

CHINA

Shanxi, Inner Mongolia get first direct fast rail line

By **ZHU XINGXIN** in Shuozhou, Shanxi and **YUAN HUI** in Hohhot and **ZHOU HUIYING**

The Jining-Datong-Yuanping High-speed Railway became operational on Tuesday, marking the beginning of a direct high-speed rail line between Shanxi province and the Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

The 309-kilometer line has nine stops. It runs between Ulaanqab in Inner Mongolia and Yuanping in Shanxi, passing through the cities of Datong, Shuozhou and Xinzhou in Shanxi, and also connects with the Datong-Xi'an High-speed Railway.

It is an important part of the nation's "Eight Vertical and Eight Horizontal" rail network.

The new line, designed for trains running at up to 250 kilometers per hour, will cut the travel time between Hohhot, the capital of Inner Mongolia, and Taiyuan, capital of Shanxi, to about 3 hours and 12 minutes from the previous five hours.

Jining-Datong-Yuanping High-speed Railway



Performers onboard a train celebrate the launch of the railway on Tuesday. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

"The new line marks the opening of the rapid railway passenger transport channel between the two provincial capitals and the further improvement of the regional railway network," Chen Lei, director of the Shanxi Provincial Development and Reform Commission, said at the opening ceremony. "It is of great significance to the high-quality economic and social development along the line, as well as the promotion of Taiyuan's status as a national comprehensive transportation hub."

The Shanxi section, with approximately 197 kilometers of new track, started construction in November 2021. As the new line opened, the Yanmenguan Railway Station, around 30 km from the Yanmen Pass section of the Great Wall in Shanxi, welcomed its first high-speed railway.

"The opening of the high-speed railway has facilitated the integration of cultural and tourist development, as well as the international popularity of the Yanmen Pass," said Yan Shengyu, Party secretary of the station. "We hope to see more tourists from home and abroad come for sightseeing."

Ping Rui, a 30-year-old resident in Datong, bought a ticket for the first train as soon as he came to know the new rail line would go into service.

"The opening of the high-speed railway can shorten the distance between Shanxi and Inner Mongolia, making travel more convenient by reducing travel time," Ping said.

Expressing his desire to welcome more tourists to Shanxi, he said, "Along the route, there are many filming locations that have inspired the settings of the hit game *Black Myth: Wukong*, including the Yungang Grottoes, the Hanging Temple and the Yingxian Wooden Pagoda."

Contact the writers at zhouhuiying@chinadaily.com.cn

Noodle master class



Students and their parents learn how to make noodles under the guidance of a chef during a Lanzhou noodle cultural activity at a primary school in Lanzhou, Gansu province, on Tuesday. During the event, professional beef noodle chefs from Gansu Heli Vocational Training School demonstrated the process of making beef noodles. FENG LEKAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Shanghai railway staff finds fame with rapid typing, spoken English

By **ZHENG ZHENG** in Shanghai zhengzheng@chinadaily.com.cn

A video showcasing a Shanghai Hongqiao Railway Station employee's rapid typing and fluent English skills has gone viral, highlighting the station's efforts to accommodate the growing number of international travelers.

In the video, You Yuan, who has been working at the station since it opened in 2010, deftly assists foreign passengers with ticket purchases and changes. Her remarkable typing speed and clear communication skills have drawn widespread praise online.

"Compared to the past, one-third to two-thirds of our daily customers are now international travelers, as most domestic travelers buy tickets online," said You, who transitioned to ticket sales in 2015. "English has become an essential skill for us."

According to railway authorities, 1.6 million foreign passengers purchased train tickets at Shanghai

railway stations last year, a 200 percent increase from 2023. The surge followed China's expansion of transit visa-free periods from 72/144 hours to 240 hours and an increase in accessible ports and regions.

To meet growing demand, railway staff workers have undergone rigorous language training.

"We regularly attend training sessions and practice through real interactions," You said. "My goal is clear communication and successful transactions."

The station has also implemented technological upgrades. Since November 2023, foreign passengers have been able to verify their passport information online, bypassing in-person checks. Last year, Shanghai Hongqiao upgraded its payment systems to accept international credit cards, including Visa and Mastercard.

"Beyond hardware upgrades, we've intensified foreign language training for staff across various positions to ensure seamless service,"

said Wang Fang, deputy marketing chief at Shanghai Railway Station.

Tourists have praised the improvements.

Jaime Martinez, a traveler from Spain, described the ticketing experience as "very helpful", noting how English-speaking workers have helped foreign passengers navigate China's high-speed rail network more easily.

China's railways are expanding rapidly. In the Yangtze River Delta region alone last year, four new high-speed rail lines were launched, and the construction of five more has commenced. The region's railways had transported over 800 million passengers by Nov 19 last year, reaching this milestone 40 days earlier than in 2023.

For You, the modernization effort is a far cry from the early days of paper tickets and long queues. "Now, it's not just about typing quickly, but also mastering multiple skills to handle diverse needs," she said.

Judiciary embraces AI for efficiency

With a population surpassing 1.4 billion, China operates one of the world's busiest judicial systems, and artificial intelligence is playing an increasingly vital role in shaping its future.

In 2023, Shenzhen, Guangdong province, became a trailblazer in judicial innovation with the introduction of an AI-assisted trial mechanism designed to streamline key judicial processes. The system is deployed across four core stages — case filing, document review, court hearings and document drafting — while also optimizing 85 additional workflows.

The AI-powered system has drastically reduced document preparation time from an hour to under five minutes. It follows templates issued by China's Supreme People's Court, offers automatic proofreading, and ensures accurate and standardized legal documentation.

Shenzhen, a bustling tech hub with a population of 17 million and a GDP of \$472.95 billion in 2023, is home to a two-tiered court system with 1,173 judges. These courts handle over 700,000 cases annually, with each judge averaging nearly 600 cases per year. By automating routine tasks, the AI system has alleviated the burden on court personnel and boosted efficiency.

Following the system's introduction in June, Shenzhen's courts saw a 31 percent increase in civil and commercial case resolutions between July and September, processing 87,000 cases in three months. Judges in these categories resolved 49 cases on average per month, up from 33 the previous year, a 48.5 percent increase.

A standout feature of the system is its ability to generate AI-assisted input during trials. Integrating with the SPC's comprehensive legal database, it analyzes case facts, legal matters and key issues, gener-

ates judgment reasoning and retrieves relevant precedents. The system can even provide real-time analysis of statements made during trials, helping judges identify inconsistencies or ambiguities.

Senior Judge Fu Luqi praised the AI system for its ability to quickly highlight critical issues. In a recent case, the system identified discrepancies in loan agreements, prompting further investigation.

"The AI's ability to identify key issues, verify facts and prompt deeper inquiry expedited the process and helped resolve a long-standing dispute in a single hearing," she told Xinhua.

The AI system has already been used in 95 percent of Shenzhen's civil, commercial and administrative cases, significantly increasing judicial productivity and efficiency.

Recognizing the potential of AI-driven reform, the SPC outlined plans in 2022 to establish a nationwide AI system by 2025, with a comprehensive framework for AI use in the judicial system by 2030. These advancements aim to reduce administrative burdens, enhance judicial integrity, and improve the transparency and fairness of the legal process.

AI-assisted systems are also proving effective in more specialized areas such as intellectual property disputes. In Keqiao district, a textile industry hub in Shaoxing, Zhejiang province, courts have implemented an AI system for copyright disputes over textile patterns.

Judge Zhang Qin noted that the system, which uses image tracing and innovation comparison techniques, has helped clarify ownership and originality in visual works. The system now analyzes over 103,000 registered artworks to assist judges in making fair rulings.

While the potential of AI in the

judicial system is vast, the integration of such technology has sparked mixed reactions. Some legal professionals welcome the efficiency AI brings, while others question its lack of accountability and empathy.

A lawyer surnamed Ren expressed concerns about the absence of human judgment in AI-assisted trials, stating, "Human judges can consider broader social and moral implications, whereas AI systems may be too mechanical, overlooking the nuances and empathy needed in some cases."

Zhao Juhua, president of the Shenzhen Intermediate People's Court, emphasized that the AI system is a tool to support, not replacement for human judgment.

"The AI system aids the judicial process but does not take away judicial responsibility," Zhao said. "It ensures traceability and accountability throughout the process."

Despite concerns about AI's limitations, experts agree that its role in the judicial system will continue to expand. Gao Wen, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering, stressed the need to enhance the country's computing infrastructure to support the growing demands of AI in law, especially as the system scales nationwide.

While Shenzhen's AI-assisted system can manage 700,000 cases annually, scaling it for diverse judicial scenarios will require continued advancements in both computational resources and model training.

The integration of AI in China's legal system represents a groundbreaking shift in the way justice is administered with potential benefits for efficiency and fairness, but there are also challenges that need to be addressed as the technology evolves.

Lists outline diseases subject to quarantine

Enhanced surveillance at ports aims to prevent cross-border illnesses spread

By **WANG XIAOYU** wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Two newly released lists of infectious diseases subjected to border quarantine and prevention measures took effect on Wednesday. The lists aim to promptly curb the spread of diseases while maintaining clearance efficiency, according to authorities.

One list requiring border quarantine outlines 11 highly contagious and potentially lethal illnesses, including plague, cholera, yellow fever and Ebola, the National Administration of Disease Control and Prevention and the General Administration of Customs announced Monday.

Local customs officials are authorized to take on-site preventive measures for confirmed or suspected patients and notify local disease control and prevention authorities to transfer patients to designated hospitals for isolation, treatment or medical observation.

A second list identifies 26 diseases that require close monitoring, including COVID-19, HIV/AIDS, measles and mpox. Local customs will advise incoming travelers suspected of having contracted these diseases to visit hospitals for screenings, where local facilities will prioritize their cases.

The release of the two disease catalogs follows a new amendment to the Frontier Health and Quarantine Law, which was passed in late June. The amendment requires the formulation of lists to identify infections among cross-border travelers, deliver necessary medical services and implement control

and prevention measures.

"Early surveillance of key contagious diseases at ports of entry will be instrumental in detecting and preventing the cross-border transmission of epidemics," the National Administration of Disease Control and Prevention said in a statement on Monday.

The administration emphasized that the range of listed diseases is designed to balance effective disease prevention with ensuring the convenience of customs clearance.

"Beyond thermal scanning, medical patrols and other noninvasive actions, additional measures such as epidemiological investigations will only be applied to the very few travelers who exhibit abnormal symptoms, rather than all travelers," the administration explained.

It added that customs officials have upgraded quarantine procedures and deployed smart quarantine tools to improve efficiency.

The administration also said that customs, disease control and health authorities will enhance communication and cooperation mechanisms, strengthen the sharing of infection-related information at ports of entry, and intensify training for public health and medical professionals.

Efforts will be coordinated to integrate quarantine measures at ports of entry with medical screening and inspections, ensuring timely treatment for patients while preventing the spread of pathogens. The administration reminded cross-border travelers to report any suspicious symptoms or diagnoses to customs and to cooperate with quarantine measures.

Palace celebration



Artists perform a Chaoshan Yingge dance during an anniversary celebration event marking the reopening of the Xingchao Tianhou Palace in Haikou, Hainan province, on Wednesday. ZHANG MAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Science popularization funding reaches record

By **YAN DONGJIE** yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

China's national science popularization funding exceeded 20 billion yuan (\$2.74 billion) for the first time in 2023, reaching a record 21.5 billion yuan, according to the Ministry of Science and Technology. The funding marked a 12.6 percent increase from 2022.

Public fiscal support from various levels of government was the main source, accounting for 77.7 percent of the total funding.

"This reflects the rapid development of science popularization in China's new era and provides strong support for the implementation of the newly revised Science and Technology Popularization Law," said Wang Ting, director of the China Research Institute for Science Popularization.

Wang added that China is the only country with a law specifically addressing science popularization. Last month, China passed its first amendment to the law since its introduction in 2002, which includes the designation of September as National Science Popularization Month to boost public scientific literacy.

The law aims to promote scientific literacy and foster a favorable environment for technological innovation. According to Wang, it also lays a strong foundation for China's goal of becoming a global science and technology powerhouse and advancing modernization.

Data for 2023 also revealed that over 3.1 billion yuan was spent on the construction of science popularization venues, while more than 2.2 billion yuan went toward funding science exhibits and facilities. The largest portion of funding — nearly 40 percent — was directed at organizing science popularization activities.

The Ministry of Science and Technology reported steady progress in science venue development, with the number of the nation's science and technology museums increasing to 1,779, which is 96 more than the previous year. Public participation in science popularization activities also surged.

The internet has played a key role in these developments, with over 2,000 science popularization websites and more than 1 billion followers on science-related WeChat official accounts nationwide.

XINHUA