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# DAILY CONVERSATIONS IN CHINESE MEDIA

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## SOCIAL MEDIA CHATTER IN CHINA

- **Return of giant pandas Ya Ya and Le Le from US:** A zoo in Memphis, Tennessee, USA is returning two giant pandas that had been on loan from China for 20 years. Earlier this year animal rights activists had claimed mistreatment of pandas by the facility. The Chinese public welcomed the news of the pandas' return to China and it became a hot topic to discuss on Chinese social media Weibo. "They must have suffered a lot. I hope they will enjoy the rest of their lives after coming home," commented a user on Weibo. The zoo said the decision to return the pandas to China had nothing to do with pressure from animal advocates. China requires foreign zoos that host pandas on loan to allow older animals to spend their final days on Chinese soil. At 24 and 22, respectively, Le Le and Ya Ya have exceeded the giant panda life expectancy in the wild by almost 10 years, according to the spokesperson.
- **Chinese couple cancels divorce and falls in love again:** A Chinese couple went viral on mainland social media. The unnamed couple from Jiangxi province who were almost officially divorced, changed their mind after the wife got COVID-19 and was taken care of by the husband. The couple were expecting to live separately after the paperwork was finalised. Until then they waited for their divorce to get completed and shared the same house. It was during this time the wife contracted COVID-19 and was moved by the level of care her husband showed while she was bedridden. Afterwards, the couple talked over and withdrew the application. The couple's story melted the hearts of millions on social media. Users were moved by this story and blessed

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the couple with their wishes. Touching stories during the pandemic have been popular lately on mainland social media.

## NEWS IN CHINA

- On the 70th anniversary of the launch of the patriotic health campaigns, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, demanded more targeted efforts and concrete actions to protect people's safety and health. Xi demanded more efforts in guiding the public to acquire health knowledge and skills, maintain good personal hygiene, and form a healthy lifestyle to build a defence line against the epidemic for the whole society. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang made instructions on the matter and urged efforts to follow the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, adhere to the principle of putting prevention first, and innovate related mechanisms and working approaches.
- China's GDP increased by 8.4 per cent to 114.92 trillion yuan (\$16.52 trillion) in 2021, according to the updated data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The NBS has recently carried out the final verification of last year's GDP data and updated China's GDP in 2021 to 114.92 trillion yuan, up by 556.7 billion yuan compared with the preliminary number released in January. Based on the final verification, the country's real GDP growth came in at 8.4 per cent year-on-year last year, up by 0.3 percentage point compared with the preliminary figure, the NBS said.
- Southwest China's Tibet Autonomous

Region vowed to expand the free coverage of Human Papillomavirus Vaccines (HPV) to teenage girls aged 13 to 14 in the next three years. According to a regional women's development plan from 2021 to 2025, the region will continue to improve the breast cancer screening rate (increasing it to 70 per cent among school-girls age) and the diagnosis and treatment of cervical cancer during the period, said Li Sang with the regional government's working committee on women and children. Earlier this year, Tibet included the screening and treatment of breast and cervical cancer in its 2022 government report as part of efforts to improve women's health.

- On December 26, the 2023 Happy Chinese New Year Press Conference was held in Beijing. Gao Zheng, director of the International Exchange and Cooperation Bureau of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Zhao Cong, head of China National Traditional Orchestra, and well-known pianist Lang Lang, cultural ambassador of the 2023 Happy Chinese New Year, attended the conference, introducing the 2023 Happy Chinese New Year activities. The 2023 Happy Chinese New Year will be guided by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and hosted by China International Culture Association. Various online and offline activities, including music concerts, temple fairs and parades, are scheduled for the celebration. The press conference also released the mascot of 2023 Happy Chinese New Year. As the coming Chinese New Year is the Year of the Rabbit, the mascot, designed by Central Academy of Fine Arts, is a cute rabbit with long ears based on the shape of a lucky bag.
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- After the initial shock and weeks of staying indoors to recuperate or hide from illness, there are signs that life is gradually returning to normal for people in Beijing and Shanghai. Mask-wearing Beijing and Shanghai commuters crowded subway trains on Monday as China's two biggest cities edged closer to living with COVID-19 even as frontline medical workers scrambled to cope with millions of new infections. Subway trains in Beijing and Shanghai were packed, while some major traffic arteries in the two cities were jammed with slow-moving cars on Monday as residents commuted to work.
  - China congratulated Pushpa Kamal Dahal, chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Center), also known as Prachanda, on his appointment as the new prime minister of Nepal and is enthusiastic about strengthening the bilateral ties under the new government. Prachanda was sworn in as the new Prime Minister of Nepal by President Bidya Devi Bhandari at the President's Office in Kathmandu. The leader of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), Dahal will return to office for his third stint as prime minister after 2008 and 2016. His two previous terms as prime minister were marked by instability, each lasting barely nine months.

## INDIA WATCH

- China has been working hard to increase its influence in Nepal, as China considers Nepal an important element in its growing South Asian footprint. With Nepal being a key partner in its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) China has overtaken India as the largest source of foreign direct investment

with the annual development assistance being worth \$120 million. In recent years, India has found lost grounds in Nepal with implementation of infrastructure projects. For instance, the Jayanagar-Bardibas railway started with India providing technical support. No matter which government comes to power in Kathmandu, the bilateral ties between Nepal and India need to remain strong due to the cultural, economic and social proximity between the two countries. Nepal is important for India in terms of its overall strategic interests in the region. India is Nepal's largest trading partner as well as an important source of inbound investment. In recent years, India has shown great interest in investment in cross-border roads, railways and oil pipelines extending to Nepal. It is noteworthy that China and India are seeking to strengthen infrastructure linkages with Nepal from different directions, and Nepal is the midpoint of infrastructure efforts by the two emerging giants in Asia. Being a buffer state, it is important for India to maintain strong bonds with Nepal to counter the Chinese influence in the region. The need today is to avoid rhetoric on territorial nationalism and lay the groundwork for quiet dialogue where both sides display sensitivity as they explore what is feasible. India needs to be a sensitive and generous partner for the neighbourhood first policy to take root.