



Golden dreams

After Paris, world's attention shifts to possible bidders for 2036 Olympics COVER, PAGE 1-3



Thriving troupe

Performers bring Yueju Opera classics to audiences in Beijing IMAGE, PAGE 7

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HOLIDAY WEEKEND

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Moviegoers check out posters at a cinema in Shanghai on Thursday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

National Day holiday sees box office surge

Robust sales boost movie industry morale after recent sluggish seasons

By XU FAN
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In a testament to its economic vitality, the weeklong National Day holiday has sparked a box office surge, underscoring the potential of China's resurgent market.

As of Friday, the vacation starting from Tuesday has raked in 1.35 billion yuan (\$192.2 million), a 23 percent increase compared to the same period in 2022 and approaching the year-on-year figure in 2023, according to Maoyan Pro, a real-time movie information tracker.

Fueled by the boom, this year's box office tally has surpassed 36 billion yuan, deemed by many industry insiders as an inspirational sign to uplift morale following the sluggish previous seasons from the May Day holiday to the summer vacation and Mid-Autumn Festival.

The Volunteers: The Battle of Life and Death, the latest directorial work by Chen Kaige, the first Chinese filmmaker to win a Palme d'Or award at the Cannes Film Festival, is currently leading the holiday box office charts with earnings exceeding 500 million yuan.

As the second installment of Chen's trilogy *The Volunteers*, an epic that chronicles the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea (1950-53), the 144-minute new movie recounts a pivotal battle in Cheorwon, where 25,000 Chinese People's Volunteer Army soldiers engaged around 50,000 United States-led "United Nations Command" forces in 1951.

Yuan Yun'er, a Beijing-based critic, said the movie, which has garnered a rating of 7.2 points out of 10 on the popular review site

Douban, is a poignant narrative that revisits the war pivotal to China's destiny over 70 years ago.

Compared to the initial installment, *The Volunteers: To the War*, released last October, the new film presents a more intense plot from a human-interest perspective, with its depiction of war scenes being more grandiose and skillful in portraying details.

For an example, a poignant detail stirring online debates is a candy gifted by CPV Commander-in-Chief Peng Dehuai to a veteran officer, who passes it to his son, a CPV soldier, and eventually to his sister, an army interpreter, with the son's touching act of licking the empty wrapper before his sacrifice resonating profoundly with viewers.

Zhi Feina, a film professor at the Chinese National Academy of Arts, remarked that the movie distinguishes itself, partly because its patriotic theme resonates with the collective emotions of the domestic audience, as this year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

Following the war epic, director Lu Chuan's sci-fi film *Bureau 749* has secured the second spot on the holiday box office charts, amassing over 300 million yuan. The film, loosely inspired by Lu's early work experience in an institute researching supernatural phenomena, narrates a near-future story about battling mysterious creatures that drag a city into an unprecedented crisis.

Ranked third in box office earnings at the festival, the crime drama *Tiger Wolf Rabbit* depicts the vengeful quest of three parents whose children are abducted by human traffickers. It has grossed over 230 million yuan.

Respectively, the fourth and fifth top earners are kung fu giant Jackie Chan's comedy *Panda Plan* and Hong Kong iconic star Andy Lau's action thriller *High Forces*.

A total of 10 movies were released on Monday and Tuesday, aiming to vie for audiences during the National Day holiday, one of the most lucrative box office seasons in China, according to China Film Distribution and Exhibition Association.

Yu Chao, deputy general manager of Beijing's Capital Cinema chain, said that the diversity in genres and the remarkable number of new films released showcase the potential of China's movie market.

From sci-fi movie *The Wandering Earth* (2019) to the fantasy epic *Creation of the Gods I: Kingdom of Storms* (2023) and the latest blockbuster *Bureau 749*, Chinese audiences have demonstrated a strong interest in watching special effects-laden big-budget films, indicating opportunities for advancement in the Chinese film technology sector, Yu said.

He also highlighted the holiday's new movie, *A Tapestry of a Legendary Land*, adapted from the popular dance poem drama of the same name, represents a new creative direction for domestic filmmakers.

The film, featuring the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) masterpiece *Qianli Jiangshan Tu* (A Panorama of Rivers and Mountains) through dance, demonstrates that stage performances translated into feature-length films can attract audiences with their established reputation and enhanced visual details on large cinema screens, added Yu.

Rao Shuguang, president of the China Film Critics Association, predicted this year's box office revenue may exceed last year's, driven by the momentum of the National Day holiday surge.

World Bank report ranks Hong Kong among top 10 global business hubs

By LIU YIFAN and OSWALD CHAN in Hong Kong

Hong Kong has been ranked as one of the top 10 economies to do business by the World Bank Group on Thursday, a vote of confidence in the city's regulations for business entry and utility infrastructure.

In the inaugural Business Ready 2024 Report covering 50 economies, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region logged high scores in international trade, business entry and utility services.

The city also ranked fifth in operational efficiency.

The ratings came after the United States in September alleged that businesses faced escalating risks associated with operations in Hong Kong, claiming that routine activities could be violated by the city's national security law.

A spokesman for the Hong Kong SAR government said the latest report recognizes the city's role as an international trading center.

"The report highlights that Hong Kong has few restrictions

on international trade in services and implements good practices in terms of information provision and regulations relating to company registration," he said.

However, the government spokesman noted that the report, on the other hand, has not reflected some of Hong Kong's elements "conducive to a friendly business environment", such as implementing common law, robust rule of law and safeguarding gender equality.

See *Competitiveness* page 2

Experts warn of deeper turmoil in Middle East

By PAN JIE
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Raising the risk of a deeper turmoil in the Middle East, tensions have heightened between Hezbollah and Israel, Iran and Israel. So far Iran's retaliatory move shows restraint and whether an all-out war can be avoided, mainly, depends on Israel's next moves, analysts say.

Israel bombarded south Beirut at least 10 times late on Thursday, according to Lebanon's official National News Agency.

The escalating assaults by Israel came as it weighs retaliation for Iran's barrage of missiles fired at the country on Tuesday. Iran said the attack was its response to the killing of Hassan Nasrallah, chief of its ally Hezbollah, and other top figures.

According to a CNN report, at least seven high-ranking Hezbollah commanders and officials have been killed by Israeli attacks in recent weeks.

Analyzing Iran's attack, experts say that Tehran is mainly in a defensive position, and has been restrained in the latest round of provocations from Israel.

Just as what Iran's Foreign Minister Seyyed Abbas Araghchi

stated on Wednesday, Iran took action after exercising "tremendous restraint for almost two months, to give space for a ceasefire in Gaza".

"Facing repeated provocations, Iran cannot remain indifferent at this moment. Otherwise, it will shake the unity with regional allies," Li Xinggang, a researcher at the Institute for Studies on the Mediterranean Rim at Zhejiang International Studies University, told China Daily.

"The Iranian government needs to maintain its status as a regional power and also needs to respond to the expectations of its allies. So from one side, Iran must respond, from another side, Iran is also working hard to avoid a full-scale war," Zhang Yuan, a professor at the Institute of Middle East Studies, Shanghai International Studies University, told China Daily.

Iran's commitment to averting a regional crisis is clear in the way how it handled previous incidents — Iran responded with restraint in the bombing of its embassy in Syria in April, and the killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Teheran in August, Li said.

See *Consequences* page 2



A father hugs his son on Thursday, as Greek and Greek Cypriot nationals are evacuated from Lebanon on a Hellenic Air Force C130, due to ongoing hostilities between Hezbollah and the Israeli forces, in Beirut, Lebanon. /ALKIS KONSTANTINIDIS / REUTERS

ASIAN NATIONS IN STRONG RACE TO HOST 2036 OLYMPICS

India, Indonesia among likely contenders, while oil-rich countries poised for intense push

By XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong and APARAJIT CHAKRABORTY in New Delhi

Now that the 2024 Summer Olympic Games in Paris are over, the world's attention has swiftly shifted to potential bidders for the 2036 Games.

With Los Angeles set to host the Summer Olympics in 2028, and Brisbane, Australia, in 2032, the quadrennial sporting extravaganza is likely to return to Asia in 12 years.

Although in the early stages, the competition is expected to be intense. Two populous nations, India and Indonesia, are almost certain to throw their hats into the ring, along with South Korea, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye, after the International Olympic Committee officially opens the bid.

Egypt and South Africa have also shown interest, and if either of those succeeds, it would be the

first time the Games are held on the African continent.

While the eagerness to host the Games indicates the rising Olympic awareness and growing sporting ethos in these countries, it also gives the winning bidder a chance to boost its economy and international standing, experts said.

"Many in the IOC think it's time for an Asian country to step up to host the Olympics (again) as the Olympics is supposed to represent the world," said James Chin, a professor of Asian Studies at the University of Tasmania in Australia.

Asian cities that have hosted the Summer Games include Beijing in 2008, Seoul in 1988, and Tokyo in 1964 and again in 2021, after it was delayed for a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Indonesia and India are seen as potentially strong hosts by the IOC due to their large populations and growing economic clout.

See *Games*, page 3

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HOLIDAYNATION

Delighting the crowd



A performer dressed as the Destined One, the main character in the recent video game hit *Black Myth: Wukong*, greets tourists at Taiyuan's landmark attraction Zhonglou Street in Shanxi province. As many renowned tourism sites in Shanxi are included in the game, the province has gained popularity among travelers recently. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

Nation ramps up public services to meet rising cultural demand

Night schools, reading clubs mark gov't's increased efforts to improve livelihoods

By XING WEN
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Shanghai resident Wang Yanqing, 38, said that her recent experience of trying to secure a spot in the upcoming autumn courses at the Shanghai Citizen Night School took her back to university days, when students had to scramble to register for classes online.

In the blink of an eye, nearly 900,000 eager applicants flooded the system as soon as the night school's registration portal opened. The most sought-after classes for the autumn session of the school spanned a wide range of disciplines, including archery, baking, leather crafting, popping and Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

Priced at a modest 500 yuan for a series of 12 classes, the Shanghai Citizen Night School has gained a reputation for its accessibility and top-quality instructors, establishing itself as the hottest public cultural service hub in the city.

Catering to people aged 18 to 55, the night school offers courses during the spring and autumn terms. In the ongoing autumn semester, the service has been expanded to include 37 branch campuses and 367 teaching venues, spanning across the city.

For Wang, who has been learning dance skills at the primary campus of Shanghai Mass Art Center since 2021, the night school represents a vital outlet for personal growth and exploration.

"Elderly people have their senior universities and children have various art training institutions to choose from. We young people also

need some public cultural services to develop our interests and add color to our lives," says Wang.

"At the night school, you'll find courses with solid reviews, awesome teachers and prices that are budget-friendly. It's also easy to locate a class close to home," Wang adds.

In recent years, the country has been actively improving the public cultural service system and expanding the coverage of basic public cultural services.

The Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) on Further Deepening Reform Comprehensively to Advance Chinese Modernization released on July 21 includes plans for enhancing the public cultural service system.

This includes establishing a mechanism for high-quality cultural resources to reach grassroots levels and enhancing the participation of social entities in the provision of public cultural services.

Li Guoxin, the director of Peking University's national center for modern public culture research, explained that the resolution highlights the importance of offering higher quality, more efficient, fairer and sustainable public cultural services to grassroots communities. This is aimed at enhancing people's sense of cultural attainment and happiness.

In recent years, the Chinese government has actively promoted innovation and reform in public cultural services. Over 35,000 new public cultural spaces have been set up nationwide, including libraries and cultural centers in urban and rural

areas, making cultural services more accessible for a wider population, Li added.

Hefei, capital of Anhui province, has witnessed active expansion of reading spaces since 2017.

With more than 100 urban reading spaces, urban residents are guaranteed to reach a reading space within a 15-minute walk from their homes.

Ji Yuanqun, a resident from Hefei's economic development zone, said that the reading space has provided a group of full-time mothers like her with a place where "they can temporarily set aside the family's troubles and worries, and just be themselves".

Formerly an entrepreneur who devoted herself to her career, she used to have her parents take care of her children. After her children started primary school, she decided to devote her time with her children and family.

However, she found that upon returning from the workplace to the family, women easily fell into anxiety. So she initiated a reading club in 2017, where full-time mothers come together to recommend good books to each other and share parenting experiences.

The club's gathering place is called Forest Book House, an urban reading space within her community that not only provides residents with reading facilities but also features workshops on calligraphy and handicrafts.

The book club receives an average of around 400 visitors per day, and last year, it hosted a total of 140,482 readers.

"We now have over 100 female members and hold events every Thursday afternoon at the Book House," Ji said.

"When we meet like-minded people in the space, our anxious feelings fade away, and we feel more uplifted as a whole."

In the first half of the year, the urban reading spaces in Hefei received 4.86 million visitors, with 1.115 million books borrowed and hosted 8,983 events, according to Meng Xianlei, an official from the city's bureau of culture and tourism.

Meng points out that these reading spaces are constructed by the government, owned by the government and operated by third parties through bidding processes. The separation of ownership and operation rights of public cultural facilities shows the reform measures proposed by the aforementioned resolution on further deepening and advancing Chinese modernization.

Starting this year, Hefei is transforming these urban reading spaces into public cultural hubs featuring art exhibitions, training seminars, literary salons, film screenings and a range of other services.

Originally from Guilin in Southwest China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, Wang has found pleasure and fulfillment in Shanghai's public cultural amenities, despite the long distance from her hometown.

The abundance of libraries, art centers and communal spaces has not only enriched Wang's own life but has also provided a welcoming place for her mother, who recently traveled from Guilin to Shanghai to live with her.

"She frequents the free movie screenings at the community cultural center near our residence every week. Such public cultural spaces have aided her in swiftly have a social circle in this unfamiliar city," she added.

Romania sees huge potential in relations

By ZHAO JIA
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As Saturday marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Romania, Dan-Horia Maxim, the Romanian ambassador to China, said the potential of bilateral relations in all possible domains is "far from being exhausted".

Romania is dedicated to strengthening bilateral relations and attaches paramount importance to this through continuous engagement and collaboration in various sectors, he said.

Romania forged diplomatic relations with China on Oct 5, 1949, becoming the third nation globally to establish such ties.

"Later, Romania has been one of the most active supporters of China regaining its righteous place in the highest forum of the nations of the world, the United Nations Organization. These historic steps set the context of our political cooperation," Maxim said.

Maxim, who has been closely following China's development, arrived in the nation in November to take up his post.

"It is no secret for anyone — no country in recent history developed at such a speed, intensity and complexity as China did, mainly in the past 30 years."

"New China deserves its name, as China's development is impressive in many directions," Maxim said, adding that he looked forward to learning more stories about China's development during his term of office.

"Now China is Romania's largest commercial partner in Asia, but there is still a lot of room for improvement," he said.

According to China's Foreign Ministry, bilateral trade reached \$10.56 billion last year, increasing 1.4 percent year-on-year.

"We will continue to seek opportunities that enhance our bilateral ties and contribute to mutual prosperity," the ambassador said.

He recalled the intense bilateral exchanges of students that started in 1950, right after the establishment of diplomatic relations, saying that such interaction "led to the fact that, from

each other's perspective, China and Romania were no longer just some distant, exotic regions of the world, but countries engaged in cultural dialogue and people-to-people exchanges".

"Today, I am happy to see that the Romanian language and civilization is taught in five major universities across China and five Confucius Institutes are successfully active across Romania," Maxim said.



Dan-Horia Maxim fondly recalled organizing a "Day of the Romanians in the People's Republic of China" at the embassy, saying that he was happy to see Romanians living and working in China in various domains.

"They are well integrated, they respect and admire the country they live in and they raise their children, some from mixed families, in the spirit of Romanian and Chinese traditions. The same can be said, I am sure, about the Chinese community living in Romania. This is also a good structure upon which to keep building," he said.

While emphasizing that the bilateral relationship is of paramount importance, the ambassador said it "serves as a cornerstone for broader regional cooperation and exemplifies the potential for mutually beneficial partnerships".

Since the launch of Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries in 2012, Romania has been an active supporter of the platform, Maxim said, as it has fostered numerous opportunities for dialogue and collaboration.

The ambassador applauded the initiatives proposed by China, such as the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, highlighting the importance of addressing global challenges through cooperation and dialogue.

"Therefore, it is essential for countries to engage in discussions that promote mutual understanding and shared objectives," Maxim said.

All in the game



Tourists engage in a game of mahjong at a bustling business street in Changsha, Hunan province, on Thursday. Known for its special snacks and night-time lifestyle, the provincial capital is leveraging its edge in tourism sector to attract more travelers from around the world. YANG HUAFENG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Consequences: Risks of bigger regional war at sight

From page 1

Pointing to the next developments, Li said: "The future depends on how Israel will retaliate against Iran in the future, as well as the intensity and severity of the retaliation."

"If Israel takes severe retaliatory actions, especially if it attacks Iran's oil and even nuclear facilities, Iran might respond militarily under the pressure of the situation," Zhang added.

Once they engage in a full-scale war, it could have incalculable consequences for both countries and even the entire Middle East region, which does not align with the current interests of the United States, she added.

US President Joe Biden stated

on Thursday that he does not believe there is going to be an all-out war in the Middle East.

"This remark reflects that the US does not want to be dragged into the mire," Li said.

"As the country which influences Israel most, the United States does not want a full-scale war in the Middle East to disrupt its global strategic layout," Zhang added.

Meanwhile, experts attributed the root cause of the current turmoil in the Middle East to the bias of the US and its support of Israel.

"If the unilateral thinking of the US hegemony and supremacy cannot be contained, the sword of Damocles of war will still hang high on the land of the Middle East," Zhang added.

Competitiveness: Stronger ASEAN ties seen as key

From page 1

The administration said it will maintain close communication with the World Bank Group to explain comprehensively about the city's situation, and its policies and measures that facilitate the business environment.

Recent reports from multiple international organizations have validated Hong Kong's robustness and competitiveness. For example, according to the latest Global Financial Centers Index issued in September, Hong Kong reclaimed its position as Asia's top financial

center and the third globally.

Ratings showed that the city was among the top places in various competitive areas such as business environment, human capital and infrastructure. The report also ranked the SAR as one of the top 10 financial technology hubs worldwide.

Billy Mak Sui-choi, associate professor at Hong Kong Baptist University's Department of Accountancy, Economics and Finance, said Hong Kong should embark on market diversification and talent cultivation to consolidate its international trade hub status.

"Hong Kong should reach out to more ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and Belt and Road countries as much as possible to strengthen its superconnector role in regional trade and investment flows," Mak told China Daily.

The professor added that Hong Kong should nurture more overseas students from ASEAN, Africa and Central Asia to become international trade talents that can act as the bridge for fostering trade between Hong Kong and those three regions.

Simon Lee Siu-por, adjunct faculty at Shenzhen Finance Institute of CUHK (Shenzhen), said the report

has reaffirmed Hong Kong's previous efforts to restore its international trade center status, and said the common law system, rule of law and freedom of information flow are very important to cement Hong Kong's reputation as a business-friendly place.

"Hong Kong should maintain the attribute of internationalization by welcoming and boosting the confidence of overseas enterprises to operate their businesses here," Lee told China Daily.

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