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DAILY CONVERSATIONS IN CHINESE MEDIA

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SOCIAL MEDIA CHATTER IN CHINA

- **Spring Festival wishes trend on Weibo:** The hashtag “Happy Spring Festival” ([#春节快乐#](#)) trended on Weibo over the weekend. Celebrities performing at the festival gala, movie stars as well as common people posted about celebrations with their families, encouraging others to welcome the new year together. Commercials about bringing good luck in the new year were also trending. Another popular conversation was about newly released TV shows and films. The hashtag “the film Mǎn Jiāng Hóng” ([#电影满江红#](#)) got more than 82 million views as people expressed their appreciation and excitement about its story. A [post](#) by a media outlet showing workers of the Chinese Communist Party hoisting the Chinese flag on the occasion of the Lunar New Year at Tainan also went viral on Weibo.
- **New film and music festivals create excitement in Macao and Singapore:** This week, it was [announced](#) that Macao will host its first international queer film festival called the Macao Inaugural International Queer Film Festival in February. With the theme ‘Let’s Get Beautiful Together Queen!’ matching the acronym LGBTQ, the festival will stage 17 films from across the globe. Elsewhere, the music record label Drink Entertainment [announced](#) that it will hold Sinmahui (新马会), an annual event in Singapore showcasing Mandarin hip-hop artists from Singapore and Malaysia. As part of the 2023 Chinese Festival of Arts ie. Huayi (华艺), Sinmahui will feature top artists such as ShiGGa Shay, Tosh Rock, Zaton and J.M3.

NEWS IN CHINA

- The Chinese Lunar New Year was celebrated with great enthusiasm on Sunday. After weeks of preparations and a country-wide travel rush to reunite with friends and family, China saw a boom in consumption and festive spending over the weekend. Chinese state media as well as private media agencies held spring festival gala events, while cities and villages held fairs and celebrations. The box office received a massive response as 7 new films were released with total sales exceeding 900 million Yuan. In many places, authorities released guidelines about drunk driving to ensure safety amidst the festivities. Taikonauts at the Chinese space station also celebrated the new year by launching the second Tiangong painting exhibition on Saturday, featuring paintings by teenagers from across China.
 - The Chinese Ministry of Culture and Tourism announced a pilot program on Friday to resume tourist international travel to 20 countries. From 6th February, China will allow tourist agencies to arrange travel to 20 countries including Thailand, Singapore, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Russia and Cuba. India is not included in the list of countries for the pilot programme. Online searches for travel destinations soared after the announcement. On Saturday, Wu Zunyu, Chief Epidemiologist of China's Center for Disease Control, stated that the probability of a new COVID-19 epidemic caused by a new variant was low, aiding the rationale behind allowing greater travel to and from the country.
 - The Chinese Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, along with 16 other departments, on Friday released the 'Robot+' programme aimed at doubling the density of robots in manufacturing industries by 2025. The programme identifies 10 key industries in which robots could enhance production capabilities and aid innovation, including energy, healthcare, construction, education and extreme environment applications. In 2020, robot density in Chinese manufacturing was 246 robots per 10,000 people. The programme intends to increase it to 500 by 2025.
 - Data released by the Chinese Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security on Sunday showed that the country's insurance scheme for the elderly added 24.3 million people in 2022, reaching a total coverage of 1.05 billion people. The state allocated funds of 244 billion Yuan (\$36 billion) while also increasing government subsidies for the elderly.
 - An avalanche claimed 28 lives in Lhasa in China's Tibet Autonomous Region. The avalanche had occurred on a road between Mainling and Medog counties earlier this week. A rescue operation consisting of two special teams concluded its efforts four days later on Friday. The avalanche is being attributed to heavy rainfall in the area.
 - The Chinese marine research vehicle "Fèn dòu zhě" reached the deepest point in the Te Amandina Trench in the Indian Ocean on Sunday. The "Fèn dòu zhě" is a manned submersible vehicle used for research of marine environments. The team reportedly discovered iron and manganese deposits in the trench.
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- The Chinese women's curling team won a gold medal on Sunday at the 31st Winter World University Games held in the USA. China beat South Korea 6-4 to secure the win, registering its first gold this season as well as its best performance in the tournament. Meanwhile, China's Gu Ailing won the 2023 Freestyle Ski World Cup in Calgary, Canada, with a high score of 95.
 - Chinese meteorological authorities issued a blue alert with intimations of strong cold winds in some regions of China over the weekend. Central and eastern regions of the country are expected to experience significantly low temperatures over the next week. Mohe city in Helongjiang province recorded a temperature of -53 degrees Celsius, the lowest-ever temperature recorded in all of China.

INDIA WATCH

- To ensure post-pandemic recovery in China, the state is encouraging the adoption of digital technology. The recent announcement of pushing for greater mechanisation of Chinese manufacturing through robots complements this effort. However, Chinese manufacturing has made strides due to the efficiency of Chinese workers, hence mechanisation may be perceived as a move away from this status-quo. In other labour-intensive economies like India, mechanisation has previously been opposed due to the danger of increased unemployment. Yet, the Chinese government's push for robots may be interpreted in the context of its broader labour policy of fostering entrepreneurship and encouraging aspirations among the youth. With a high literacy rate and a growing service sector, the Chinese economy is becoming less dependent on manufacturing. The government aims to capitalise on this shift and upgrade industrial production through mechanisation. In the Indian case, the manufacturing sector is not only nascent, but also very labour-intensive. Therefore, policies are also aimed at expanding manufacturing to increase blue-collar jobs. However, this may not be sufficient to fuel the country's growth aspirations. Instead, policy should focus on making blue-collar jobs more prosperous by raising income levels in the sector. The Indian state's efforts towards vocational training for the youth should be supplemented by greater lending towards MSMEs and low-income groups. The gig economy, which contributes significantly towards blue-collar employment in urban areas, should be revolutionised to improve the living of ordinary workers. This can be done by introducing regulation and standardisation in the gig sector, minimising profits accrued by intermediaries between customers and workers, expanding the gig economy to rural areas and leveraging the India Stack mechanism to reduce transaction costs and ensure compliance. In order to compete with global players such as China in the manufacturing space, India needs to improve its own industry while also empowering its workers.
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