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DAILY CONVERSATIONS IN CHINESE MEDIA

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NEWS IN CHINA

- According to Xu Ningning, executive president of the China-ASEAN Business Council and chairman of the RCEP Industry Cooperation Committee, China and ASEAN countries have continuously improved good neighbourly relations and economic and trade cooperation, with both sides becoming each other's largest trading partner in the last three years. Based on recent data, trade volume between China and ASEAN countries increased by 9.6 per cent year on year in the first two months of 2023. According to Xu, non-financial direct investment from Chinese enterprises in nations participating in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) totalled 17.06 billion yuan (roughly 2.49 billion dollars) in January, up 42.7 per cent year over year, making up 22.5 percent of the total during the same period. Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia are the top three ASEAN nations that have drawn the most non-financial direct investment from China.
- According to the National Immigration Administration, foreigners with valid visas issued before March 28, 2020, will be permitted to enter China, as the country adjusts its visa and entry policies to facilitate cross-border travel. Visa-free entry to the southern island province of Hainan and cruise tour groups at Shanghai ports will be reinstated. Visa-free entry to the southern province of Guangdong for foreign tour groups from Hong Kong and Macao will be restored, and a similar mechanism will be reinstated for tour groups from ASEAN countries to enter Guilin in the southern Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. According to immigration officials, the policies will go into effect on Wednesday.
- According to analysts, China will focus on smaller, less risky,

and more profitable trade-related infrastructure projects overseas in the coming years, after a number of larger ones under the Belt and Road Initiative ran into financial difficulties that drew international attention. This corresponds to what Chinese officials and state media began calling "small but beautiful" additions to the global Belt and Road Initiative in 2021, with the projects possibly led by smaller state-run or private firms. This would be consistent with China's emphasis on a more sustainable approach to the Belt and Road Initiative, particularly when Beijing is dealing with worsening credit and debt distress among various partners. According to the Communist Party-run People's Daily, a series of "small but beautiful" projects in agriculture, healthcare, and poverty reduction "landed one after another" last month. According to the State Council Information Office, these types of projects will "increasingly become reality" in the digital, healthcare, and environmental sectors.

- Oil workers in Taklamakan, China's largest desert, accomplished a remarkable feat by drilling to a depth of 9,396 metres, setting a record for Asia's deepest drilling. The achievement is also significant for the Tarim Oilfield, which has entered a new phase of ultra-deep oil and gas exploration and development at 9,000 metres. The oilfield can now go even deeper, paving the way for further advancements in China's oil and gas exploration technology. Tarim Oilfield has made significant advances in ultra-deep exploration in recent years, becoming one of the most important strategic areas for increasing production capabilities in China's

petroleum industry. Last year, for the first time, the average depth of an oil well exceeded 7,000 metres, and the Tarim Oilfield is now pushing even harder to extract more oil and gas from the earth's depths.

- According to Premier Li Qiang, China will embrace a talent dividend to boost economic development, while implementing the employment-first policy remains one of the government's top priorities for job market stabilisation. Li stated at a news conference in Beijing on Monday that employment is the foundation of people's livelihoods and that the primary way to increase employment is to boost the economy. The newly released Government Work Report set a target of creating 12 million new jobs in urban areas for the year. According to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, the domestic job market was stable last year, despite a slight fluctuation caused by the COVID-19 epidemic, with approximately 12.06 million people landing jobs in urban areas, exceeding the year's target of 11 million. Li emphasised that the nation will continue to implement the employment-first policy comprehensively this year, with more supportive policies on employment services and skills training.

SOCIAL MEDIA CHATTER IN CHINA

- **Mother in China creates a massive playhouse and toys for her daughters out of recycled cardboard:** A Chinese mother used old cardboard boxes to make large toys for her daughters, including a huge playhouse, a castle, a Transformer car,
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and a lion head, has been praised for her thrifty ingenuity on Chinese social media.

INDIA WATCH

- Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam are members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). India's emphasis on a strengthened and multifaceted relationship with ASEAN stems from significant changes in the world's political and economic landscape since the early 1990s, as well as India's own march towards economic liberalization. The Act East Policy (AEP), the India-led Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), and the India-ASEAN Plan of Action (2021-2025) have been viewed as central pillars in the consolidation of the ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress, Stability, and Shared Prosperity in the region that also serves as India's extended eastern border. Such diplomatic efforts are especially important at a time when the two sides are commemorating the 30th anniversary of ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations. The recent addition of India and some ASEAN countries to the recently launched Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) is a significant development. The declaration agreed to promote stable and sustainable growth for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), including technology transfer, as well as to improve capacity building, technical assistance, access to innovation, and opportunities to integrate into global and regional value chains. Through the implementation of the ASEAN-India Space Cooperation Programme, including satellite launches, India and ASEAN

countries will continue to collaborate in the peaceful exploitation of outer space for sustainable exploitation of ground, sea, atmospheric, and digital resources for equitable regional development.
