

NATION: GREEN CARDS WOO TALENT P.28

BUSINESS: PENSION GAP LOOMS P.36

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Cover Photo: High-speed trains at a maintenance base in Wuhan, capital of central China's Hubei Province (STR/CFP)

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Full Speed Ahead

The world's longest high-speed railway was put into operation from Beijing to Guangzhou on December 26, 2012. Connecting the nation's capital and south China's Guangdong Province, the Beijing-Guangzhou high-speed railway runs 2,298 km and proves once again that China's high-speed railway technology and the management of its transport systems have steadily improved.

China's high-speed rail construction began in 1999. Within a decade, China had established several lines in its high-speed railway network, an achievement secured by the country's strength as the world's second largest economy.

The Beijing-Shanghai high-speed railway was put into operation in 2011, arresting world attention. Compared with that railway, the Beijing-Guangzhou line has achieved breakthroughs in technology, including in ballastless tracks. China has become the first country to wield the complete technologies of ballastless tracks in mountain areas and long-distance tunnels.

As an important north-south corridor in China's railway network plan, the Beijing-Guangzhou line will bring vigor to the economic and social development along the railway. While passing by four provincial capitals—Shijiazhuang, Zhengzhou, Wuhan and Changsha, the Beijing-Guangzhou line is also connected with the other completed high-speed lines covering most metropolitan areas in the eastern and central regions. All densely populated areas lie somewhere along the high-speed network, which will continue to reduce time and costs as well as facilitate the flow of people and goods.

There is no high-speed railway connecting China's eastern and western regions. China needs more high-speed railways to meet the demands of economic and social development. The Beijing-Guangzhou line remains an important piece in the vast puzzle of China's future high-speed rail development, and in the near future it may no longer be the longest. ■

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Available on App Store



FAIRYLAND

Visitors take photos in front of a massive ice castle sculpture in Jingyuetan National Park, Changchun, northeast China's Jilin Province, on December 24. Every winter, various parks throughout north China provide tourists the chance to enjoy unique works of snow and ice art.

Final Sentence

Six appellants convicted of murdering 13 Chinese sailors on the Mekong River in 2011 hear their verdict at a court in Kunming, capital of southwest China's Yunnan Province on December 26, 2012.

The Provincial Higher People's Court of Yunnan on December 26 rejected appeals from the six people convicted of intentional homicide, drug trafficking, kidnapping and hijacking by a local court in Kunming last November. The court upheld death penalties for the case's prime convicts Naw Kham, a Myanmar drug lord, and three of his top-ranked men.

The court also sustained sentences for the two other Myanmar convicts. Known by their Chinese names, Zha Bo and Zha Tuobo were handed a death sentence with two-year reprieve and eight years in prison, respectively.



Medical White Paper

The Chinese Government issued a white paper on December 26, 2012, saying that the country's medical and healthcare systems covering both urban and rural residents have taken shape.

The white paper, Medical and Health Services in China, was released by the State Council Information Office. It said that China has kept advancing the reform of

its healthcare system to ensure that every resident has access to safe, effective, convenient and affordable services.

The white paper revealed that the health of the Chinese people is among the top in developing countries with an overall life expectancy of 74.8 years in 2010, 72.4 years for males and 77.4 years for females. China currently has about 260 million people who have been diagnosed with chronic diseases, which

cause 85 percent of total deaths in the country.

The mortality rate of children under 5 has kept dropping from 34.9 per thousand in 2002 to 15.6 per thousand in 2011, ahead of the UN Millennium Development Goal schedule, the white paper said.

The infant mortality rate had dropped from 29.2 per thousand in 2002 to 12.1 per thousand in 2011, it said.

Helping the Needy

China's Ministry of Civil Affairs is looking for more non-governmental support to aid the homeless and beggars as it looks to adopt a more proactive and efficient approach to

helping the needy.

In a document released on December 26, 2012, the ministry said that it encourages charitable donations, health care and education services for the homeless and beggars.

The ministry requires local civil affairs authorities to offer training to non-governmental sectors in a bid to help them better understand policies, regulations and other specifications.

Pension Insurance

China will nearly double its pension insurance coverage by the end of 2015 to address the problem of a rapidly aging population, a senior official said on December 26, 2012.

As many as 348 million more people will be covered by the program over the next three years, bringing the total participants to 807 million, or about 60 percent of China's population, said Hu Xiaoyi, Vice Minister of Human Resources and Social Security.

The State Council, China's cabinet, decided to adopt the program



ICE FISHING

An organizer hoists fish caught in Changling Lake during the run-up to an ice fishing celebration in Harbin, northeast China's Heilongjiang Province, on December 24, 2012



NEW BRIDGE

The 28,996-meter No.4 Yangtze River Bridge in Nanjing, east China's Jiangsu Province, the longest suspension bridge in China and the third longest in the world, opens to traffic on December 24, 2012



SUN CAN

in all counties nationwide in the first half of 2012 after earlier pilot studies.

By 2015, some 95 percent of the population will be covered by medical insurance, and insurance for work-related injury, unemployment and maternity will benefit 210 million, 160 million and 150 million people, respectively, Hu added.

Mainland Longevity

A total of 47,773 centenarians were living on the Chinese mainland as of October 16, 2012, with women comprising 80.1 percent, according to a report issued on December 26, 2012.

Zhao Baohua, Executive Vice President of the China Gerontological Society, said that there were 9,505 men and 38,268 women at or over the age of 100 as of October 16.

The number of centenarians in cities stood at 12,457, and another 35,316, or 73.92 percent, were residing in rural regions.

According to the report, Luo Meizhen, a 127-year-old woman of Yao ethnic group in south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, is the oldest person living on the Chinese mainland, and possibly the world.

With a combined age of 214, Zhang Wanqing and Wang Yuxiu, a married couple from south China's Hainan Province, are the oldest living couple on the mainland.

Museum Boom

China is home to 3,589 museums, including 3,054 state-owned and 535 private ones, according to information released at a conference on

cultural relics on December 25, 2012.

"The government will further promote free museum admission and improve the quality of displays and public services," said Minister of Culture Cai Wu at the conference.

In 2011, the Palace Museum in Beijing, also known as the Forbidden City, received 14 million visitors, twice the number of visitors in 2002. During national holidays, it welcomed even more visitors, with a record-high 182,000 people visiting the museum on a single day in 2011.

Geoinformation Survey

China will launch its first national survey that will examine the country's geographic conditions later this year.

The survey, with investment of about 1.1 billion yuan (\$176 million), will take three years to monitor China's natural and geographic conditions relating to humans, the National Administration of Surveying, Mapping and Geoinformation said in a statement on December 24, 2012.

Information collected will consist of the country's territorial size, geological regions, topographic and geomorphic characteristics, as well as road and transportation networks.

The information will be used to establish a national background database on geographic conditions in the country, the statement said.

The administration also announced on December 24, 2012 that it will launch a national program to equip the country's cities with digital public services supported by geoinformation networks.

Fitness Monitoring

China will carry out fitness monitoring for school children nationwide this year in a bid to boost students' physical health, Minister of Education Yuan Guiren said on December 24, 2012.

The monitoring will be conducted by an independent institution and results will be released to students' parents in a timely manner, Yuan said at a meeting on physical education.

Sports work concerns children's physical and mental health, and their lifetime happiness, said Yuan, who urged schools to guarantee class hours for physical education.

China has tried a series of measures in recent years to promote physical education. However, the physical health of school children remains worrisome.

Official statistics show that obesity and poor eyesight are major physical problems among school children. About 67.33 percent of students aged between 13 and 15 and 79.2 percent of students aged between 19 to 22 have vision deficiency.

Young Victim

A kindergartener is treated at the People's Hospital in Guixi, central China's Jiangxi Province, on December 24, 2012, after a private kindergarten's van crashed into a pond, killing 11 children and injuring four.

A total of 12 officials, including a vice mayor and heads of education and transport bureaus of Guixi, have been suspended from work for further investigation. The van's driver, who is also owner of the kindergarten, has been detained for questioning.



ZHOU KE

Utilizing Legacy

A 330,000-square-meter shopping mall, which was converted from the Expo Axis from the World Expo in Shanghai in 2010, opens for business on December 28, 2012



Downgrading U.S.

The Chinese rating agency Dagong Global Credit Rating Co. put the local and foreign currency sovereign credit ratings of the United States on a negative watch list on December 25, 2012.

The addition to the watch list is due to the ongoing U.S. debt crisis and political deadlock in Washington.

The debt burden of the U.S. Federal Government increased 9.1 percent year on year in 2011 and 11.7 percent in 2012, far exceeding the country's nominal GDP growth rate of 3.9 percent in 2011 and 3.4 percent in 2012, Dagong said.

Dagong said that it expected the outstanding debt of the United States to rise to 104.8 percent of its GDP and 608.7 percent of its fiscal revenue by the end of 2012, indicating that its solvency is experiencing a descending trend.

"Due to the pending fiscal cliff, the U.S. economy is likely to fall into recession in 2013 and stay weak in the long term, which will further weaken the material basis for the

government to repay debt," Dagong said.

Stock Delisting

The Shenzhen Stock Exchange delisted two companies on December 24, 2012, amid a push to improve its stock delisting procedures.

The bourse said in a statement that Jiangsu Chinese Online Logistics Co. Ltd. and Powerise Information

Technology Co. Ltd. failed to win approval to resume trading and would be delisted.

Jiangsu Chinese Online Logistics suffered losses for three straight years from 2003 to 2005. Its trading was suspended on May 15, 2006. Powerise Information Technology saw losses from 2004 to 2006 and its trading was suspended on May 24, 2007.

In late June 2012, both the Shanghai and Shenzhen stock exchanges released programs to improve delisting rules in a bid to protect investors and promote a healthy development of the stock market.

The new rules set specific requirements concerning the stock performance of listed companies on

the two bourses.

"As China's stock market becomes mature and more market-oriented, stock delisting will become an increasingly common phenomenon," according to a statement of the Shenzhen bourse.

Mining Regulation

China has made key progress in protecting mining resources in recent years.

Some 5.01 billion tons of petroleum reserves, 2.6 trillion cubic meters of natural gas and 279.8 billion tons of coal were discovered between 2008 and 2011 in a large-scale geological survey, said Xu Shaoshi, Minister of Land and Resources, on December 25, 2012.

According to Xu, the country has formed a geological exploration system that values both public and commercial interests and encourages investment from multiple sources.

Between 2008 and 2011, some 370.8 billion yuan (\$59.47 billion) was spent on mining exploration, up 110 percent year on year. Among the



SETTING SAIL

A Hong Kong cargo ship at the Ganyu port in east China's Jiangsu Province on December 24, 2012, the day the port opened for business

Numbers

40%

The year-on-year drop of flower sales in Guangzhou, capital of south China's Guangdong Province, in December, due to a call to cut spending on official meeting decorations, according to the *Southern Metropolis Daily*

785 bn yuan

The estimated B2C online sales in China in 2013, nearly double the 2012 figure, according to Analysys International, a Beijing-based consulting firm

11.1%

The proportion of China's exports against world trade during the first three quarters of 2012, according to the Ministry of Commerce

\$106.3 billion

The total amount of outbound direct investment by Chinese companies in the form of mergers and acquisitions from 2008-11, an average annual growth of 44 percent, according to the Ministry of Commerce

total, central and local government funds took up only 15.3 percent, while the rest came from non-state investors, Xu said.

Meanwhile, a security deposit system to protect the environment in mining regions has been implemented in 30 provinces so far, Xu said.

Under the system, mine owners have to pay a security fee before they begin mining. The fee will be returned to the owners if they successfully restore natural environment damaged by mining activities.

Xu said that efforts have also been made to solve persistent environmental problems, clean up tailing mines and crack down on illegal mining.

Production Halt

On December 25, 2012, China's largest rare earth producer announced that it would continue to halt some of its production for a third straight month to stabilize tumbling prices.

The Inner Mongolia Baotou Steel Rare Earth (Group) Hi-tech Co. Ltd. will maintain its suspension of rare earth roasting and smelting operations, which began last October, for another month, the company said in a statement filed to the Shanghai Stock Exchange.

"The rare earth market recovered a bit in the past two months but did not improve fundamentally," the



DA PX



SOLAR ENERGY

Staff from the Huzhou Electric Power Authority, Zhejiang Province, check photovoltaic panels installed on the roof of a skyscraper, which generated electricity for commercial use on December 24, 2012

statement said.

The burst of a speculative bubble in China's rare earth industry and a slowing economy have led to a plunge in prices of 17 rare earth metals used in products ranging from smartphones to hybrid cars since last year.

Baotou Steel Rare Earth saw its third quarter net profits dive 89.6 percent year on year to 120 million yuan (\$19.24 million) due to declines in prices and sales.

Green Meeting

The Fourth China International Forum of Ecological Competition kicked off in Beijing on December 20, 2012, demonstrating the latest achievements made in ecological conservation.

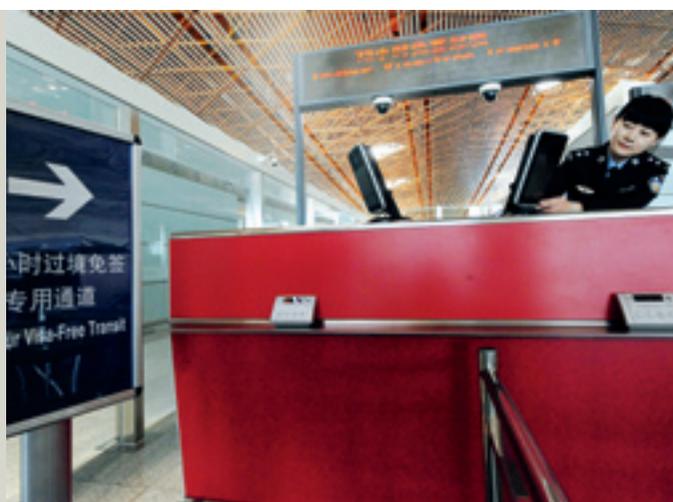
The annual event, which began in 2008, showed off an array of green projects and new technology and products for ecological protection.

At this year's forum, northeast China's Heilongjiang Province was granted the title of China's Most Ecologically Competitive Province, for its efforts in ecological conservation.

The China Green Carbon Foundation was set up at the forum, which aims to collect donations from the public to use in ecological conservation.

Last-Minute Check

A border police officer at the Beijing Capital International Airport prepares to receive 72-hour visa-free tourists on December 25, 2012. Foreign tourists from 45 countries were allowed a 72-hour visa-free stay in the Chinese capital beginning from New Year's Day



TANG ZHAOWEN

THIS WEEK WORLD



RUSSIA

Russian President Vladimir Putin holds the first major press conference of his third term in power in Moscow on December 20, 2012



ARGENTINA

A family watches the Copahue Volcano spew ash and gas over their village more than 1,000 km southwest of Buenos Aires on December 22, 2012



BAHRAIN

Leaders from Gulf Cooperation Council member states attend the closing ceremony of the 33rd GCC Summit in Manama on December 25, 2012. The six oil-rich countries stressed the importance of developing a common defense system to deal with regional threats





← THE UNITED STATES

Miss U.S.A. Olivia Culpo is crowned Miss Universe 2012 in Las Vegas on December 19, 2012

↓ CROATIA

Residents launch sky lanterns to celebrate the New Year in Zagreb on December 20, 2012



← GUATEMALA

A folkloric group performs at a celebration marking the end of a Mayan calendar cycle and the start of a new era on December 20, 2012 at the Tikal archaeological site 560 km north of Guatemala City

“China should use income distribution, resource pricing and production as starting points for economic reform, and promote reforms in the country’s social security, land and financial systems.”

Xia Bin, senior advisor to the China Western Development Promotion Association, on December 23



“The lack of a sound legal system to protect personal information in China is a serious problem. The country should quicken legislative moves to toughen the fight on infringement upon privacy.”

Li Yuxiao, an expert in Internet management and law studies with Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, commenting on strengthening online information safety



“China should maintain the proactive fiscal policy and follow a moderately ease monetary policy in the future and realize the long-term development goal through policy adjustment and structural reforms.”

Gao Peiyong, a senior researcher with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, analyzing a report released by the National Academy of Economic Strategy on December 24 in Beijing



“Today is a special day. It’s a day of giving and receiving. During the last two months I’ve been far from my family, but my teammates have made up for that. You brought me joy and happiness.”

Ex-NBA star Tracy McGrady, sending Christmas wishes to his teammates in the Chinese Basketball Association on December 25, thanking them for their care and support since he joined the Qingdao Doublestars



BIG HIT



Xu Zheng, 40, a well-known actor, recently made an excellent debut as film director of *Lost in Thailand*. The movie set a new box office record by earning over 720 million yuan (\$115.4 million) in the first two weeks since its premiere across China on December 12. Although competition at the box office always proves tough, the small-budget film has enjoyed success thanks to its funny storyline and excellent acting.



ANOTHER TITLE



Yao Ming, China’s basketball giant, was appointed vice chairman of Shanghai Sports Federation at a reelection meeting on December 20. The star has received a number of honors since retiring from the NBA Houston Rockets team in July 2011. Currently managing the Shanghai Sharks Basketball Club, Yao is involved in charities, culture as well as business and enjoys a good reputation thanks to his modesty and diligence. The 32-year-old has become one of the most respected athletes in China.



E-WASTE RECYCLING

South Reviews
December 18, 2012

For the past 20 to 30 years, residents in Qingyuan, south China's Guangdong Province, have made a living by extracting precious metals such as copper from e-waste. According to Qingyuan Statistics Bureau, the revenue of the Qingyuan resource recycling industry reached 51.82 billion yuan (\$8.22 billion) in 2010, accounting for about one fourth of the city's industrial output. Around 2.5 million tons of e-waste have been processed.

However, e-waste discarded after valuable metals have been extracted has caused serious environmental pollution. In recent years the Ministry of Environmental Protection has

tightened control over the import of e-waste and the copper price has sunk sharply, forcing the extraction industry to transform.

In this issue, *South Reviews* looks back at the rise and golden age of the industry and discusses measures the local government is taking to cope with new challenges.

A big industrial park was recently built by China Recycling Development Corporation Ltd. in Shijiao Town of Qingyuan, with the aim of housing dispersed family workshops and reducing pollution. However, it is not easy to persuade such workshops to move to the park due to high rent. A lot remains to be done by the local government.

Leader Transparency

China Youth Daily
December 26, 2012

Xinhua News Agency released a series of profiles on the new members of the Communist Party of China (CPC) leadership in December 2012, containing details regarding their achievements and family lives in an open and transparent way. These reports have since evoked a wide public response.

The profiles highlight two aspects. First, the families of top leaders are shown to the public. Second, the profiles give detailed illustrations of their working experience. Rather than praising their achievements, the profiles aim to answer the question as to why these leaders have been appointed.

In short, as China deepens reform, the profiles of top CPC leaders will set an example for officials at all levels to persevere in the country's rapid development.

Land Law To Be Revised

The 21st Century Business Herald
December 26, 2012

Recently, a draft amendment on the Land Administration Law was submitted to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress for examination and discussion. One possible change underlines compensation on land requisition as set out in Article 47.

The amendment deletes the limit of compensation and stresses that payment occurs in a fair, equal and open manner. The amendment explicitly states that land requisition be prohibited if compensation funding is not finalized.

Without doubt, the amendment will play an important part in China's nationwide urbanization

progress. Land requisition and compensation has caused a lot of problems over past years. Breakthroughs show China is advancing legal protection for rural property. Though the amendment gives people more bargaining rights when making price offers, they still have to negotiate with the government. In addition, possible higher compensation will raise land prices further and slow the speed of urbanization.

Educational Equality

South Weekend
December 20, 2012

The argument on whether to permit students who are not registered as residents of a region to attend local university entrance examinations is heating up since the Ministry of Education demanded new exam registration policies be worked out by the end of 2012.

In large cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, the dispute on whether to permit children of migrant workers to take the examinations in the cities where their parents work has reached boiling point. People from other places call for equal education rights for their children, while residents worry that children from other regions will scramble for limited educational resources with local students.

But it is actually a fight for privilege. Under current circumstances, migrant workers' children have to return to their hometowns to attend university entrance examinations. But, the preferential policy for local students will soon be a thing of the past. Both the privileged and unprivileged should approach the matter in a calm way. Along with deepening reform, educational inequality is bound to decrease in the near future.

SUZHOU'S NEW OPPORTUNITY

Oriental Outlook
December 27, 2012

Wujiang City, formerly a county-level town, was merged into Suzhou, east China's Jiangsu Province, as one of its districts in September. *Oriental Outlook* looks at the impact of administrative transition on the future development of Suzhou, a city known for its scenery and rapid economic development.

After Kunshan, previously a county of Suzhou, came under the direct jurisdiction of the Jiangsu Provincial Government, Suzhou's economic strength weakened. Wujiang is among the top 10 economically strong counties in China and will increase Suzhou's overall economic power.

People in Wujiang worry that merging with Suzhou might restrict the town's development. Xu Ming, Vice Mayor of Suzhou and Party leader of Wujiang District, pointed out that it is important for Wujiang to work out a new development strategy. While for Suzhou, the inclusion of Wujiang will undoubtedly enhance the role of the central city in the region's economic development.



COVER STORY

Railway History

China opens the world's longest high-speed line, but has it won over the public? By Deng Yaqing and Elvis Anber

When Zhang Xi, the operator for the G801 high-speed train, made a hand gesture to signal the vehicle's departure from Beijing at precisely 9 a.m. The Beijing-Guangzhou high-speed railway had formally begun its long-awaited inaugural journey.



IN OPERATION: A high-speed train enters the Beijing West Railway Station on December 26

On December 26, history was made when the world's longest high-speed rail opened to the public. The line runs from the national capital Beijing down to the southern metropolis of Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong Province, covering a total of 2,298 km.

The high-speed trains run at a maximum speed of 300 km/h, although they can reach up to 350 km/h, cutting the distance between two of China's largest cities to eight hours, down from the usual travel time of 20 hours.

The Beijing-Guangzhou line runs through several provincial capitals in China's less developed interior as the Central Government tries to shift development away from the country's more prosperous coastal areas to more underdeveloped western and central regions.

At a time when other nations are simply content to bury any plans for high-speed rail in feasibility reports or too timid to cough up the funds to lay down a single track, China continues to illustrate to the world how serious it is about developing an expansive network of high-speed lines.

Despite setbacks in the development of high speed over the past 18 months, China has shown a renewed sense of vigor as it expands its transportation network,

which it sees as vital in job creation and economic growth. Nonetheless, problems and concerns remain, which could impede the country's plans to realize the full potential of its high-speed network.

Economic benefits

The Beijing-Guangzhou line is the latest in the Chinese Government's plans to establish a network of four north-south lines and another four east-west routes as part of its Medium and Long-Term Railway Network Plan. The total length of high-speed railways in the country has exceeded 9,300 km.

The Beijing-Guangzhou run is the most significant one to open since the Beijing-Shanghai route opened in 2011 and hopes are high that the new line will spur development of China's poorer inland provinces.

"In China's high-speed rail network, the Beijing-Guangzhou railway is an important north-south line," said Chen Yabing, chief engineer of the Beijing-Zhengzhou High-Speed Rail Project.

Prior to the completion of the Beijing-Guangzhou high-speed railway, the line ran from Zhengzhou, capital of Henan Province, down to Guangzhou. The addition of the Beijing-Zhengzhou portion was the final link in the historic line.

"Starting from Beijing, it spans across several major economic zones in north, central and south-central China and the Pearl River Delta. By linking major densely populated cities like Beijing, Wuhan, capital of Hubei Province, and Guangzhou, it will give a great push to the economic development of regions along the line," said Chen.

Spanning five provincial capitals, the national capital and five provinces—Hebei, Henan,

Hubei, Hunan and Guangdong, the Beijing-Guangzhou line is widely considered to be the backbone of China's high-speed rail network. The distance between the main cities along the route has been substantially shortened and hopes are high for stronger regional integration as a result.

The Beijing-Zhengzhou section is also of great significance to the development of the recently established Central Plains Economic Zone, which encompasses Henan, and parts of Shandong, Anhui, Hebei and Shanxi provinces. Zhengzhou is expected to play a key role in the economic zone as a major transport hub.

Taking into account a future track from Zhengzhou to Xuzhou in Jiangsu Province, and the already available line from Zhengzhou to Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi Province, "The high-speed rail framework of the Central Plains Economic Zone has taken shape," said Zhou Li, Director of the Science and Technology

Department at the Ministry of Railways, on a test run of the Beijing-Zhengzhou portion on December 21.

Transportation and logistics will make a big stride forward with the Beijing-Guangzhou line.

Currently, 80 percent of fast-freight goods are transported by highway and 15 percent by air, while railways account for less than 5 percent.

According to a preliminary estimation, an additional 24 pairs of freight trains will be in service on the line per day, and the freight capacity between Beijing and Wuhan will be increased by around 20 million tons per year.

Because transport by railway is more economical and accessible, some say the cost of using high-speed to move goods is 50 percent lower than by air. Rail lines are also less vulnerable to unfavorable weather conditions.

Tourism is also likely to receive a boost from the Beijing-Guangzhou line. Recently, representatives from seven provinces and 31 cities came together to promote tourism in the regions along the line running from Beijing to Hong Kong and Macao (an extension of the Beijing-Guangzhou high-speed railway), with the aim of consolidating travel routes and building up a leisure tourism belt.

But the Beijing-Guangzhou line has triggered panic in the airline industry. After releasing discounts for short-haul flights, some airline companies are even mulling over the elimination of air routes hard hit by established high-speed lines. According to a report by Guangzhou-based *Nanfang Daily*, some airlines have lowered the cost of a one-way ticket from Wuhan to Beijing to under 200 yuan (\$32), a dramatic discount compared with the original price of more than 1,000 yuan (\$160).

Given how time-consuming it can be to travel through airports—checking in, security checks and possible flight delays—the airline industry may suffer if more passengers turn to high-speed rail, especially for shorter routes. The challenge faced by airlines, however, may also provide an opportunity for the industry to better integrate airline networks and improve its efficiency and services.

Tackling special conditions

To cope with unique geographical conditions along the Beijing-Guangzhou route, various solutions have been found for concerns like subgrade construction on soft soil.

Furthermore, bridges made to especially



EXPERIENCING BUSINESS CLASS:
A stewardess helps a boy adjust his TV during a test run of the Beijing-Guangzhou high-speed railway on December 22

China's High-Speed Railway Network



handle the high-speed rail line have been developed over the Yangtze River and the Yellow River. The Wuhan Tianxingzhou Bridge over the Yangtze River has the world's largest span of 504 meters. The underground tunnel in Shijiazhuang, capital of Hebei Province, with a total length of 4.98 km and six tracks, is the most complicated design among railway tunnels in China.

Significant gains have also been made on construction of high-speed rails. The tracks along the newly opened Harbin-Dalian high-speed railway were built to cope with the frigid temperatures of China's more remote northeast. The Harbin-Dalian line is the only high-speed railway in the world designed for a high-latitude region, where temperatures in winter can drop to minus 40 degrees Celsius. Snow melting and anti-freeze properties are built into

the roadbed and power substations.

Controversies remain

Guangdong, dubbed China's manufacturing powerhouse, is a source of China's Spring Festival rush, also known as the greatest migration of people in the world. According to statistics from the Department of Human Resources and Social Security of Guangdong Province, Guangdong was home to 26 million migrant workers in the past two years. During the 40-day Spring Festival in 2012, Guangzhou saw over 28 million departures.

Many believe that the new Beijing-Guangzhou line will lure passengers away from other conventional, slower lines along the route, which are already overflowing with passengers during the festival period.

"For the coming Spring Festival rush in January, the trains should be less crowded than usual," said Zhao, adding that dozens of trains a day—each with a seating capacity of 1,000—are expected to travel between Guangzhou and Beijing everyday.

Ticket prices, however, have been criticized for being too high. The ticket price for the Beijing-Guangzhou high-speed railway ranges from 865 yuan (\$139) for a seat in second-class to 2,727 yuan (\$437) for one in business class.

Some netizens have called for the Ministry of Railways to publish the operating cost for the Beijing-Guangzhou line to explain the ticket prices.

"Reasonable prices can be worked by taking passenger flow and future income levels into account," says Xu Fengxian, a research fellow with the Institute of Economics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. "Right now, common people cannot afford such prices."

Tian Fengshao, a research fellow at the Institute of Sociology at Henan University, argued that though ticket prices may be reduced during the upcoming Spring Festival, travel by high-speed rail should gradually morph into a common means of passenger travel rather than an indicator of social status.

Doubts about safety also run high among the public given the tragedy in July 2011 near Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, when a bullet train rammed into another train stranded on the track, killing 40 people.

Design flaws, poor management and a mishandling of equipment struck by lightning were found to be the culprits behind the train crash, according to an investigation by the authorities.

Despite a design speed of 350 km/h, Zhao says the operational speed along the Beijing-Guangzhou line will run at 300 km/h to ease any fears of trains running faster than need be.

"Safety is our top priority," he said.

At 5 p.m. on December 26, the first high-speed train arrived in flower-dotted, subtropical Guangzhou on time. The successful launch of the Beijing-Guangzhou high-speed railway will help the country regain its confidence in the development of its high-speed network. Nonetheless, China's high-speed railway development has plenty of work to do to guarantee safety and win the hearts and minds of the Chinese people. ■

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