VIEWS

Connectivity

The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge officially opened to traffic on Oct 24. Covering a distance of 55 kilometers, the bridge is the longest sea-crossing of its kind in the world, and it has been hailed as the one of seven wonders of the modern world by overseas media outlets.

• **Expert:** *Mao Yanhua, a professor at the Center for Studies on Hong Kong, Macao and Pearl River Delta at the Research Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, Sun Yat-sen University:*

The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge is a major construction project led by the central government. It connects Hong Kong, Macao and Zhuhai, the three main cities in the Pearl River Delta area, like blood vessels connecting different human organs.

The opening of the bridge will provide a boost to the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the surrounding areas such as Shenzhen.

More importantly, the bridge will strengthen the interaction among cities, not only in the Greater Bay Area, but also in the whole of Guangdong province.

Progress

The Korean Peninsula experienced a dramatic breakthrough with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) making great progress in relations with the United States and the Republic of Korea (ROK). Will the three countries be able to untie the nuclear knot in 2019?

• **Expert:** *Liu Litao, a researcher of international relations in Nanjing University:*

The historic summit between DPRK and US leaders in June promoted bilateral communication and the agreement for Pyongyang to dismantle some nuclear test sites in exchange for Washington's promise of a security guarantee.

Relations between the DPRK and the ROK also made progress. The leaders of the two countries met three times and jointly issued their Panmunjom Declaration and Pyongyang Declaration.

However, the Peninsula cannot go straight to complete denuclearization and peace mechanism this year. Its nuclear weapons are the only chips that Pyongyang can use to bargain with Washington, and Washington has not yet provided a security guarantee to it. Also, the US has not eased any of its sanctions against Pyongyang.

Although Pyongyang is not strong enough to challenge Washington, Washington can hardly give in on the Peninsula issue, as it is an important tool for the US to gain advantage in East Asia.

Facebook

In March, Cambridge Analytica, a data mining, brokerage and analysis company, was reported to have obtained personal information of about 50 million Facebook users. Facebook's stock prices fell sharply and the company was fined 1.63 billion euros ($1.9 billion) by the European Union for data breach.

• **Expert:** *Lu Chuanying, an associate researcher at Shanghai Institutes for International Studies:*

Facebook provides a platform for users to interact with each other, and its size and influence depend on the number of its users.

But as its size and influence have grown, the personal information of the billions of people it collects also poses a huge risk to both the company and its users. Should personal data be leaked, the company will have to pay huge amounts of compensation to users whose privacy is violated.

In some experiments, data companies reportedly managed to outline a person's daily life by collecting their personal data from social media. Leaks of such personal data may cause a loss that no money can compensate. Even for a government, the database of big platforms such as Facebook is important because a leak could threaten national security. In the case of Facebook, Cambridge Analytica analyzed the impact of personal information on the US presidential election, implying that it posed a potential challenge to the state. So a government has to perform the role of night watchman well.

It's time the authorities regulated such companies strictly.

Taiwan

On Nov 24, Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party, suffered a big defeat in the local elections, winning only six of the 22 cities and counties. This prompted Taiwan leader Tsai Ing-wen to resign as leader of the DPP.

• **Expert:** *Liu Xiangping, a senior professor of Taiwan studies, Nanjing University:*

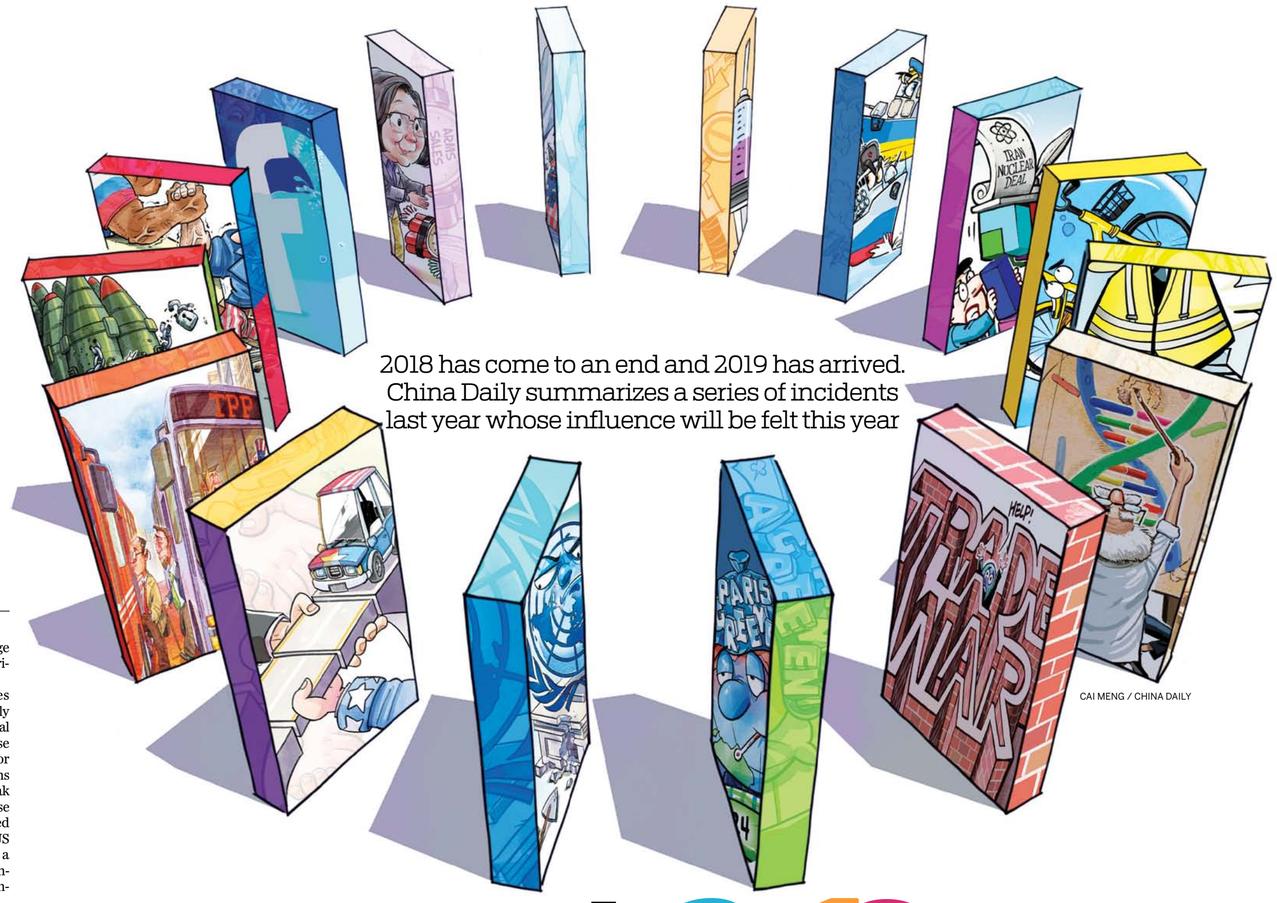
The failure of the DPP has once again proved right that anyone that dares to seek "Taiwan independence" will fail. For Taiwan compatriots, their biggest interest is healthy economic growth and the prosperity of their businesses, instead of any slogan that forces them into political confrontation.

The DPP has ignored Taiwan residents' interests in the two years it has been in power. Since Tsai refuses to uphold the 1992 Consensus that there is only one China, cross-Straits relations have frozen, preventing Taiwan from benefiting from the peaceful development of cross-Straits ties.

The number of Chinese mainland tourists to Taiwan has dropped by 40 percent since Tsai took office, dealing a big blow to the island's tourism industry. Agricultural products, which previously accounted for a high percentage of the island's supplies to the mainland, are now overstocked.

But instead of correcting their wrongs, Tsai and her fellow DPP leaders have continually hyped up the cross-Straits issue and accused the mainland of "intervening" in the local elections.

If they continue to move ahead on the wrong path next year, they will only lose further support.



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

Beyond 2018

Protests

The *gilets jaunes* (yellow vest) movement has transformed from being a protest against French President Emmanuel Macron's new eco-tax on fuel to a national protest against Macron. The movement has also spread to other European countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands.

• **Expert:** *Cui Hongjian, director of the Department for European Studies at the China Institute of International Studies:*

The spread of the yellow vest protests is symptomatic of the social conflict in Europe as people are disappointed about the declining living standards and ineffective governance.

But the problem in France is more severe because people had high expectations of President Emmanuel Macron, as the leader of a new party, but his party cannot reform the traditional political system in a short time. What's more, Macron launched sweeping reform in a rush and the reforms have not met people's needs.

The *gilets jaunes* protests are having a great impact on Macron's presidency, and will affect the implementation of his policies in the future, France's political environment and even the power of his party in the European Parliament.

The *gilets jaunes* movement has close relations with the rising populism in Europe but cannot be regarded as a populist movement. And in the time of the internet, it is natural for such a movement to spread.

Confrontation

The United States announced it would withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with Russia and it was establishing a space force. The antagonism between the two major military countries increased worries of an arms race.

• **Expert:** *Zhu Feng, dean of the Institute of International Relations, Nanjing University:*

The shadow of nuclear war has not been eliminated but has been controlled under the global consensus on nuclear disarmament and nuclear weapons control since the 1980s. However, the US and Russia have ignited a small-scale arms race and oil has been added to the flames by US President Donald Trump who promoted a US space force and threatened to quit the INF Treaty.

Washington and Moscow have blamed each other for violating the INF Treaty for years. But it was Trump's policies that have broken the rules and balance of arms control between the two major nuclear countries, undermining the global disarmament mechanism.

The two countries have started small-scale strategic nuclear competition and more uncertainties will challenge global security in 2019.

Reported by
ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, WANG YU, PAN YIXUAN, WANG KAN

Scandal

On July 15, Changchun Changsheng Biotech Co was reported to have falsified the production records for its rabies vaccine for human use. Later, it also came to light that it had produced substandard diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough) and tetanus (DPT) vaccines for children's use in the past.

• **Expert:** *Tao Lina, a doctor with 15 years' experience of vaccines:*

Some said the incident had little effect on actual public health, which in a sense is not totally baseless, as false production records do not necessarily mean fake vaccines.

Besides, as the government has taken measures to recall the substandard vaccines, the possibility of them damaging public health is quite low.

But the fact that some vaccine producers have lax production quality control has undermined people's confidence in the domestic vaccination system. And although the company was fined 9.1 billion yuan ($1.3 billion) and its top executives were banned for life from the vaccine profession, many people used micro blogs and other social media platforms to express their distrust in the domestic vaccination system.

But such distrust is unfair because China's vaccination system is strictly supervised. That central supervisors unearthed the Changchun company's scandal is the best proof of how sincerely they are working.

On Dec 23, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, reviewed the draft of a new, separate vaccination law, which would strengthen supervision, and risk and quality control.

Unilateralism

In June, the United States exited from the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC). In October, it announced it was starting the procedures to exit the Universal Postal Union and it would exit the treaty on the International Court of Justice.

• **Expert:** *Tao Wenzhao, a US studies researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences:*

Before 2018, the US had already exited from the Paris Agreement, the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization, as well as the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement.

Exiting from so many organizations and agreements will undoubtedly curb the influence of the US. For example, it has always been in the habit of blaming other countries for "human rights" issues. Now the US is no longer a member of the UNHRC and the excuse will look paler than before. Besides that, exiting the Universal Postal Union and the International Court of Justice also makes it more difficult for the US to make use of these organizations to realize its objectives.

The withdrawals are part of the Donald Trump administration's "America First" policy and incompatibility of that policy with multilateral arrangements.

Some say this is good opportunity for China to participate more actively in more world affairs, but it remains debatable whether China should join these arrangements dominated by the West. Maybe it is more proper for China to better develop itself.

Medical ethics

On Nov 26, He Jiankui, a Chinese research fellow in genetic studies, announced the birth of gene-edited twins, sparking nationwide concern on whether the human gene editing violates medical ethics.

• **Expert:** *Tang Cheng, a doctoral candidate and research fellow at the Institute for Neuroscience, Chinese Academy of Sciences:*

He has set a very bad example for other researchers in genetics by violating medical ethics in the name of science. However, his is not a scientific breakthrough, because he only conducted an experiment that other scientists dared not do out of respect for medical ethics.

He has received little punishment for his unethical modifying of the genes of two babies, which could encourage other researchers to follow his example and cross the bottom line of medical ethics. His action has made scientists engaged in genetics research more suspectful in the eyes of the public.

Many netizens have raised doubts about human gene editing, which might make it more difficult for scientists to apply the technology in the future. That's why I believe He's action could curb the progress of gene editing.

People are not likely to make a distinction between serious scientists or science institutes and the wrong deeds of a single scientist.

Trade tensions

On Dec 1, the leaders of China and the United States reached a consensus on suspending new tariffs and measures to ease bilateral trade tensions, which started in March 2018 with the US announcing new tariffs against products imported from China.

• **Expert:** *Mei Xinyu, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation:*

The consensus has, to a large extent, prevented the Sino-US relationship from worsening. There used to be worries about China and the US engaging in a "new cold war", but now those worries seem to have eased.

More important, China has realized all its goals in the consensus. According to a news release, the US' past order-like claim of "cutting US-China trade deficit by $100 billion" was given up, while the two sides agreed to narrow the trade gap by enlarging China's imports from the US, not cutting its exports to the latter. Neither has the US mentioned anything about China's own innovation plans.

In a word, the trade frictions seem to have been curbed in a way that benefits both sides, which has given China confidence that it can cope with any external challenges.

However, it is still too early to assert "Sino-US trade frictions have come to an end", because that is not the story. The US government has always had the bad habit of letting other countries pay for its own illness, and there might be more uncertainties unless it gives up that philosophy.