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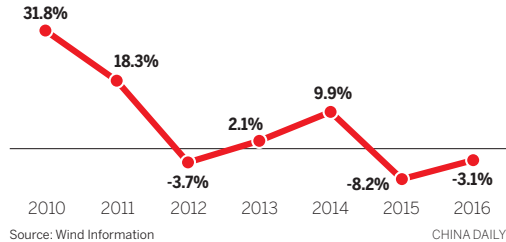
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EU confidence in China ties grows

Sino-EU trade growth



Xi's globalization and opening-up pledges at Davos called convincing

By JIANG XUEQING in Beijing and FU JING in Brussels

President Xi Jinping's commitment to globalization and opening-up at the recent World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, has bolstered European officials' confidence in expanding economic ties with the country, said Hans Dietmar Schweisgut, the European Union's ambassador to China.

The Delegation of the European Union to China saw encouraging signs in the speech because it "sent a clear message that China will continue its process of opening-up", he said at a news conference in Beijing on Wednesday.

"A speech is a speech; actions are actions. But a speech by the president of China is a bit more than a normal speech, so we are very much confident that this will indeed lead to further opening-up," said Schweisgut. "Our hope is that we will see concrete progress in seeing this translated into real opening on the ground."

The EU is looking forward to China's further loosening of

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Prices of premium baijiu soar at holidays

By ZHU WENQIAN in Beijing and YANG JUN in Guizhou

Kweichow Moutai, arguably the best known of the expensive Chinese liquors, has seen its prices soar at some retail stores just before the Spring Festival.

A 500 ml bottle of Moutai's classic Feitian 53 percent alcohol has been going for as much as 2,000 yuan (\$290) in some stores in Beijing, an increase of almost 40 percent from a few weeks ago. Prices online are lower, with the same bottle going for as little as 1,288 yuan on JD.com.

Analysts credit greater demand for premium liquor and limited supplies for the increases.

"With more disposable income, consumers are willing to spend more, and their mindset is to buy liquors when prices are going up," said a distributor from the Ningxia Hui autonomous region who asked to be identified only as Ding.

However, Ding added, "Despite the recovery, the prices haven't rebounded to the levels before the government's austerity drive and anti-graft campaign." Retail store prices in 2012 peaked above 2,000 yuan, according to Xinhua News Agency, dropping to 1,800 in early 2013, then to 1,200 later that year before stabilizing at about 1,000 yuan.

Beijing: Trade war with US harms all

By CHEN WEIHUA in Washington and MO JINGXI in Beijing

Chinese diplomats spoke out against the damage a trade war with the United States could cause to the global economy and reiterated their opposition to it days after Donald Trump assumed office as US president.

Their remarks came amid mounting speculation about possible trade conflicts between the world's two largest economies, given Trump's blunt rhetoric on trade with China. During the presidential campaign, Trump called China a currency manipulator and threatened to impose a 45 percent tariff on imports from the country.

Lu Kang, spokesman and director of the Foreign Ministry's information department, told NBC News on Tuesday that a trade war with the US is not what China wants, because it serves no one's interest and can only harm both sides.

"We don't want that, but it's not up to us. That needs efforts from both sides," he said, in a rare English-language face-to-face interview in Beijing.

While China hopes to emphasize that continuing the framework of China-US trade and economic ties serves the interests of both countries, Lu said, "we have to prepare for the bad to protect our legitimate national interests."

Chinese Ambassador to the United States Cui Tiankai also said on Tuesday that China opposes a trade war.

"It will inflict even more damage to the global economy," Cui told reporters on Tuesday on the sidelines of a

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reception at the Chinese embassy in Washington to mark the Lunar New Year.

Instead, Cui said, it is the inescapable responsibility of China and the US to help inject new momentum to propel global economic growth.

Calling China the world's largest single market, Cui said that if the US wants a bigger slice of this market and to benefit more from it, it should work with China for a stronger and more stable China-US economic and trade relationship.

On the same day, former US secretary of commerce Barbara Franklin also said a trade war would be destructive and expressed the belief that it can be avoided.

"A trade war, as some are predicting, harms both countries, creates uncertainties for many other countries, and is an activity that has no place anywhere in the interconnected global world of the 21st century," Franklin said. "So I think that this is not going to happen. I think it will be averted."

David Lampton, director of China studies at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, said he is concerned about possible trade retaliation.

"I think if we do get into trade retaliation, it's lose-lose for both countries," he said. "We will see increasing trade friction for a while until each side makes an accommodation with the other."

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Vivi Wang, the 25-year-old owner of VAC Cat Hotel and Spa in Beijing, plays with a feline guest on Wednesday. Most cats stay from 7 to 10 days while their owners are away for Spring Festival, she said. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

Luxury hotels for furry guests boom

By CUI JIA in Beijing and XU JUNQIAN in Shanghai

While the streets of major Chinese cities start to empty as people return home for Spring Festival, businesses providing accommodations for left-behind pets are enjoying their busiest time of the year.

For lots of people, securing a suitable temporary home for a pet — which many now treat as a family member — is just as difficult as getting a train ticket during the year's most important festival. It can be even more costly.

Luxury "pet hotels" in Beijing and Shanghai can be

more expensive than hotels for people, and they were fully booked at least a month before the weeklong holiday.

VAC Cat Hotel and Spa in Beijing touts what it calls the best possible care for cats. It has 15 individual modern and spacious suites with catwalks, multilevel platforms and "fun" nooks. Each room only allows one feline guest.

The hotel's normal room rate is 350 yuan (\$50) a day, including daily feeding and grooming services. Its rate went up by 15 percent during the Spring Festival holiday season and all suites are booked, owner Vivi Wang said on Wednesday.

\$57.50

daily cost to board a cat at the VAC Cat Hotel and Spa in Beijing during Spring Festival

"Most cats will stay with us from 7 to 10 days. Knowing their cats will enjoy luxury rooms and services makes people feel less guilty about leaving them behind," she said.

In Shanghai, pampered pooches don't have to be relegated to spending the holiday in a cage. Instead, they can enjoy self-described five-star

luxury hotels designed just for canines. That means private suites ranging from 1 to 4 square meters each; individual, 24-hour butler services; daily housecleaning and a heated swimming pool.

"Pets have become such an integral part of the life of many urbanites that when the owners are on vacation, they want to make sure the animals are given the same treatment," said Qi Jing, who owns Qian Xiaoyang's Pet Hotel in Shanghai.

The hotel charges 580 yuan a night, arguably the most expensive in town and about

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With more disposable income, consumers are willing to spend more."

Ding, a liquor distributor from the Ningxia Hui autonomous region

Wang Chonglin, deputy manager of Kweichow Moutai Co, in the town of Maotai, Guizhou province, said that after a few years of market volatility, the baijiu, or white spirits, industry is gradually recovering, and the demand has expanded as consumer spending has risen.

Inventories of other leading brands of Chinese spirits, such as Wuliangye Yibin Co and Luzhou Laojiao Co, also have been at low levels. Since early January, business dinners, gatherings between friends and special purchases for the Spring Festival have contributed to brisker sales, industry experts said.

High-end baijiu is extremely profitable, and the top four producers in China, including Moutai and Wuliangye, are estimated to account for 27 percent of earnings before interest and taxes of the global spirits industry, according to a Bloomberg report.

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Singapore craftsmen say traditions at risk

By REUTERS in Singapore

As Singapore prepares for Lunar New Year celebrations this weekend, some in the fast-changing city-state's older generation are concerned about who will take over traditions such as making costumes for the lion dance and baking niangao, which are New Year's steamed cakes.

Ham Wing Thong is working with 15 employees in Tai Chong Kok bakery, founded in 1935, to turn out niangao, a sticky rice flour cake.

"Keeping tradition helps us Chinese retain our culture," said Ham, 79, the son of the founder.

"Nowadays, society has changed with the new generation of people, so it is now on

our shoulders, the older generation, to retain the tradition and pass it on."

Henry Ng, one of Singapore's few remaining makers of lion dance costumes, said interest in the craft spurred him to carry on the tradition, but his children show little interest.

"I think the market now is based more on technology and they are changing," he said.

Ng added that his children would do better to get jobs making use of their classroom learning.

He started in the trade in the 1990s, after tiring of his office job.

Ng makes all his creations by hand, from the bamboo frame that shapes the lion's



A diver performs a dragon dance underwater on Wednesday at Resorts World Sentosa, a popular tourist destination in Singapore during Lunar New Year. AP

head to intricately painted faces, producing about 60 to 70 heads for lion dancers every year.

Each costs about \$880, roughly six times more than factory-made ones.

Each takes from five days to a few weeks to make.

With no one for the craftsmen to pass their skills down to, however, their patrons will eventually feel the loss.

"I've eaten at that niangao

place for almost my whole life, so it brings back very nice memories," said a customer at the Tai Chong Kok bakery who gave her name only as Jane, a student in Australia who was back home for the holidays.

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