

Cultural icon

Shanghai Museum stages zodiac exhibition featuring ox LIFE, PAGE 17

COVID blamed for increase in UK dog thefts

WORLD, PAGE 10

Green initiatives

Carbon control target generates big opportunities for investors

BUSINESS, PAGE 15



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China promotes global vaccine equity

Nation uses its strength in production chains to help boost capacity, FM says

By ZHANG YUNBI and WANG XIAODONG

China is contributing its fair share to help ease the global shortfall in COVID-19 vaccines as it expands assistance to countries in dire need, advances vaccine-related cooperation with eligible partners, boosts vaccine exports and gears up production. Concerns are lingering globally

about the widening gap between immunity and development around the world as high-income nations acquire more doses of vaccine than poorer countries, observers and international health agencies have warned. China has offered COVID-19 vaccine assistance to 53 developing countries at their request, and it has exported or is exporting

vaccines to 22 nations, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said.

The nation has also been using its strength in production chains to help other countries manufacture vaccines in China or locally in order to boost global production capacity, Wang said on Wednesday via video link at a United Nations Security Council open briefing on ensuring equitable access to vaccines.

During the Spring Festival holiday, China delivered vaccine shipments to seven countries.

Leaders of countries such as Hungary greeted the shipments' arrival at airports and expressed heartfelt thanks to China, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said at a daily news conference in Beijing on Thursday.

China has never sought geopolitical advantage in carrying out international cooperation on COVID-19 vaccines, never calculated any economic gains and never

attached any political conditions, Wang said.

But countries continue to face "deficits" in vaccine production capacity and global distribution, Wang warned.

He said all parties should join hands to oppose nationalistic vaccine-related moves, promote fair distribution of vaccines, and in particular, make them accessible and affordable for developing countries, including those in conflicts.

See **Vaccines**, page 4

Duty-free shopping flourishes in Hainan

By MA ZHIPING in Haikou

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Duty-free shops in Hainan province saw sales of 1.5 billion yuan (\$232 million) during the Spring Festival shopping spree, double the figure for the Spring Festival holiday in 2019.

From Feb 11, Lunar New Year's eve, to Wednesday, sales at Hainan's nine duty-free shops reached 1.5 billion yuan, 1.4 billion yuan of which was for duty-free goods, official data showed.

The stores welcomed more than 200,000 visitors over the holiday period, and many of the visitors tried the new "mail and delivery" shopping service, which was introduced on Feb 2.

During the same period last year, Hainan's duty-free shops had sales of just 16 million yuan due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Haikou Daily reported on Tuesday.

Xiao Di, a shopper at a duty-free store in downtown Haikou, said this year's Spring Festival holiday "was a great time to go shopping in Hainan", as all of the duty-free outlets were offering big discounts, vouchers and lottery drawings.

Xie Xiangxiang, an associate professor of tourism at Hainan University, attributed the shopping enthusiasm to a much greater shopping quota for consumers, a longer list of duty-free goods and a range of promotional activities.

On July 1, Hainan raised the annual duty-free shopping quota to 100,000 yuan per person from the previous 30,000 yuan. The categories of goods included were also expanded from 38 to 45, with liquor and electronic products added.

Xie suggested that top Chinese brands should be added to the duty-free shopping lists, to give more choices for overseas tourists visiting Hainan and let the Hainan Free Trade Port play a more important role in contributing to the nation's new dual circulation paradigm, in which domestic and overseas markets reinforce each other, with the former acting as the mainstay.

"Duty-free shopping is expected to become the new blockbuster growth point for Hainan's tourism industry and the development of Hainan as an international tourism center," he added.

Despite the pandemic, total sales of duty-free goods in Hainan reached 27.48 billion yuan in 2020, a year-on-year increase of 103.7 percent, with the number of individual shopping trips increasing by 19.2 percent to 4.48 million, according to the General Administration of Customs.

See **Hainan**, page 3

FOREIGNERS, LOCALS ENJOY HOLIDAY AS WUHAN REBOUNDS

Spring Festival good opportunity to reflect on challenging year

By YUE WENWAN, DAI WEI and CAO PENGYUAN in Wuhan

For China Daily

French doctor Philippe Klein has worked in Wuhan, capital of Hubei province, for seven years, but he has just celebrated Spring Festival in the city for the first time.

He used to feel that he had little connection with local people, but things have changed over the past year.



"Maybe because of the pandemic, I now feel closer to the people in Wuhan," he said.

During a reunion dinner in the city with his family, Klein proposed a Lunar New Year's toast. Their guests were Sara Platto, an Italian associate professor of animal behavior and welfare at Jiangnan University, her son Matteo, Israeli blogger and entrepreneur Raz Galor and other friends. Earlier, as they made preparations to mark the start of the Year of the Ox, they had the chance to experience the reignited spark of a city hit hard by COVID-19 at the start of last year.

In search of new clothes for Spring Festival, Platto and her son strolled along Hanjie Street, which was adorned with red banners and lanterns.

Meanwhile, Klein drove to a supermarket near his home to pick up some wine. He was accompanied by Wuhan resident Zhong Weiwei, a construction worker who helped build the city's Leishenshan makeshift hospital.

See **Wuhan**, page 2



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Residents wait in line to fill propane tanks in Houston, Texas, United States, on Wednesday. Millions of Texans still had no power after a historic snowfall, and single-digit temperatures created a surge of demand for electricity to warm up households unaccustomed to such extreme lows, buckling the state's power grid and causing widespread blackouts. DAVID J. PHILLIP / AP

Texas' energy pride sags amid bitter winter cold

By CHINA DAILY

Texas entered a sixth day of freezing cold on Thursday, as the largest energy producing state in the United States grappled with massive refining outages and oil and gas shutdowns that rippled beyond its borders into neighboring Mexico.

Meanwhile, the now former mayor of Colorado City, in West Texas, said he had already turned in his resignation when he wrote a Facebook post saying it was not the local government's responsibility to help those suffering in the cold without power.

In his typo-ridden post on Tuesday, Tim Boyd wrote: "Only the strong will survive and the weak will perish (perish)." He said he was "sick and tired" of people looking for handouts.

Boyd deleted his post but stood

by the sentiments in a follow-up message. He also wrote that his original message was posted as a private citizen, not as mayor of the city of 4,000, saying "(I) had already turned in my resignation and had not signed up to run for mayor again."

The post was made as millions of Texans had no power following a winter storm. The cold snap, which has killed at least 21 people nationwide, is not expected to let up until this weekend. The deep freeze has shut about one-fifth of the US refining capacity and closed oil and natural gas production across Texas.

Power companies in Texas have implemented rolling blackouts to avoid grids being overloaded as residents try to heat their homes.

The outages in the state also affected power generation in Mexico, with exports of natural

gas via pipelines dropping by about 75 percent over the last week, according to preliminary Refinitiv Eikon data.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott directed the state's natural gas providers not to ship outside Texas and asked state regulators to enforce that ban.

Abbott said on Wednesday that "every source of power Texas has, has been compromised", from coal and renewable energy to the state's two nuclear power plants.

Texas accounts for roughly one-quarter of US natural gas production. It exports gas via pipelines to Mexico and on ships that load liquefied natural gas from terminals in Freeport and Corpus Christi. It also supplies numerous regions of the US, including the Midwest and Northeast.

The ban prompted a response

from officials in Mexico, as US gas pipeline exports to Mexico fell to 107 million cubic meters per day on Wednesday, down from an average over the past 30 days of 5.7 billion cubic meters, according to Refinitiv.

About 28.3 million cubic meters of gas can supply 5 million US homes for a day.

The Mexican government called the top US representative in Mexico on Wednesday to press for natural gas supplies.

Power cuts have hit millions in northern Mexico. Major automobile manufacturers halted operations temporarily because they did not have natural gas needed to operate their plants.

Agencies, Minlu Zhang in New York and May Zhou in Houston contributed to this story.

RIGHT TRACK

Consumer boom heralds robust growth

By LIU ZHIHUA

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The online and offline boom in the consumption of products and services during the Spring Festival holiday heralded a stronger year of consumer confidence and domestic market expansion

Inside

Comment, page 8

in 2021, and also indicated that the Chinese economy is on the right track for further growth and recovery, according to analysts.

Data from the Ministry of

Commerce showed that combined sales by key retail and catering enterprises reached 821 billion yuan (\$127 billion) from Feb 11 to Wednesday.

That was a 28.7 percent increase year-on-year, and 4.9 percent higher than the same period in 2019.

Purchases of household goods and furnishings, catering, short-distance travel, entertainment and traditional products related to the festival such as appliances, clothing, snacks and fitness equipment, all increased dramatically, as many people chose to spend the holiday

where they worked or studied and avoided unnecessary gatherings in response to the government's call for COVID-19 prevention and control.

Wang Wei, head of the Development Research Center of the State Council's Institute for Market Economy, said the consumption surge in such a wide range of consumer products and services during the holiday indicated further rebounds in consumer confidence, which will continue to support the country's economic recovery and growth.

See **Market**, page 4



Vendors prepare goods for the Spring Festival shopping season at a flower market in Kunming, Yunnan province, on Feb 9.

LIANG ZHIQIANG / XINHUA