000 mu (4,733 hectares) to 92,500 mu, according to the local government. Annual tea production went from 2,600 tons to 4,180 tons in that three-year period, with output value more than doubling from 310 million to 670 million yuan.

Flight of imagination to save bird

By YANG FEIYUE

No matter how tired Tao Yang is at the end of a day, her mood always brightens when the subject of conversation is the green peafowl, a species found in Southeast Asia.

The 45-year-old Shanghai resident seems to like everything about the bird, especially the distinctive feature of the males — colorful long feathers. Tao keeps herself abreast of the birds' major habitats and their numbers.

Tao, born in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, earlier worked for an investment bank in Shanghai, but she has always had a soft spot for nature. She plans to donate all her belongings for animal protection after she is gone.

Green peafowls first caught her attention 12 years ago.

The green peafowl was once widely found in China. However, in recent decades the bird's numbers in the country have fallen.

In 2009 the green peafowl was listed as endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's red list.

In 2017 the birds were put in the critically endangered category by

authorities in Yunnan province. Habitat loss is a key reason behind their disappearance in modern times.

Tao said she was shocked to learn online that there are fewer than 600 such birds in China today. Asking around her friends, she realized none of them even knew of the bird's existence.

"My immediate reaction was that I should do my part to have more people know about them," she said.

When the pandemic broke out, Tao was working on an investment project with an Australian company, but the work came to a halt. That gave her time to do what she had meant to do for the green peafowl. She started to write a story based on her study of the bird, aiming to attract public attention. With the experience of publishing a novel about stray cats and dogs in 2018, she completed the *Green Peafowl Empire* last year. She did not stop there and considered turning the novel into a script.

Tao settled for clay figurines after studying various approaches that would be viable with her limited resources while meeting her expectations. The idea was



From left: Tao Yang models green peafowl figurines out of clay and features them in stop-motion animation. The clay figurines of the green peafowl become vivid characters in Tao Yang's animation series. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

to make the figurines on her own and have them featured in a stop-motion animation, a technique to simulate motion of things in photos. The beginning was tough. It took her nearly four months and many attempts to pull off the first episode. "I often broke them during the drying process at the beginning," she said, adding that it usually took her two days to finish a figurine after several steps, including modeling, drying and coloring.

By trial and error she managed to fashion vivid green peafowl figurines out of clay. She took more than 90,000 photos for about 20 episodes of the first season, and took time to learn filming, editing, audio-recording and synthesis. Her friends have supported her



and taken part in dubbing the animation. They sent Tao their dubbed audios, which she then processed and put in the film.

Sheng Weijuan has helped with dubbing since the beginning.

"I feel fortunate to dub for a role in the animation and be part of a very meaningful production."

Sheng got to know Tao when they both fed stray cats, and the two have been friends for more than 10 years.

Tao often chooses nights to record her voice in her wardrobe.

"I can avoid interference by external noises and echoes that can happen in a bigger environment of the living room."

Tao often has to go without sleep two nights in a row before the

release of an episode. She spent about 12 months exploring ways to shape clay, shoot for the animation and only went out once for dinner with friends, she said.

The first episode was released on her social media accounts in July last year and has attracted more than 10,000 views.

She has now made more than 20 episodes and said she is getting better at it. About 20 days are now spent on making an episode. Her animation was recommended by friends to be played at a Spring Festival gala for overseas Chinese in North America this year.

Tao said she is working on a documentary that she expects to go out on social media in the next few weeks.