

**Rail support**

Chinese-built railway in populous Nigeria helps power local growth

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**UN agency says aid warehouse struck in Gaza**

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**Unanimous decision**

Box-office hit *YOLO* becomes this year's highest-grossing film so far

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# CHINA DAILY

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## AI Act passed



Members vote on Wednesday during a plenary session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France. The parliament passed the Artificial Intelligence Act with 523 votes in favor, 46 against and 49 abstentions. It is the first-ever comprehensive legal framework on AI globally, aimed at regulating AI systems according to a risk-based approach. FREDERICK FLORIN / AFP See story, page 6

## Trade-ins, upgrades set to stimulate consumption

By WANG KEJU wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

China's latest efforts to push ahead large-scale equipment upgrades and consumer goods trade-ins will promote investment and boost consumption in a focused manner. This in turn will enhance the country's internal growth drivers for fulfilling this year's economic targets amid rising external uncertainties and dwindling global demand, said experts and executives.

By promoting the production capacity of businesses with equipment upgrades and improving the quality of consumer goods by allowing the return of old appliances as part payment for new ones, the initiative will help foster innovation-driven and environment-friendly development with a market-oriented approach, they added.

While equipment upgrades are primarily seen as investment activities, the trade-in program focuses on encouraging consumers, including individuals and households, to make more purchases, said a detailed plan issued on Wednesday by the State Council, China's Cabinet.

According to the plan, sectors

such as manufacturing, agriculture, construction, transportation, education, tourism and healthcare are expected to see investment in equipment surge by over 25 percent by 2027, compared with the figures recorded last year.

By 2027, the country also aims to double the volume of scrapped vehicles collected compared with 2023, witness a 45 percent increase in second-hand car transactions, and achieve a 30 percent growth in the recycling of discarded household appliances, the plan said.

China will also improve the energy-saving, environmental and technical standards of traded products, to ensure the initiative contributes to the country's carbon emission and pollution reduction efforts while improving the quality of the products, according to the plan.

Expanding investment in manufacturing and boosting domestic demand are emerging as the new pillars for stable economic growth, said Song Xuetao, chief macroeconomy analyst at TF Securities.

In addition, traditional stimulus policies, which relied upon sheer increases in purchases of production equipment and expenditure on

household items, have suffered from reduced effectiveness due to various factors, such as high corporate leverage and market saturation of durable consumer goods, Song said.

However, as the Chinese economy expands, the growth and upgrading of some major industries, such as equipment and automaking, have produced substantial demand for more equipment and product renewal, which requires policy support, Song added.

Zhou Yunjie, chairman and CEO of Chinese home appliances giant Haier Group, said the low efficiency of some existing equipment has hampered productivity and inhibited industrial capacity to meet the shifting market demand.

China's industrial sector is on the cusp of a transformative shift toward high-end development through equipment upgrades. Haier will leverage the opportunity to update its machinery and technologies to enhance the intelligence, automation, and informatization levels of its factories to maintain its competitive edge in the rapidly evolving consumer goods market, Zhou added.

According to estimates by the Bank of China Research Institute,

the upcoming wave of equipment upgrades will contribute to an increase of 1.2-1.5 percentage points in overall fixed-asset investment and drive GDP growth by some 0.4 percentage point.

The anticipated demand value generated by the trade-in policy will be between 210.9 billion yuan (29.3 billion) and 629.3 billion yuan, which will in turn stimulate GDP growth by approximately 0.16 to 0.5 percentage points, according to the institute.

While the benefits of equipment upgrades and trade-in programs are evident in terms of improved efficiency, productivity and technological advancements, many enterprises and individuals might still be hesitant to implement the initiative, said Luo Zhiheng, chief economist at Yuekai Securities.

The hesitancy stems from the perception that the current equipment is still functional. Additionally, the financial burden associated with equipment renewal acts as a deterrent for many firms, Luo said, emphasizing that appropriate fiscal, financial and taxation incentives should be weighed toward catalyzing their willingness.

## Xi's Vision | GLOBAL CIVILIZATION INITIATIVE

# Strides made toward more global diversity

Respect for differences seen as key for cultural exchanges, mutual learning

By MO JINGXI mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

On a windy night in late February, diplomatic envoys from different countries were reluctant to leave after spending three hours at the China National Opera House in Beijing watching a choreographed portrayal of the ancient Chinese landscape painting *A Panorama of Mountains and Rivers*.

Many of them extended invitations to the show's directors, hoping that people in their own countries could also appreciate this breathtaking performance, which made the audience feel as if they were part of the painting.

Nico Schiettekatte, from the embassy of the Netherlands in China, said the dance drama provided him with a different way to look at other paintings about nature and landscapes, including those by famous Dutch artists such as Van Gogh and Rembrandt.

"I think we share a lot in common. We all have a history related with nature, but our experience of nature is different in a cultural way," Schiettekatte said, emphasizing the importance of exchanges among different cultures.

Respect for the diversity of civilizations is one of the four aspects of the Global Civilization Initiative, which was proposed by President Xi Jinping on March 15, 2023.

Speaking at the time to leaders of political parties from around the world, Xi said China is ready to work together with the international community to open up new prospects for enhanced exchanges and understanding among different peoples, and better interactions and integration of diversified cultures.

"Together we can make the garden of world civilizations colorful and vibrant," Xi said.

Over the past year, China has shown the rest of the world its sincerity, with practical actions to implement the Global Civilization Initiative and to promote exchanges and mutual learning with other civilizations.

Yang Mingjie, president of the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, said the initiative is a strategic vision gaining increasing recognition from the international community because it addresses current problems caused by conflicts or confrontations between different civilizations.

"It calls on countries to transcend estrangement and clashes through cultural exchanges and mutual learning," Yang said.

He added that since the initiative was proposed, China has made all-around efforts to promote cultural and people-to-people exchanges at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

For example, during the Chengdu Summer Universiade last year, more than 6,500 young athletes from 113 countries and regions got the chance to experience in person the unique charm of Chinese civilization as well as that of Sichuan culture, by visiting the giant panda base, tasting hotpot and taking part in intangible cultural heritage activities such as playing with shadow puppets.

Siyabonga Cyprian Cwele, South Africa's ambassador to China, said he was glad that dancers from an art troupe in Cape Town visited China last year and displayed the charm of South African arts to a Chinese audience.

"Our political relations are fine and our economic relations are growing, so we need to intensify people-to-people exchanges to create a better understanding between our peoples and improve our overall relationship," he said, noting that President Xi and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa have guided the two countries' efforts in promoting cultural exchanges.

When Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis made an official visit to China in November, he told Xi that Greece was ready to work with China to run the Center of Greek and Chinese Ancient Civilizations, advocate mutual learning, and promote the establishment of more harmonious and balanced international relations.

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## Ties between China and Australia on upward trend

WORLD WATCH By David Morris

Following a successful visit to China late last year by Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Australia-China relations are on an upward trend, having turned frosty under the previous administration.

With Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi set to visit Australia later this month, hopes are high that progress can be made in resolving trade disputes between the two sides.

But was the recent Australia-ASEAN Special Summit a sign that Australia is looking elsewhere for partners? Or could deeper Australian engagement with Southeast Asia complement the repair of its China relationship?

The deterioration of the Australia-

lia-China relationship under the previous Australian government is commonly attributed to some provocative statements by the leaders in Canberra, and the language has certainly moderated since the Albanese government took office.

Instead of the "China threat" assertions that were a hallmark of former prime minister Scott Morrison's government, the Albanese government has been more cordial in talking about China and has been investing in repairing Australia's relationship with it. At the same time, it has also been investing more in a diversity of regional relationships, from the Pacific islands to Southeast Asia.

Widely anticipated resolution of the trade disputes between China and Australia should clear the way for Australia to join with the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and

See *Relations*, page 3

## Battery factory



An employee works on the production line at a BYD battery factory in Manaus, the capital of Amazonas state, Brazil, on Tuesday. The battery factory focuses on assembling lithium iron phosphate battery packs, providing new-energy power for electric buses in Brazil. BYD Brazil was established in 2014. WANG TIANCONG / XINHUA

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## BEIJING'S SUB CITY-CENTER SHINES AS BEACON AFTER DECADE OF GROWTH

New area showcases green, high-quality development model

By DU JUAN dujuan@chinadaily.com.cn



Situated more than 20 kilometers east of Tian'anmen Square, Beijing's burgeoning sub city-center stands as a beacon of progress and promise, poised to usher in a new era of dynamic growth only 10 years after it was first floated.

The coordinated development strategy for Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei province was proposed by President Xi Jinping at a meeting on Feb 26, 2014, after his inspection tour of the capital.

In May 2016, the central government began implementing plans to establish the Beijing sub city-center, with the first phase involving

laying the foundations and addressing challenges that would arise during the development stages.

The first and second phases of the city's municipal administrative office area have been completed, and more than 30,000 staff members have moved to live and work in the center, a significant factor in ensuring its viability.

A total of 61 Beijing municipal State-owned enterprises and their subsidiaries have relocated to the sub city-center.

See *Hub*, page 2

# PAGE TWO



## HUB: BEIJING SUB CITY-CENTER BENEFITS ALL

The Beijing sub city-center provides residents with different choices of recreation, including ice and snow activities, Spring Festival celebrations and dragon dance performances. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

From page 1

Meanwhile, new cultural, recreational and entertainment facilities have added to the area's appeal. Universal Studios Beijing has based itself there, along with the Beijing Performing Arts Center, Beijing Library and the Grand Canal Museum of Beijing, which opened in late December, all enriching residents' daily lives.

The sub city-center is also attracting an increasing number of visitors from other areas of Beijing who like to enjoy cultural and entertainment activities, such as spending weekends strolling around Central Green Forest Park or exploring the Grand Canal Museum's exhibitions.

Hu Jiulong, the deputy director of the sub city-center management committee, has an affinity for the area and wants to move there from his current home in downtown Beijing.

"My greatest wish is to move here as soon as possible," he told China Daily. "The place has been updated in all aspects. I especially appreciate the environment here, and as a sports enthusiast I hope to make this my home," he said, adding he commutes using suburban trains and the subway system.

### Green transformation

As a member of the sub city-center's management team, Hu has witnessed firsthand the rapid development of the area in recent years.

At the heart of the 155-square-kilometer core area of the center lies the Central Green Forest Park, which is planned to eventually cover a total area of 11.2 sq km.

"The changes in the ecological environment are particularly noticeable," Hu said. "The site of the Central Green Forest Park was previously a chemical plant and three surrounding villages. In the past, there was also some soil contamination."

Environmentally sensitive methods were used during the rehabilitation and enhancement of the site, Hu said.

"Trees and plants in the former villages were relocated for the construction of the park," he said. "All the planting was designed based on keeping existing trees, rather than removing them all and planting new ones."

After the completion of work on the park, the authority invited the former villagers to inspect it. "They could recognize the trees which had been in front of their former homes," Hu said. "The development of the city is a good thing and we also want to keep their memories alive."

In March, the park was recognized at the national level as one of the first 23 cases in China of an energy-efficient, green, and low-carbon transformation project, the National Energy Administration said.

The park not only features photovoltaic panels, geothermal heat pumps, power storage and green energy, but also green buildings, charging piles, ecological restoration work and smart management systems. These diverse low-carbon applications are good examples that can be easily adopted across the country, the administration said.

By 2025, the park's energy terminals are expected to be entirely powered by green energy, achieving the goal of zero carbon emissions, according to the Beijing Investment Group, the operator of the park.

"It is different from traditional parks in the country, it is one without walls," Hu explained. "We hope to integrate the city and the forest park, providing residents with a better experience. During the road planning phase, we carefully designed the routes ... to avoid conflicts between motor vehicles and pedestrians."

"Since its opening in September 2020, visitors have highly praised the park, and I often visit it myself," he said.

### Thriving new area

Liu Xin, 44, is one of the tens of thousands of government workers who have relocated to the sub city-center. He used to live and work in Beijing's Dongcheng district but moved when his workplace was relocated.

"The government provides dormitories for us, so I can get home in a few minutes. I can have meals in the work canteen, and there are more and more restaurants nearby, providing more choices."

"New hospitals and schools have also

been built here, ensuring the education of children and the medical needs of more people," he added.

Liu said his life in the sub city-center is more convenient and easier than in Dongcheng as the population density is lower and many of the public facilities are new.

"The ecology and transportation are both good here," he said.

"If there is anything lacking, it's that many of my friends still live in the downtown area of the city, so it's not as convenient to meet them. However, recently the arts center and new library have attracted many of my friends to come here on weekends so we can hang out again."

To reassure people working in the sub city-center that the facilities are adequate, the government has built new schools and encouraged a number of high-quality schools to establish branches in the area, said Hu from the management committee.

A total of 17 respected primary and high schools have been opened in the sub city-center, providing thousands of children with high-quality education, he said.

The schools not only accept the children of relocated civil servants, but also

the children of new residents and professionals who have moved to the area.

Beijing Anzhen Hospital's Tongzhou campus, with an area of 340,000 sq m, is the largest hospital under construction in the city, and is scheduled to start offering medical services in September.

The hospital will be able to deal with 6,500 outpatient and emergency visits a day, with 1,300 beds available. It will perform multiple functions such as providing outpatient services, emergency treatment, medical technology research, inpatient care, professional teaching, and rehabilitation.

The Tongzhou campus of the Beijing Friendship Hospital has already been completed and opened, Hu added. "The efficiency of seeing a doctor has improved, and the treatment experience is much better. Recently, two of my colleagues gave birth to their babies at this hospital and gave good feedback on the services," he said.

The Children's Hospital affiliated to the Capital Institute of Pediatrics will start construction of its Tongzhou campus in the second half of this year, further increasing available medical services.

"In fact, many patients who come to hospitals in the sub city-center are resi-

dents from the neighboring three counties in Hebei province," Hu said.

"The development of the sub city-center has also benefited the residents in Hebei and even Tianjin municipality. Many regular visitors to Universal Studios Beijing also come from the surrounding areas of Tianjin and Hebei," Hu said.

"We hope that the growth of the Beijing sub city-center will bring more employment, culture, ecology and convenience to these surrounding areas."

### Integrated development

The planning and construction of the Beijing sub city-center along with the formation of the Xiongan New Area in Hebei, was a significant decision made by the central government.

At the end of February, the State Council Information Office held a news conference to outline the progress made over the past decade on the coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.

"Breakthrough progress has been made in the relocation of noncapital functions from Beijing," Guo Lanfeng, a senior official of the National Development and Reform Commission, said at the news conference. "Focusing on addressing the 'big city malaise' of Beijing, a plan for relocation has been constructed."

The first batch of universities, hospitals, and central State-owned enterprises chosen for relocation have already begun settling in the Xiongan New Area. Policies covering incentives, investment and household registration have also been implemented.

"The capital's functions have been continuously optimized, making Beijing the first major city in the country to realize sustainable development through reduced resources," Guo said. "At the same time, the Xiongan New Area has entered a stage of large-scale construction and is undertaking the relocation of noncapital functions from Beijing," he said.

Meticulous planning is made for the use of "every inch of land" before construction begins, Guo added.

"Currently, the urban framework is taking shape, the main backbone of the road network has been completed, and the new area has its own administrative division codes and vehicle license plates," he said.

The level of coordinated development in key sectors has continued to improve, Guo said.

Transportation, ecology and industry are the major areas where breakthroughs have been made. Improvement of the integrated transportation network of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region has been accelerated, and people can now travel between the major cities in 1 to 1.5 hours via high-speed trains and expressways.

"In the past decade, the growth of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region mainly focused on adjusting and optimizing economic and spatial structures," he said.

In the future, the region's growth will continue to be comprehensive and high-quality, Guo said, adding that the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region is set to lead "the high-quality development of the entire country".



Clockwise from top left: Visitors have been allowed to take a free trial ride on driverless buses since March 3. HUANG LIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY The ice and snow carnival at the Central Green Forest Park, which opened in December, proved popular with visitors; A view of the Tongzhou campus of the Beijing Friendship Hospital. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## TOP NEWS

## Up in flames



An onlooker reacts on Wednesday as homes are burnt down by a wildfire in Valparaiso, Chile. There were no reports of any casualties. RODRIGO GARRIDO / REUTERS

## FM trip expected to reinforce peace, stability in Asia-Pacific

In-depth exchanges on bilateral ties anticipated during visits to New Zealand, Australia

By ZHANG YUNBI  
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China is sending strong signals to further reinforce peace and stability and better manage differences with nations in the Asia-Pacific region, with Foreign Minister Wang Yi scheduled to make official visits to New Zealand and Australia from Sunday through March 21, observers said.

The last time a Chinese foreign minister visited the two countries was in 2017. This year marks the 10th anniversary of China's comprehensive strategic partnerships with New Zealand and Australia.

During his trip, Wang Yi will have wide-ranging and in-depth exchange of views with the foreign ministers and leaders of both countries on bilateral relations as well as international and regional issues of common concern.

The visit will kick off this year's high-level exchanges between China and the two countries, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said on Thursday.

Wang's upcoming visit will help keep afloat the improving momentum of the ties and roll out friendly discussions on specific topics such as commodity trade."

Chen Hong, professor and director of the Australian Studies Centre at East China Normal University

"China looks forward to working with the two countries to implement the consensus reached by the leaders, strengthen strategic communication, enhance mutual trust, and deepen exchanges and cooperation," the spokesman said.

China wants to jointly advance

stable and far-reaching growth of its comprehensive strategic partnerships with New Zealand and Australia, and make contributions to world peace, stability, development and prosperity, he added.

Chen Hong, professor and director of the Australian Studies Centre at East China Normal University in Shanghai, said the relationship between Beijing and Wellington "has played a leading role in the relations between China and Western countries for quite a long time, and the ties have been constantly scaling new heights."

Currently, China is New Zealand's largest trading partner.

Chen pointed out that while China-New Zealand ties have delivered lasting growth, Beijing and Canberra have recently been working together to see more signs of improvement in their relationship after it plummeted to a low years ago.

"The incumbent cabinet of Australia has broken away from the anti-China approach of the past administration. Wang's upcoming

visit will help keep afloat the improving momentum of the ties and roll out friendly discussions on specific topics such as commodity trade," he said.

The visit by Anthony Albanese to China in November was the first by an Australian prime minister since 2016.

During his visit to Australia, Wang Yi will hold the seventh China-Australia Foreign and Strategic Dialogue with his counterpart Penny Wong.

Albanese told reporters on Thursday that "it is a good thing that Wang Yi is visiting," citing "significant progress" in removing trade impediments, AFP reported.

Chinese Ambassador to Australia Xiao Qian said that win-win cooperation between the two countries is "the only right choice."

"It is important that we shall not allow our differences to severely affect or even hijack our overall bilateral relations and cooperation," Xiao said on Monday during the Financial Review Business Summit 2024.

## More Chinese travelers set foot in Antarctica

By CHENG SI  
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Chinese tourists are a common sight in almost every continent of the world, and their eagerness to explore new and different destinations is now taking some of them literally to the final frontier of travel — the frozen continent of Antarctica.

The global tourism industry is hoping to cash in on Chinese tourists' well-known wanderlust to help tap the potential of this land at the world's end with its pristine glaciers and distinctive wildlife.

But if you fancy spending your next vacation in Antarctica, be prepared to pay a hefty price for the privilege.

"The trip costs at least 100,000 yuan (\$13,900) per person," said Li Peng, travel portal Tuniu's director for long-distance outbound trips.

This is the most popular choice among the travel portal's Antarctic offerings, explained Li, adding that it is a 17-day trip combining travel to Argentina and the icebound continent, with departures in December and next February.

Tuniu also offers a monthlong trip to South America and Antarctica in late October, with room prices reaching 350,000 yuan per person so far, he added.

"The cruise trip to the frozen continent is usually on presale one year before the departure date and customers holding US tourist visas can get quicker access to Argentina or Chile, the two main starting points for travel to Antarctica," he said.

During the Antarctic tourism season from late 2022 to early 2023 — usually from November to March — 103,988 people worldwide visited the continent, according to the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators, an international organization promoting

responsible travel to the continent. It's the first time that traveler numbers exceeded 100,000 since the continent opened to tourism in the 1950s.

The association said that China is already the second-largest source of travelers to the continent, and it expects that the number of Chinese travelers to Antarctica will recover to 80 percent of the pre-COVID-19 level during the ongoing Antarctic tourism season.

According to the association, 8,273 Chinese people visited the continent during the 2017-18 tourism season, accounting for 16 percent of the total and coming second to the United States.

The number of Chinese tourists dropped to 1,464 in the 2022-23 tourism season, due to the impact of the pandemic.

The association's optimistic outlook for Chinese travel to Antarctica is based on the growing number of package tours coming onto the market in China.

For example, Chinese National Geography — a magazine published by the Chinese Academy of Sciences, released a 17-day tourism and study group tour to Antarctica last November.

The 130 places on the tour, which costs at least 99,800 yuan per person and departs from Beijing in November, were soon sold out.

It was the third group tour to Antarctica organized by the magazine last year. All of the places on the previous two trips, which departed in January and February respectively, were soon snapped up by eager travelers.

"We've seen Chinese tourists traveling to the continent since late 1990s, but we estimate the business will experience a relatively slow recovery in next two years due to the high travel costs," said Lyu Caihui, who works on cruise ships visiting polar regions.



Tourists explore the Antarctic Peninsula in kayaks in February. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Vision: Initiative set to increase awareness of value of exchanges

From page 1

Zhao Mei, a senior fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of American Studies, said the Global Civilization Initiative was proposed in the hope of getting more people to be aware of the value of exchanges among different civilizations and boosting confidence in cultural exchanges and cooperation.

According to Zhao, the people-to-people contacts between China and the US are recovering, especially after the meeting in San Francisco last year between the two heads of state.

"Yet the level of communication is far from reaching the pre-COVID level, so more needs to be done to facilitate mutual visits and enhance mutual trust between the Chinese and American people, who are both brave and hardworking," she said.

Xi announced in November at a welcoming dinner by friendly organizations in San Francisco that China was ready to invite 50,000 young people from the US for exchanges and study programs in the next five years to increase exchanges between the two peoples, especially between youths.

He told those present at the banquet that the development paths of China and the US are different, but both paths are the choice of their peoples that lead to the realization of the common values of humanity and should both be respected.

"The purpose of the Global Civilization Initiative I proposed is to urge the international community to address the imbalance between material and cultural advancement and jointly promote the continued progress of human civilization," he said.

Observers said efforts to imple-

ment the initiative should continue, as it bears great significance for advocating an equal and orderly multipolar world in which some countries are still obsessed with drawing ideological lines and creating small cliques.

"No country sees itself as a peg to be shaped by others, so it can be fitted into a designated hole," said Einar Tangen, a senior fellow at the Beijing-based think tank Taihe Institute. "Only through mutual understanding and respect can people and countries identify and understand each other's differen-

ces, then accept them and exist in harmony."

Tangen said that the initiative is about recognizing and respecting the differences between countries, while acknowledging that they share common aspirational goals for their people in terms of security, sustainability, peace, development, respect and self-determination.

"The GCI is the third pillar of China's proposal for a world order based on aspirations rather than coercion," he said, referring to the other two global initiatives previously proposed by China on devel-

opment and security.

Days after the abrupt escalation of the Palestine-Israel conflict on Oct 7, China and the Arab side held a symposium in the United Arab Emirates on China-Arab relations and civilization dialogue, in the belief that enhancing intercultural dialogue can be an effective remedy for fixing the problem of confrontation and conflict.

"China stands ready to work with Arab countries to further unlock the power of civilizations and jointly act on the GCI to inject more stability into a world of change and instability and contribute more to the shared response to global challenges," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said.

## Relations: Summit highlights a shared interest in peace and prosperity of region

From page 1

other partners in welcoming China into the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. That would have benefits all around. A commitment to free trade and the welcoming of foreign investment have been important elements for the region's growth in recent decades.

The recent summit underlined the shared interest of Australia and ASEAN members in an Asia-Pacific region that is at peace and pursuing shared prosperity through greater

economic cooperation.

It has also sparked some media attention about differences of view on the rise of China.

There are, of course, different security outlooks among the diverse members of the region. Australia has been a close ally of the United States since World War II, while most ASEAN members cherish their nonalignment and resist domination by any hegemonic power in the Pacific.

There is nonetheless a deep understanding of each other's different strategic outlooks, given the friendly relations between countries

of the region. Indeed, shared interests should overshadow differences.

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim was widely quoted for remarking during his visit to Australia that "if they have problems with China, they should not impose it upon us." Yet this was a statement of the obvious, as any attempt to cajole ASEAN members to join any bipolar view of the world would indeed be counterproductive.

Rather, Australia should seek to become closer to ASEAN for sound strategic and economic reasons. Southeast Asia is Australia's neigh-

borhood, which it needs to be at peace, and there remain plenty of opportunities to grow trade and investment within the region. That is anticipated to be complementary rather than contradictory to each country's continued economic engagement with China, which brings widespread and mutual benefits.

Actions rather than words underline how China and Australia have complementary economies. Even through the recent disputes, bilateral trade continued to grow. Australia supplies China with iron ore, natural gas and lithium, which is

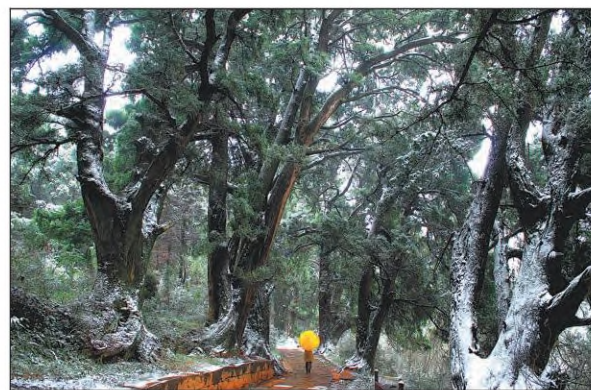
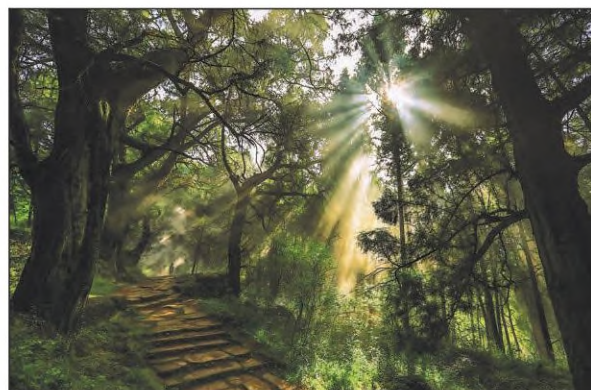
important to the products of the new green economy, such as electric vehicle batteries. Equally, China supplies Australia with a wide range of competitively priced manufactured goods and migrants and students who contribute to Australia's ongoing growth.

If the Albanese government can encourage deeper cooperation with ASEAN, this should make a constructive contribution to Australia-China relations, too, as Australians become more used to Asian cultural values and as Asia becomes more understanding of Australia's cultural mores.

At the end of the day, we all share a region that we want to keep safe and prosperous. That's a powerful glue, as long as leaders can harness and encourage the friendly people-to-people links that grow stronger day by day.

The author is vice-chair of the United Nations Sustainable Business Network for the Asia-Pacific region, a non-resident senior fellow at the Beijing-based Center for China and Globalization, and a former Australian diplomat. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Editor's note: As protection of the planet's flora, fauna and resources becomes increasingly important, China Daily is publishing a series of stories to illustrate the country's commitment to safeguarding the natural world.



# Protection of ancient trees an act of pride for ranger

Dedicated locals ensure world's largest artificial cypress forest remains healthy for generations to come

The ancient trees in the Cuiyun Corridor in Jiange, Sichuan province, have weathered the slings and arrows of history and of countless seasons. PHOTOS BY WEI YUNHUI, ZENG ZHENGQIANG AND GOU YONGXIONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

By YAN DONGJIE  
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Shi Honglin has walked the roads lined with ancient cypress trees near his home so many times over the past 60 years that he can recount stories about them as if they were members of his own family.

The 67-year-old has spent his life in Dongqing village in Jiange county, adjacent to the main stretch of the Cuiyun Corridor in Guangyuan city, Sichuan province — the world's largest artificial cypress forest. Lining the 151 kilometers of roads that crisscross the corridor are 7,803 ancient trees, with the oldest being over 2,300 years old.

Shi took up the post of a forest ranger in 2016, making him responsible for the care and protection of the trees in Jiange.

He said that although the government has put strict protection measures in place for the cypress trees, the lack of daily care sometimes led to incidents where the ancient trees were injured.

"Here, a passing truck scraped against this tree damaging the bark," Shi said, patting the trunk of a 1,300-year-old cypress tree as if comforting a family member who'd fallen ill.

"The Cuiyun Corridor cypress road where we are right now used to be part of National Highway 108," he said.

The Cuiyun Corridor is a tree-lined transport route that was built during

the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) for travelers and traders.

In 2009, to protect the ancient cypresses along the road, the highway was shifted more than 300 meters outside what is now the Cuiyun Corridor scenic area.

"I come here every day and feel uneasy if I miss a day," Shi said.

He is responsible for caring for and protecting 67 ancient trees in the Jiange section of the corridor. Wildfires, pests and flooding are the three main threats to the ancient trees, according to the ranger.

In addition to clearing dead branches and trash during his routine patrols, Shi and other forest rangers look out for different threats at different times of the year. In autumn and winter, they focus on preventing fires. In spring, they focus on preventing diseases and pests, and in summer, they focus on mitigating the impact of heavy rain and flooding.

"If there is extreme weather such as heavy winds and rain, I come at least twice a day to ensure that the trees in low-lying areas are not adversely affected," he said, pointing to a pair of ancient trees. "You can see that the branches of the tree on the right are relatively dry, and the color of the leaves is slightly pale, indicating that the tree has died."

Shi explained that two years ago, a heavy rainstorm hit the area and swamped the two ancient trees. "Even though we dug drainage ditches and quickly drained the



Shi Honglin checks the status of an ancient cypress tree at the Cuiyun Corridor in Guangyuan, Sichuan province. YAN DONGJIE / CHINA DAILY

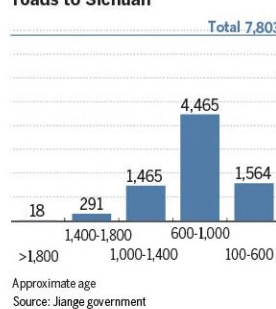
water, we only managed to save one of them."

Despite years passing, the death of the tree still weighs heavy on Shi.

In the wake of the tragedy, experts from the local forestry bureau and other related departments implemented measures to improve fertilization and infusion for the surviving cypresses.

Even though that one particular tree had died, it remains precious to local people.

## Ancient trees in the Cuiyun Corridor section of the ancient roads to Sichuan



"We won't cut it down," said Yang Zubin, Party chief of Jiange county. "With it just standing there, it passes on the spirit of protecting trees."

For the people of Jiange, the trees have stood side by side with their families for generations.

Over 60 years ago, within Shi's patrol area, there used to be a small temple where people from surrounding villages would come to burn incense for blessings during festivals and in times of difficulty.

"In order to protect the ancient trees the temple was demolished, but occasionally, the elderly still come here to worship. Sometimes when I encounter them, I have to remind them that strict fire prevention is essential in protecting the trees," he said.

Not far from Dongqing, Tianqiao

is the closest village to the Cuiyun Corridor scenic area. Xu Xinggui, the former village Party secretary of Tianqiao, said, "We grew up listening to the stories of the ancient trees."

Xu, who is also in his 60s, remembers vividly that when he was in elementary school, the teachers often told them the legends of the ancient trees.

"Over 1,800 years ago, Zhang Fei (a famous general) passed through here and planted a cypress tree, which grew into three trunks, supporting each other, echoing the famous story of 'The Oath of the Peach Garden' in the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*."

The cypress mentioned by Xu is known to the locals as the Zhang Fei Cypress. Today, the Cuiyun Corridor is listed as a 5A-level scenic spot — the highest in the national scenic spot rating system. There are many such trees with legends that are cherished and respected by the locals.

"We like to tie a red string on the thick trunk of a thousand-year-old cypress tree to pray for the safety of our family," Xu said.

Ancient trees are some of the largest living organisms on the planet, playing environmental roles that younger trees cannot fulfill. They are crucial for recycling soil nutrients and influencing the direction of river flows. With the sharp decrease in the number of large ancient trees in many parts of the world, the

integrity of these ecosystems and biodiversity is seriously affected.

In recent years, regulations related to the protection of ancient trees have been introduced, and the Jiange government has included the number and growth status of cypresses as an important metric to be shared among county and township Party and government leaders to keep track of.

On the trunk of each ancient tree, there is an information plaque. In addition to basic information such as age, species and the person responsible for it, there is also a QR code that can be scanned to see more information about the tree's health.

"Sichuan provincial and Guangyuan city forestry experts often visit to train forest rangers on improved ways of inspecting and protecting trees. Each tree has its own ID card, and both the management and protection of the trees have become more scientifically standardized," Shi said.

Yang said, "The cypress trees are the symbol of Jiange. We must protect the world's largest artificial cypress forest just like we protect giant pandas."

Yan Zhongqian contributed to this story.



Online  
Watch the video  
by scanning  
the code.

## FIRST PERSON

# Guide tells how corridor paved way for historical footsteps

Liang Zhixin, tour guide and interpreter at the Cuiyun Corridor in Jiange county, Guangyuan, Sichuan province

I introduce the Cuiyun Corridor to visitors over a thousand times every year.

Along this path, which renowned strategist Zhuge Liang (181-234), general Zhang Fei (?-221) and Emperor Xuanzong (685-762) of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) once traversed, historical scenes of the exchanges between the "Land of Abundance" in the Tang Dynasty and the outside world have been recorded.

This area has also borne witness to the continuous development of Chinese culture from the Qin Dynasty (221-207 BC) to the present, spanning over 2,000 years.

Every time I weave through these lush millennia-old cypresses, I am

deeply drawn in by the serene and profound atmosphere, as well as the traces left by history.

Ancient Sichuan province had a mild climate and abundant resources, but the geographical barrier of the surrounding mountains posed a significant obstacle to external communication. In order to better connect to the outside world, the ancients began to construct the *shudao*, or the roads to Sichuan. The Cuiyun Corridor is a representative section of this road.

Centered in Jiange county, the Cuiyun Corridor connects the northern part of Sichuan to the outside world and has a total length of 151 kilometers.

During its construction, the ancients planted trees on both sides of the road to clearly mark its position and measure its length. As the trees grew lush, they also provided shade, allowing people to travel even in the hot summers. This cre-

ated the unique landscape we call "100,000 trees on a 150-km road".

Within Jiange, the Cuiyun Corridor boasts the best-preserved, largest and most numerous ancient tree clusters in China. It is home to 7,803 ancient trees with an average age exceeding 1,000 years.

In the history of the corridor, there were six documented large-scale tree plantings, with particularly massive plantings during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) over 1,000 years ago and the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) over 600 years ago.

It takes 100 years for these trees to increase their trunk width by just 10 centimeters.

The oldest tree here is over 2,300 years old, and its diameter is longer than the height of an average male human.

One of the oldest trees, known as the Royal Cypress, is 27 meters tall — almost as high as a 10-story building.

Over the course of more than 2,000 years, the Cuiyun Corridor, while serving as a transportation route, has also stood witness to thousands of years of political, military, cultural and economic developments.

Yang Zubin, Party chief of Jiange county, said, "Even if the trees die, they cannot be felled." I believe it is precisely because of the generations of Jiange people's original maintenance that we can still see the most primitive appearance of this cypress forest today.

With technological advancements, the means of protection are becoming increasingly diverse. Now, every ancient tree in the Cuiyun Corridor has its own ID card, recording information such as age and maintenance dates. In addition, over a thousand forest rangers collectively guard this historical treasure.



Liang Zhixin (right) introduces the history of the Cuiyun Corridor in Jiange, Sichuan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The corridor has become a nationally renowned 5A-level scenic area, attracting an increasing number of visitors due to its lush mountains, clear waters and profound cultural heritage.

The Cuiyun Corridor, formed by nearly 10,000 ancient cypresses, vividly portrays the interdependence between humanity and nature.

Tens of thousands of visitors come here to adore the treasures, learning not only about history but also how we and the plants have protected and supported each other for thousands of years.

Liang Zhixin spoke to Yan Dongjie.

Contact the writer at yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

# WORLDUS

## Expert: TikTok ban not certain

By LIA ZHU  
in San Francisco  
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The US House approved bill calling for the forced sale or ban of the video app TikTok in the United States could face an uphill battle in the Senate and in court, said a Silicon Valley-based law expert.

The bill represents the latest efforts by US lawmakers to force a sale of TikTok by its Chinese owner or ban it from app stores. The legislation has been passed by the House but still must clear the US Senate.

President Joe Biden, whose reelection campaign uses TikTok, has said he would sign the legislation if it cleared Congress.

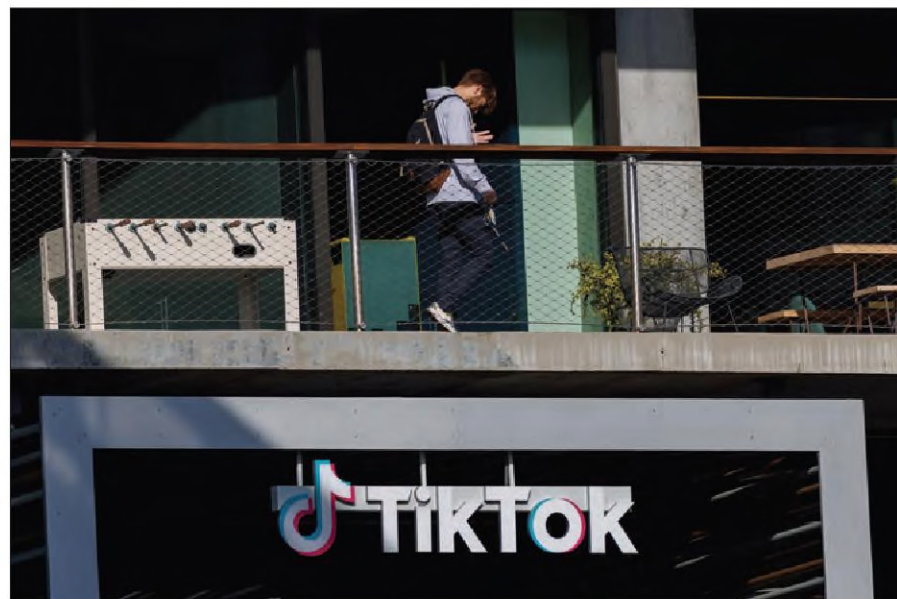
"Although the House passed in a 352-65 vote the bill seeking to ban TikTok in the United States, those favoring the ban still need to fight an uphill battle in the Senate and, probably, in court," Mei Gechlik, founder and CEO of Sinotalks, a think tank and consultancy, told China Daily.

Unlike the House, the Senate has voices from Republican and Democratic leaders opposing or casting doubt on the bill on various grounds, including free speech concerns, she said.

"Such concerns could also lead to challenges in court, as multiple groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union have suggested potential First Amendment violations," she added.

TikTok, which is owned by the China-based tech giant ByteDance, is wildly popular, with 170 million users in the United States.

Though the bill's proponents said it is merely about regulating a commercial activity, the proposal's opponents said it would violate American users' First Amendment rights by taking away a platform they use for free speech.



A person arrives at the offices of TikTok in Culver City, California, on Wednesday. MIKE BLAKE / REUTERS

Legal experts said it could infringe free speech by preventing users from expressing themselves and businesses from using the app to promote their products.

Late last year, a court blocked the state of Montana's TikTok ban, SB 419, from going into effect on Jan 1, 2024, ruling that the law violated users' First Amendment rights to speak and to access information online. The state is appealing that ruling.

In a letter sent to lawmakers this week, Jameel Jaffer, executive director of the Knight First Amendment Institute, called the new legislation "censorship — plain and simple".

Critics also accused the US government of lacking real concerns about abuse of users' data by other social media platforms, such as Meta.

The Electronic Frontier

Foundation has said that if the United States were really concerned about China and data privacy, it would push legislation that applies to all social media companies, not just TikTok.

"Intriguingly, seeing former president Donald Trump's current opposition to the TikTok ban to, among other reasons, win younger voters' support and noticing that his lead over Trump among these voters has reduced to only 4 percentage points, President Joe Biden is probably regretting his promise to sign the bill into law," said Gechlik.

"After all, younger voters helped send Biden to the White House in 2020. Democratic senators are, therefore, likely to block the bill to spare him from the embarrassment," she added.

Potential buyers are already circling. Former treasury

secretary Steven Mnuchin said on CNBC on Thursday that he was putting together a consortium to try to buy TikTok.

"Blocking the bill in the Senate before Mnuchin gains more momentum in putting together a consortium to buy TikTok is crucial," said Gechlik.

"President Biden just publicly opposed the Nippon-US Steel deal, emphasizing the need for the United States to 'maintain strong American steel companies powered by American steel workers'.

"This opposition, together with a potential forced sale of TikTok, will hurt the United States, as the country is likely to be perceived as unfriendly to foreign investment, no matter whether the investment is from an ally like Japan or a competitor like China," she said.

## US manipulates freedom of speech, new report finds

By CAO DESHENG  
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China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing released a report on "Freedom of Speech in the United States: Truth and Facts" on Thursday, saying that Washington covers up political manipulation and social injustice with empty political slogans of so-called freedom of speech.

The report reveals the freedom of speech purported by the US is "not worthy of the name". The United States violates freedom of speech at home and manipulates freedom of speech in foreign countries, it said.

The report said that although the First Amendment to the US Constitution explicitly stipulates "freedom of speech", political disputes and group interests have been constantly taking advantage of the form of "freedom of speech" to damage its essence.

The report cited the survey, "Free Expression in America Post-2020", which was conducted by the Knight Foundation in 2022. The survey, described as "representing the most comprehensive public opinion study on free speech at present" by the US Free Speech Center, noted that political polarization and party strife have severely undermined free speech in the US, especially on political issues.

In a 2022 national poll conducted by The New York Times and Siena College, 66 percent of participants say they do not believe people in the US enjoy free speech, with 8 percent also saying they don't have any freedom of speech, the report said.

The report reveals the US government colludes with media to disseminate information under the cover of media to achieve its political objectives. It cited an editorial published by The New York Times in March 2022 titled "America has a free speech problem", which pointed out that freedom of speech in the US is a thing of the past.

The report cited the US crackdown on TikTok. Before the House Committee on Energy and Commerce held the TikTok hearing in March 2023, several US free speech organizations, including the Civil Liberties Union, warned in an open letter that the ban on TikTok would have a serious impact on free speech in the digital domain, which violate the rights of people according to the First Amendment.

"The crackdown has set a worrying precedent by damaging the freedom of more than 150 million TikTok American users on the platform. The US government has turned a deaf ear to these calls and is determined to clamp down on TikTok," the report said.

The report concluded that freedom of speech in the US "is one for domestic politicians and interest groups and another for ordinary people". It is one way of saying and doing things about the US, and another way of saying and doing things about other countries, it added.

"No matter how the US propagates its freedom of speech ... it cannot change the fact that more and more people are seeing through the ugly practices of the US: How it relies on lies to weave 'the emperor's new clothes', and how it smears others to maintain its hegemony," the report noted.

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## WORLD

## UN agency says aid warehouse hit in Gaza Strip

GAZA/WASHINGTON — The main UN aid agency in Gaza said an Israeli strike on Wednesday hit one of its warehouses, killing an employee, as calls intensified for land routes to bring food into the besieged territory.

"At least one UNRWA staff member was killed and another 22 were injured when Israeli forces hit a food distribution center in the eastern part of Rafah" in southern Gaza, the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees said in a statement.

The agency's chief, Philippe Lazarini, said the "attack on one of the very few remaining UNRWA distribution centers in the Gaza Strip comes as food supplies are running out, hunger is widespread and, in some areas, turning into famine."

Israel later said a Hamas militant was killed in a strike on Rafah, naming him as Muhammad Abu Hasna, one of four people the Gaza health ministry said were killed in the strike on the UNRWA facility.

Donor nations, aid agencies and charities have pushed on with efforts to rush food to the impoverished territory of 2.4 million people, where more than five months of conflict have caused mass civilian deaths and reduced vast areas to a rubble-strewn wasteland.

Efforts to open a maritime corridor or airdrop aid were no alternative to aid delivery by land as they could only provide a fraction of the needs, said a statement by 25 organizations.

Trying an alternative land route from southern Israel, the UN World Food Programme sent an initial six aid trucks on Tuesday into worst-hit northern Gaza through a gate in the security fence, the Israeli army said.



Palestinians wait to receive food during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan in Rafah, Gaza Strip, on Wednesday. MOHAMMED SALEM / REUTERS

Rafah, on Gaza's southern border with Egypt, has remained the coastal territory's last population center spared an Israeli ground operation, and Israeli officials have threatened to send ground troops into the city.

Meanwhile, the Israeli parliament on Wednesday approved a revised budget for 2024 to fund the country's fighting in Gaza.

According to the finance ministry, the updated budget stands at about 584 billion shekels (about \$161 billion), an increase of 70 billion shek-

els compared to the original budget approved in May last year.

#### Widespread protests

In the United States, hundreds of protesters demanding a cease-fire in Gaza and calling for an end to US military assistance for Israel, blocked the international terminal at the San Francisco International Airport on Wednesday.

Footage from the scene showed them carrying banners with messages such as "Permanent Cease-fire

Now", "Stop the World for Gaza" and "Stop Arming Israel". An ABC News affiliate put the number of demonstrators at more than 300.

Protests demanding a cease-fire in Gaza have occurred in many US cities, including near airports and bridges in New York City and Los Angeles, as well as holding vigils outside the White House and marches in Washington. The US has long rejected calls for a permanent cease-fire.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Experts: Africa can take leaf out of China's book

Govts across continent urged to avail of opportunities through cooperation

By EDITH MUTETHYA  
in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania  
edithmutethya@chinadaily.com.cn

China remains Africa's valued partner not only for its contribution to transforming the continent through infrastructure development but also as a role model for the continent to take a leaf from, African think tanks have reiterated.

Experts from the think tanks, who gathered for a forum in Tanzania's Dar es Salaam city last week, urged African governments and policymakers to learn from China about their development agenda as well as take advantage of the opportunities provided by the Asian powerhouse.

David Norris, advisory panel member of the Africa-China Centre for Policy and Advisory and the vice-chancellor of the University of Botswana, called on African governments and policymakers to draw inspiration from China's philosophy of development, which is people-centered.

Norris said African governments should put people first in every policy consideration.

"We should learn how China developed from a very poor country to being an economic powerhouse. If we don't set certain things right in Africa, our partnership with China could be a lopsided affair," he said.

He said if African countries fail to take care of people's desires and aspirations, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals will become empty talk.

Norris challenged Africa to stop copying economic models and develop its own by taking a leaf from China, which he said has a homegrown economic model — a socialist market economy.

Charles Onunaiju, director of Centre for China Studies in Nigeria, said for China and Africa to remain stable in a turbulent world, Africa should meet China halfway, bring something to the table and drive cooperation on a win-win principle. This, he said, can be achieved by engaging in local capacity building.

"We need to take several initiatives, including rural revitalization, which is the strength of Africa. If we don't revitalize our rural communities, if we don't connect our rural communities with trends of Africa renaissance, it will be empty talk," he said.

Through rural revitalization, China has been able to promote a more balanced economic and social development as well as alleviate poverty and protect the environment.

Humphrey Mushi, director at the Center of Chinese Studies in Tanzania, expressed the need for Africa's proactiveness in seizing

"We need to take several initiatives, including rural revitalization, which is the strength of Africa. If we don't revitalize our rural communities, if we don't connect our rural communities with trends of Africa renaissance, it will be an empty talk."

Charles Onunaiju,  
director of Centre for China  
Studies in Nigeria

the opportunities offered by China's cooperation platforms, especially the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the Belt and Road Initiative.

He said the platforms are non-bureaucratic, hence consultative, through the holding of scheduled summits and ministerial conferences whose decisions are dutifully implemented.

#### Spillover effect

Moshi said the BRI has a positive spillover effect on other sectors of a country's economy and views the development process in its totality.

It is also inclusive as it ensures the cooperation parties meet frequently at scheduled Belt and Road forums to review progress, discuss the challenges confronted and chart out the way forward, thus promoting the spirit of ownership and partnership.

He said the BRI has incorporated a new agenda on its menu with a view to addressing challenges and tapping opportunities.

The post-COVID-19 pandemic ushered in the Health Silk Road, Green Silk Road, Digital Silk Road and Clean Silk Road, Moshi said.

He said the BRI is well aligned with individual African countries' development, visions and plans, coupled with those of regional groupings such as the East African Community, the Southern African Development Community, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, and the Economic Community of West African States.

"In that regard, African countries have been quite proactive in embracing the initiative. This is evident among others, through the mushrooming of BRI-led projects in Africa, ranging from infrastructure, manufacturing, agriculture, education, public health, energy, vocational training and culture," he added.

## EU OKs law on artificial intelligence

By JONATHAN POWELL in London  
jonathan@mail.chinadailyuk.com

Legislators in the European Union granted approval to the 27-nation bloc's artificial intelligence law on Wednesday, paving the way for what it describes as its world-leading regulations to come into force later this year.

The AI Act, which aims to ensure safety, fundamental rights and innovation, received significant support from lawmakers in the European Parliament, with 523 votes in favor, 46 against and 49 abstentions.

The new law is said to serve as a model for other governments worldwide, navigating the complexities of

regulating the rapidly advancing technology, reported The Associated Press.

"The AI Act has nudged the future of AI in a human-centric direction, in a direction where humans are in control of the technology and where it — the technology — helps us leverage new discoveries, economic growth, societal progress, and unlock human potential," said Dragos Tudorache, a Romanian lawmaker who was a co-leader of the Parliament negotiations on the law. "The AI Act is not the end of the journey but the starting point for new governance built around technology."

First proposed five years ago, the legislation sets differing levels of risk and creates a new oversight office to

regulate the development and use of AI models.

Low-risk systems, like content recommendation or spam filters, face minimal regulations, such as the need to disclose they are powered by AI, while high-risk AI applications, like those used in critical infrastructure, education, healthcare, law enforcement, border management and elections, will be subject to stringent requirements.

Certain uses of AI will be prohibited, due to their deemed unacceptable risks, such as for social scoring systems and certain surveillance methods like facial recognition for public use by law enforcement,

except in cases of serious crimes.

Early drafts of the law had focused on limited AI tasks, such as resume scanning for job applications, but the emergence of general-purpose AI models, like OpenAI's ChatGPT, prompted EU policymakers to adapt by including provisions for generative AI models, requiring developers to disclose data sources and comply with copyright law, especially for deepfake content.

Brussels will establish an AI Office that will enforce the law for general-purpose AI systems, with potential fines of up to 35 million euros (\$38 million) or 7 percent of a company's global revenue for any AI Act violations.

## 3,200 Chinese titles on show at London event

By ZHENG WANYIN in London  
zhengwanyin@mail.chinadailyuk.com

More than 3,200 China-themed titles from some 50 Chinese publishers have been brought to this year's London Book Fair, one of the world's largest publishing trade fairs.

The three-day event, which kicked off on Tuesday, boasts the participation of more than 30,000 publishing professionals and 1,000 companies from around the globe.

Founded in 1971, the event has evolved into a major global copyright marketplace, where publishers such as HarperCollins, Bloomsbury, Macmillan and Penguin Random House talk about copyright trade, authors meet translators, and literary scouts look for potential best-sellers.

Chinese publishers, including China Publishing Group, China International Communications Group and China Renmin University Press, are showcasing a wide range of books, including politics, culture and academic subjects, at the 454-square-meter China Booth. One-third of the titles brought by Chinese publishers are foreign-language editions.

With China's growing stature, foreign publishers have emphasized the

necessity for readers to comprehend contemporary China through books.

"It is vital that scholarship from China reaches the rest of the world," said Jeremy North, managing director for books publishing at Taylor & Francis Group, an international academic publisher in England.

"There should be this interchange of ideas, both for researchers and for students, if we think about the subjects, such as humanities, history and governance. When it comes to sciences, wonderful work is being done in China in the technology field, and the rest of the world needs to understand those advances as it is for the benefit of the people around the world."

At the fair, Routledge, a subdivision of Taylor & Francis, co-launched two new titles in the China Perspectives series with China Renmin University Press. The series focuses on publishing original and translated works by leading Chinese scholars on both global topics and China-related themes.

#### Close collaboration

The two agencies have collaborated to publish more than 40 titles in the series.

Also on Tuesday, Lebanon's Arab Scientific Publishers signed cooperation agreements with China's Foreign Languages Press to publish the Arabic version of Happiness in Being Ordinary: Stories from a Vocational School.

Yao Li, the book's author and founder of China's first private, charitable vocational high school, recounts her school's 18-year journey in the book.

When asked about the reason for furthering partnership with Chinese publishers, Bassam Chebaro, president of Arab Scientific Publishers, said: "Any book that benefits the Chinese people should also benefit the Arab people, as China is trying its best to upgrade and build a nation for peace."

In addition to showcasing books, Chinese publishers have also organized about 30 activities at the fair, some of which were on trending topics such as low-carbon development and artificial intelligence.

One such event, a forum for the discussion of technologies to promote green transition, was co-organized by China Science Publishing & Media and EDP Sciences, a scientific publisher in Paris.

## Knee-deep



An Afghan man's courtyard is submerged in floodwater after heavy rainfall in the Guzara district of Herat Province on Wednesday. At least 60 people have been killed by bad weather in the country over the past three weeks, the disaster ministry said. MOHSEN KARIMI / AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

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# GLOBAL LENS



A freight train traverses across Southwestern Nigeria's Ogun State on the Lagos-Ibadan Railway on Dec 5. LAN YUANHONG / XINHUA



**From top:** Passengers get ready to board a train from Ibadan at the Mobolaji Johnson Railway Station of the Lagos-Ibadan Railway in Lagos, Nigeria, on March 2. A Chinese employee of the Lagos-Ibadan Railway instructs local trainees in Lagos, Nigeria, on Feb 27. A freight train waits to be unloaded at Apapa port of the Lagos-Ibadan Railway in Lagos, Nigeria, on March 2. PHOTOS BY HAN XU / XINHUA

## ON A ROLL

### Chinese-built railway in Nigeria helps power local growth

**S**peeding smoothly across Nigeria's bustling landscape, the Lagos-Ibadan Railway is a testament to innovation and connectivity. As of March 5, the Chinese-built railway has been operating safely for 1,000 days with passenger traffic exceeding 2 million trips.

Built by China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation, the Lagos-Ibadan Railway connects Nigeria's economic center Lagos and the southwest industrial city of Ibadan.

Officially opened to traffic in June 2021 with a main line stretching about 157 kilometers long and a branch line of about 7 kilometers, the link adopts modern railway standards and has a designed speed of 150 km/h.

The railway provides Africa's most populous country with an affordable and safe mode of transportation. It facilitates travel and helps improve the efficiency of port operations and inland cargo delivery.

The railway builder has also been providing all-round technical support, training a large number of technical and managerial specialists and directly creating local job opportunities.

XINHUA



**From top:** Passengers alight from a train from Ibadan at the Mobolaji Johnson Railway Station of the Lagos-Ibadan Railway in Lagos, Nigeria, on March 2. A Chinese employee of the Lagos-Ibadan Railway instructs local trainees in Lagos, Nigeria, on Feb 27. Passengers sit in the train to Ibadan at the Mobolaji Johnson Railway Station of the Lagos-Ibadan Railway in Lagos, Nigeria, on March 2. PHOTOS BY HAN XU / XINHUA



A passenger train stops at the Mobolaji Johnson Railway Station of the Lagos-Ibadan Railway in Lagos, Nigeria, on March 2. HAN XU / XINHUA

## BUSINESS

FIND US ON FACEBOOK AND JOIN THE CONVERSATION · CHINA DAILY

## Healthcare MNCs upbeat on nation

By ZHENG YIRAN

zhengyiran@chinadaily.com.cn

Multinational healthcare companies are upbeat about the Chinese economy as well as further opportunities in the healthcare sector, and said they will deepen roots in the country.

"We have witnessed the vibrancy of the Chinese economy, and we are an integral part of China's development," said Zhou Xiaolan, executive vice-president at the pharmaceuticals division of Bayer AG.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China. It is a crucial year for achieving the objectives outlined in the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25). Throughout 2023, China experienced a notable economic recovery and substantial progress in achieving high-quality development, she said.

"The Government Work Report presented at this year's two sessions established a target for China's economic growth at around 5 percent and outlined specific measures to attain this goal. This signifies the Chinese government's commitment to further stabilize the economy and propel growth," Zhou, who is also president of Bayer Pharmaceuticals China and Bayer Greater China, added.

The Government Work Report outlined major tasks for this year, which include striving to modernize the industrial system and developing new quality productive forces at a faster



A view of the booth of Bayer AG during an expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

pace, better invigorating China through science and education, and continuing to deepen reform and pursuing higher-standard opening-up.

Susan Gu, general manager for the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong at consumer health multinational corporation Haleon plc, said: "We believe that the Chinese economy will continue to grow in a sustainable manner. We are particularly confident in the prospects of the health industry, which is driven by people's increasing focus on health, the growing middle-income population and the aging trend which leads to a rise in demand for health products and services related to the elderly."

On developing new quality productive forces in the healthcare sector, Li Xiaokun, a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, academician with the Chinese Academy of Engineering, and president of Wenzhou Medical University, said: "A complete innovative ecosystem should be established to enable the seed of

innovation to sprout and grow."

Healthcare MNCs also expressed high optimism regarding China's innovative environment.

Zhou from Bayer said: "In the area of healthcare, we have expedited the launch of innovative products to strengthen healthcare access. Over the past five years, Bayer has obtained approval for nearly 30 new prescription drugs or new indications in China, with these new drugs being launched in China almost simultaneously with the other parts of the world."

Shan Jizhong, senior director of MSD China R&D, said: "Over the past years, we were witnesses to the local government's efforts in supporting research and development and innovative drug reviews and approvals. Working with the local healthcare community, we are able to bring our first-in-class and best-in-class drugs to the Chinese market."

On China's business environment for MNCs, Zhou said: "Since the Party's 20th National Congress, the Chi-

nese government has intensified efforts to enhance openness at higher levels across the board and has created favorable conditions for foreign companies to innovate, invest, operate and grow in China, making foreign companies a significant driving force and an integral part of China's high-quality economic growth."

Looking ahead, healthcare MNCs have said that they plan to continue investing in China, and further integrating their business strategies with China's strategic goals, such as Healthy China 2030.

Last year, Bayer inaugurated an Open Innovation Center in E-Town, Beijing, the first of its kind in China. Simultaneously, the Beijing plant of Bayer Radiology was also established. Additionally, the construction of a new supply center in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province with an investment of over 300 million yuan (\$41.7 million) from Bayer Crop Science and the government of Hangzhou's Qiantang district commenced last year.

## Economy set to improve in 2024: Experts

Problems are 'inevitable' but can be solved; long-term prospects intact

By LIU ZHIHUA and OUYANG SHIJIA

China is expected to register better economic performance this year, thanks to its strong economic resilience and intensifying macroeconomic policy support, experts said.

Liu Shangxi, president of the Chinese Academy of Fiscal Sciences, said the country's ongoing urbanization, pursuit of low-carbon and green development, and digitalization have been generating powerful indigenous growth momentum.

In addition, with institutional advantages, China has strong capabilities to correct errors, and its unwavering efforts on reform and innovation will also continue to inject certainty into its economic development prospects, Liu said.

Huang Yiping, dean at the National School of Development, Peking University, said that China can adopt stronger

macroeconomic stimulus measures this year to boost demand and create more orders for enterprises, thereby offsetting cyclical pressures of insufficient

investment and consumption demand to boost economic growth.

At the same time, the country needs to adopt more measures to boost confidence and stabilize expectations, the economist said at a news conference to announce events to mark the 30th anniversary of the school this year.

"China's economic performance will become better this year" on the back of a stronger proactive fiscal policy and given the room for more monetary policy adjustments. Talk about the United States halting interest rate hikes or even cutting the rates is also a factor, he said.

"The Chinese economy indeed is facing problems that can undermine the realization of its growth potential. Among the problems are insufficient effective demand, weak social expectations and many hidden risks, Liu said.

"However, these problems can be solved. They are inevitable in the country's transition toward high-quality development, and will not change the long-term prospects of the stable and positive development trend of China's economy."

According to Huang, China still has room to further cut the reserve requirement ratio — the proportion of money that lenders must hold as reserves — and lower interest rates.

"It is advisable to lean on tools

like interest rate cuts, as that will help alleviate financial burdens on businesses and households, and potentially stimulate demand," he said.

Huang also called for more measures to boost enterprises' confidence that has been dampened by geopolitical issues and the interplay between the government's optimization of regulations (in some troubled industries like real estate where build-up of price bubbles was prevented) and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the past few years.

Liu said that China has a great demand advantage from its vast domestic market, and with consumption upgrade, the Chinese economy will have huge growth potential.

The country's complete industrial system and continuous upgrade of the manufacturing sector also provide a solid base for its future high-quality economic development, Liu said.

Also, the improvement in the workforce quality has been generating new demographic dividends for China faster, and the country's growing innovation capacity and financial industry development also serve as important pillars of growth, Liu said.

Huang Zhuo, deputy dean of the National School of Development, expressed confidence in the country's ability to achieve the target of 5 percent GDP growth this year.

He also emphasized that the primary concern at present is restoring confidence among entrepreneurs, necessitating policies to alleviate burdens on enterprises and bolster business and consumer confidence. More efforts are also needed to alleviate the debt burdens of local governments and tackle debt issues plaguing the real estate industry.

Huang Yiping expressed cautious optimism, especially over the implementation of various policies aimed at improving the business environment and supporting the development of the private sector.

However, the dean acknowledged that it may take time to see those measures gradually take effect, given the complex economic landscape.

He stressed the importance of maintaining a policy environment conducive to sustaining China's reform and opening-up initiatives, thus ensuring continued progress and growth.

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## Briefly

## Jiangsu trade growth up 13.4% in Jan-Feb

East China's Jiangsu province reported a foreign trade volume of 850.4 billion yuan (\$119.9 billion) in the first two months, up 13.4 percent year-on-year, said Nanjing Customs. During the period, the province's exports rose 11.9 percent to 541.6 billion yuan, while imports stood at 308.8 billion yuan, up 16.2 percent. January-February trade volume of Jiangsu's private enterprises surged 28.1 percent, reaching 396.9 billion yuan, accounting for 46.7 percent of the province's total trade. Foreign-funded enterprises in the province contributed 45.6 percent to the overall trade volume.

## PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 3 billion yuan (\$422.69 million) in seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.8 percent on Thursday. The move aims to keep liquidity in the banking system reasonable and ample, the People's Bank of China said in a statement. A reverse repo is a process in which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## Beijing voices concern over EU EV tariffs

By ZHONG NAN

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China will closely monitor the European Union's subsequent actions and firmly safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of its companies, after the European Commission implemented a special Customs registration process targeting Chinese-made electric vehicles, said the Ministry of Commerce on Thursday.

Implemented on March 7, this EU policy could potentially affect China's EV exports to Europe, as it may lead to punitive tariffs, according to market watchers and media reports.

"We have noticed this move. China expresses high concern over this and the industry is extremely worried about the potential retroactive tariff measures that the EU may take in the future," said He Yadong, a spokesman for the ministry.

The commerce official said that Chinese EV exporters have reported that their export volume to the EU is in line with the changes in the EU's EV consumption, and there is no so-called "surge in imports" or "damage" to the EU market.

The EU's import registration measures and possible retroactive tariffs create a burden on imports, adding obstacles to normal trade flows. This is not conducive to deepening cooperation in the new energy industry between both

sides, and will also affect the interests of EU consumers, he added.

"China has always insisted on resolving mutual concerns through dialogue and consultation to achieve mutual benefits and win-win results. We hope that the EU will use trade remedy measures prudently, building a more stable and healthy environment for the development of the EV industry in China and the EU," said He.

According to data from the General Administration of Customs, the European Union remained China's second-largest trading partner in the first two months, with total trade value between China and the EU amounting to 832.39 billion yuan (\$115.75 billion), declining 1.3 percent year-on-year, accounting for 12.6 percent of China's total foreign trade.

In another development, He, speaking at a weekly news conference in Beijing, said that China's latest initiatives to advance the high-quality development of e-commerce in rural areas will support the digital economy's expansion and boost consumption in its vast rural markets.

To align with the development trend of the digital economy, the government has recently rolled out a guideline to boost the high-quality growth of e-commerce in its rural areas, said the Ministry of Commerce.

The new policy proposes 14

detailed measures across six areas, including building a multilevel rural e-commerce comprehensive service platform, accelerating construction of a modern logistics and distribution system and fostering diversified new e-commerce entities in rural areas.

Li Guoxiang, a researcher at the Rural Development Institute of the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that these measures are part of a broader strategy to bridge the urban-rural divide, improve rural residents' access to goods and services, and create new opportunities for rural entrepreneurship and employment.

By leveraging technology and digital platforms, China aims to integrate rural areas into the broader economy, driving inclusive and sustainable development across the country, he said.

The government will help facilitate the construction of county-level livestreaming e-commerce bases amid the country's efforts to comprehensively promote rural vitalization, said the head of the department of circulation industry development at the Ministry of Commerce in an online statement.

Rural online retail sales in China reached 2.5 trillion yuan in 2023, marking a 12.9 percent increase compared to the previous year and a nearly 13-fold increase since 2014, the ministry added.

## Top execs spotlight China's growth opportunities

By ZHENG XIN

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Executives of top multinational corporations have voiced optimism about China's economic growth target for 2024 and confidence in the country's long-term potential, and have expressed their willingness to continue expanding and investing in the nation.

"We're optimistic about the Chinese economy and we have continued to see policy announcements in China aimed at supporting employment and economic growth," said Dino Otranto, chief executive officer of Fortescue Metals.

"These policies will support the property and infrastructure sectors, which will benefit steel demand." The comments came after China

set its economic growth target for 2024 at around 5 percent.

"Even a 4.6 percent GDP growth is well above other regions, considering global GDP is expected to slow to around 2.4 percent, with Europe remaining weak at around 0.5 percent and the US to soften to around 2 percent," said Jens Cuntze, president of Clariant Catalysts & Asia-Pacific.

"With China shifting to high-quality development focusing on sustainability, innovation and digitalization, we see a lot of opportunities for a sustainability-focused specialty chemical company such as ours to contribute."

While these targets will impact all industries, Cuntze believes the biggest growth potential comes from the fast-growing electrical and electronic equipment industries, particularly

e-mobility, 5G communications technology and transportation.

Clariant has made significant investments in expanding capacities in China over the last few years.

Xie Xue, president of Vale China, said the nation's pledge to peak carbon emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060 offers numerous opportunities for the leading supplier of high-quality iron ore.

Today, China is accelerating new industrialization that is driven by innovation and based on green and low carbon, actively promoting the continuous optimization and upgrading of traditional industries, which will bring new opportunities and contribute to the long-term development potential, she said.

According to Henry Ding, president of 3M China, the company's

perspective on China's economic outlook for 2024 remains optimistic, bolstered by the country's steadfast commitment to high-quality development and innovation.

According to Ding, China has taken steps to ensure the favorable treatment of foreign enterprises, aiming to boost foreign investment, which is conducive to fostering a more favorable investment climate for foreign enterprises like 3M.

"China is the largest overseas market for 3M and we will continue our commitment to the China market, as we see great potential in contributing to and benefiting from China's high-quality development trajectory," he said.

Zhou Tao, China unit president of DSM-Firmenich, said the government's emphasis on the importance



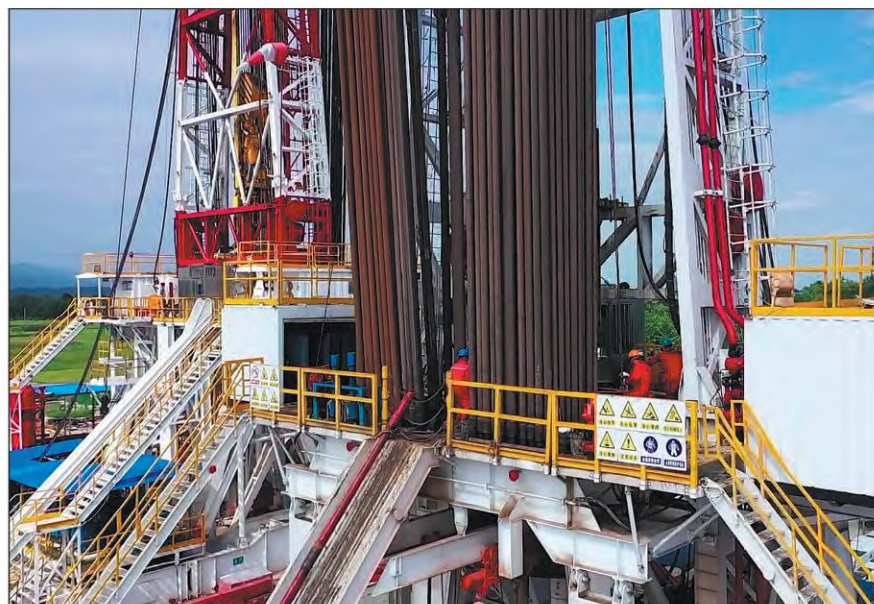
A visitor looks at items on show at the booth of Vale China during an expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

of scientific innovation and sustainability provides broad opportunities for the company to strengthen its footprint in the Chinese market.

Mohammed Al Ajlan, deputy chairman of Ajlan & Bros Group

and Chairman of the Saudi-Chinese Business Council, said with China being one of the largest markets in the world, the company is confident that foreign investment will gradually rebound as the market recovers.

## BUSINESS



Employees work on a platform at Chuanxi gas field. ccrv

## Sinopec starts gas output at new field

By HUANG ZHILING and PENG CHAO in Chengdu

Chuanxi gas field in the Sichuan Basin, developed by China Petroleum and Chemical Corp (Sinopec), has completed construction and launched full production, with an annual capacity of 2 billion cubic meters of natural gas and 130,000 metric tons of sulfur, said the company.

Guo Tonglou, executive director and Party chief of Sinopec's Southwest Petroleum Bureau, said the gas field, with proven natural gas reserves of more than 100 billion cubic meters, is the third large-scale gas field of its type discovered by Sinopec in the basin, after Puguang and Yuanba gas fields.

"Scientific and technological innovation has played a leading role in the development of the gas field. Its full completion and operation have provided a successful experience for the scale-efficient development of ultra-deep oil and gas resources," Guo said.

The main gas reservoir of the western Sichuan gas field is buried at an average depth of about 6,000 meters, where geological conditions are quite complex,

## 2 billion cubic meters

annual production capacity of Chuanxi gas field

making it extremely difficult to develop in a cost-effective manner, said Lei Wei, director of the bureau's engineering technology research institute.

Lei said the bureau has independently developed a series of leading technologies and techniques for the drilling and construction of ultra-deep and long-scale gas field of its type discovered by Sinopec in the basin, after Puguang and Yuanba gas fields.

Pengzhou 5-1D well, the deepest of its kind in the western Sichuan gas field, has a depth of 8,208 meters and a horizontal length of 1,893 meters. Its daily output has reached 600,000 cubic meters, Lei said.

Li Huachang, production and operations management manager of Sinopec Southwest Oil and Gas Co, said the field has 16 wells, with daily output exceeding 6 million

cubic meters when operating at full capacity — equivalent to the daily gas demand of about 12 million households.

Cai Suode, chief expert at Sinopec Southwest Oil and Gas Co, said the gas field has achieved a total sulfur recovery rate of over 99.9 percent by integrating advanced gas extraction and desulfurization technologies.

"The gas can meet national first-class standards and there is no wastewater discharge," Cai said.

The gas field has also established an intelligent operations and maintenance management platform to ensure safe and environmentally friendly processes throughout the entire operation and reduce carbon emissions, he added.

Sinopec has so far discovered proven reserves of nearly 3 trillion cubic meters of natural gas in the Sichuan Basin, with an annual production capacity of 26 billion cubic meters and a cumulative production of more than 200 billion cubic meters, the company said.

Zhang Chunqi contributed to this story. Contact the writers at pengchao@chinadaily.com.cn

## Manufacturing access latest opening-up move

Foreign firms upbeat on more investment, biz opportunities

By LIU YUKUN liuyukun@chinadaily.com.cn

China's recent announcement that it would completely remove market access restrictions on foreign investment in manufacturing sparked optimism among numerous foreign enterprises as they seek collaboration with Chinese entities for more growth opportunities, particularly in high-end manufacturing.

Experts view this initiative as a positive signal for China's active expansion of high-standard openness, injecting fresh momentum into global industrial development.

The remarks came after this year's Government Work Report, delivered during the recently concluded two sessions, said that all market access restrictions on foreign investment in manufacturing will be abolished, and market access restrictions in services sectors — such as telecommunications and healthcare — will be reduced.

Andrew Choy, global accounting firm Ernst & Young China's international tax and transaction services partner, said the latest announcement on the comprehensive opening of manufacturing signifies a crucial milestone in encouraging more foreign direct investment and collaboration.

"This demonstrates China's willingness to provide the largest market globally for foreign investors to explore innovation in advanced manufacturing and commercialize related innovative outcomes. This move also implies that China can accelerate the comprehensive upgrade of manufacturing," Choy said.

"In the context of the global restructuring of supply chains in many critical industries, China,

through these policies, can make a more significant contribution to global industrial development. Many technologically advanced economies have expressed optimism about the Chinese market. Their manufacturing enterprises also showed a willingness to collaborate with Chinese entities in high-end manufacturing," he added.

Mathias Klein, chief sales officer of EMAG Group, a global manufacturing system supplier based in Germany, said: "We hope the delivery volume of our Chinese factories will double in the next three to four years. Correspondingly, this investment will require at least several million euros. This is the strategy we are implementing — continuous investment in China. We express our confidence in the Chinese market through action."

Norbert Wiest, general manager of the Asia branch of global machine tool manufacturer Schwaebische Werkzeugmaschinen GmbH — also based in Germany — said: "China is (a) nearly unbelievable (market) for SW, as the peak seems to be never reached even under unstable environmental situations in the last years. Therefore, SW believes in (the potential of) the Chinese market. In SW Group business, SW China is contributing more than 40 percent of the order intake in total in 2022, with now more than 100 customers, 1,000 machines and 400 employees in China."

Jiang Ying, a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and chair of market consultancy Deloitte China, said the removal of market access restrictions on foreign investment in manufacturing indicates that China will continue to actively expand high-standard openness, connecting the domestic market with the "two-way journey" of foreign investment, injecting a continuous new driving force into global industrial development.

In addition, the State Council,

China's Cabinet, issued a 24-measure document last year addressing core concerns of foreign-funded enterprises such as intellectual property protections. This has showcased China's firm determination to promote further opening-up, thus greatly boosting the confidence of foreign-funded enterprises in China. Looking ahead, China's potential in innovation and green development will bring numerous opportunities for foreign enterprises, Jiang said.

According to the State Administration of Foreign Exchange, last year, foreign investment in China saw a net inflow. Specifically, net inflows from foreign equity-based direct investments amounted to \$62.1 billion last year. There was also a net inflow of securities investments into China, reaching a near two-year high in scale during the fourth quarter.

"We have reasons to believe that the growth momentum of foreign investment in China will not only continue but will also further strengthen. Our global clients, including corporate executives and major investors, have expressed optimism about the Chinese market. They believe that China remains a hotbed for attracting foreign investment, with comparative advantages in new industries, technology talent pools and the overall business environment," Jiang said.

"I am optimistic about the foreign investment situation in China this year and believe that this growth trend will continue in the foreseeable future. The frequent new trends in foreign investment projects and the accelerating expansion of foreign-funded enterprises in China this year are positive responses to China's long-term stable economic growth and high-quality development policies. As China deepens reform and opening-up, especially in investment opportunities in high-tech, environmental protection and modern services, there will be increasing opportunities to attract more foreign capital," she added.

## Zeiss Vision stays positive on business growth in Chinese market

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai zhouwenting@chinadaily.com.cn

Zeiss Vision is confident of growing by double digits in China due to the country's unique consumer demographics and rising awareness about eye care, a senior executive of the German manufacturer of eye-glass lenses and ophthalmic instruments said.

The company expects to show robust business growth in China, which has been one of its priority markets and fastest-growing regions, said Sven Hermann, a member of the executive board of the 178-year-old Zeiss Group.

"We've seen double-digit growth rates in the China market for many consecutive years. We are highly attentive to the market demands in China and will continue to increase our investments in this country," said Hermann,

who is also head of Zeiss Consumer Markets.

"The company reached more than 10 billion euros (\$10.93 billion) in sales in the last fiscal year. We've been adding nearly 1 billion euros in global sales each year in the past years, and China, where the vision care business is doing fairly well, contributed to that," he said during the Shanghai International Optics Fair, which concluded on Wednesday.

During the fair, Zeiss Vision launched a new brand concept, "Nobody sees like you", marking a comprehensive upgrade from concept to products and services.

From providing lens products to complete solutions for consumers of different age groups and scenarios, Zeiss aims to further consolidate the concept of eye health management throughout the life cycle of consumer needs.

Data show that Chinese household expenditures on eye health have been rising.

The optometric business revenue of Shanghai-based Ai'er Ophthalmology, and Huaxia Ophthalmology, based in Xiamen, Fujian province, rose by 30.5 percent and 17.7 percent, respectively, year-on-year in the first half of 2023, according to the company.

Hermann said the age distribution pyramid in China makes the market very important, and that opportunities lie in consumer groups, including children with myopia and the elderly.

"Opportunities also lie in the middle-aged, who include those born in the 1980s and have reached an age range when eye care becomes quite important. We would like to accompany this journey," he said.

According to data released by the

National Health Commission in September, there were more than 700 million people with myopia in China. The overall myopia rate among children and adolescents was 52.7 percent, the most in the world.

"In child myopia, China has a higher progression in this area than in other parts of the world. But we see that such a myopia trend will hit other parts of the world. So, all the learnings we have in China will be exported globally later," said Hermann.

A lens product clinically proven to slow down child myopia progression — a research and development result from the company's China R&D center — has been marketed in Europe after its China launch in 2022. Clinical trials are underway worldwide.

"It's a prominent example that products and services currently

developed in China are actually for China and beyond. Therefore, our investments are not only in China for China, but in China to serve the world," said Hermann, adding that the company has spent 15 percent of its revenue on R&D each year.

He said investments in China will focus on building more professional manufacturing, and devices or technologies for optometry. He added that the investment amount will be significant.

There have been huge changes in terms of choice of optical lenses and eye care concepts in China, as revealed by the company's sales data.

The market was happy with entry-level products two decades ago, but the most sophisticated ones are quickly catching up these days, said Hermann.

"So, such a consumer campaign

We are highly attentive to the market demands in China and will continue to increase our investments in this country."

Sven Hermann, member of the executive board of Zeiss Group



launched at the Shanghai fair is important and shows our long-term relationship with Chinese customers. We used to focus on supporting optical retail, and now with the consumer campaign, we want to ensure that we help consumers to better understand the importance of eye care and the difference in eye lenses," he said.

## Nation powerful engine of global economic recovery, Rio Tinto exec says

By ZHENG XIN zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

Despite facing domestic and international challenges, China's economy demonstrated fundamental strength and resilience in 2023, and the country remains a powerful engine of global economic recovery, a top company executive said.

"As the world's second-largest economy, we believe China will continue to be a driving force for global manufacturing and trading, and an important stabilizer in the global supply chain," said Alf Barrios, chief commercial officer of Rio Tinto.

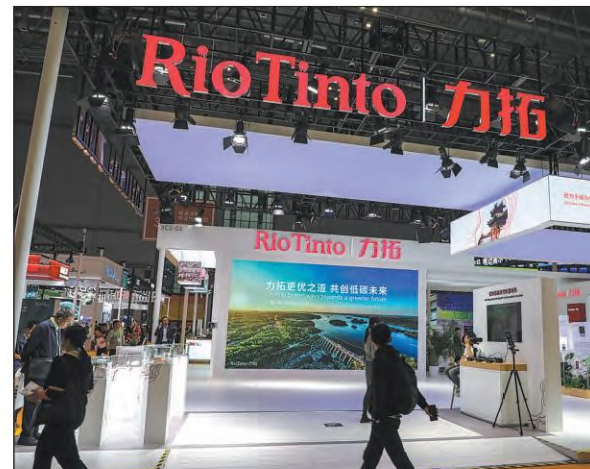
Barrios' comments came after the Government Work Report announced the country's economic expansion goal during the two sessions early this month. The report was delivered by Premier Li Qiang at the opening of the second session of the

14th National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, in Beijing.

"China outlined a strong and clear roadmap for its economic development in 2024, and I am confident the country remains a powerful engine for global economic recovery," he said.

"China stated its dedication to growing new quality productive forces to propel high-quality development, with strong commitment to green development in particular. This represents tremendous potential for Rio Tinto in terms of both trade and strategic partnerships."

Forecasting strong demand from manufacturing and infrastructure investment, specifically in solar cell production, lithium-ion battery and EV production in China, Rio Tinto said it looks forward to broadening and deepening its collaboration with Chinese partners, jointly developing



The Rio Tinto booth is seen during the sixth China International Import Expo in Shanghai in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

decarbonization solutions and navigating the industry's low-carbon transformation with innovation.

According to Barrios, China's emphasis on developing new quality productive forces and advanced manufacturing by giving full play to the leading role of innovation will enhance the resilience and competitiveness of its industrial and supply chains, and inject new impetus into the country's long-term economic growth.

"I believe the rise of new quality productive forces will inject new momentum into China's economic recovery and help boost its core competitiveness on the global stage," he said.

China's efforts in developing new quality productive forces will ensure a more resilient economy while improving the resilience of its industrial and supply chains, said Li Xianjun, an associate researcher at

the Institute of Industrial Economics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Strengthening the capacity to defend against external risks will help build the country into a manufacturing powerhouse, Li with the CASS said.

As the largest market of Rio Tinto, China is vital to the long-term success of the company, which has been China's largest iron ore supplier with around 250 million metric tons of shipments every year, and also a provider of key products such as copper, bauxite, alumina, borate, salt, and other minerals, said Barrios.

"Openness and cooperation being the enduring drivers of progress, China's ongoing openness will foster collaboration and innovation with profound implications for the world," he said.

"I believe foreign businesses, including Rio Tinto, will be able to contribute more to helping China grow and achieve its goals for high-quality development."

# BUSINESS FOCUS

## New forces to enhance charm of supersized mkt

BEIJING — What is the charm of China's supersized market?

Every 24 hours, an average of 27,000-plus new businesses are registered, over 80,000 vehicles roll off the assembly line, products worth 35 billion yuan (\$4.86 billion) are sold online, and some 300 million parcels are delivered nationwide.

Over the past decade, China — as the world's second-largest economy — has fostered a resilient and vibrant domestic market that owns great potential and brings benefits to the world.

### Enormous advantages

Analysts believe the Chinese market nowadays enjoys growing scale, better market structure, more complete rules and institutions, and stronger international influence and attraction.

China has the world's largest middle-income group and represents the second-largest consumer market, which provides enormous opportunities for businesses in various sectors — such as auto manufacturers, food and cosmetics brands across the globe.

With the robust domestic market, China contributes over 30 percent of global economic growth. As China is the major trading partner of over 140 countries and regions, every one percentage point of its economic growth will be translated into a 0.3-percentage-point increase in the output of other economies.

As the world's major producer, the country possesses all industrial categories and its manufacturing added value accounts for 30 percent of the world's total. China has remained the top goods trading country for years, and its railway and expressway networks are also unrivaled.

The market is still evolving and progressing, with vigor and momentum offered by 180 million business entities and 170 million people who have received higher education or have professional skills.

Lured by market opportunities, foreign businesses have been increasing their presence here in the past decades, with the number of foreign-funded enterprises in China amounting to over 1.18 million. Products from Apple's iPhone to Tesla's electric vehicles prove the criti-

cal role of the Chinese market in global supply chains.

Foreign investors on the hunt for growth potential do not need to look too far for "the next China" because "the next China is China", said Joe Ngai, chairman of McKinsey & Company in Greater China.

### Innovation-intensive

It took China 27 years from 1995 to 2022 to see its annual new energy vehicle output rise from zero to 10 million, whereas reaching the second 10-million output goal took only 17 months from February 2022 to July 2023.

Wang Yiming, vice-chairman of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges, said China's super-large market significantly improves the international competitiveness of its manufacturing sector and vigorously promotes the development of new industries, new business formats and new business models, among others.

Over the years, China's super-large market has fast-tracked the development of new infrastructure and emerging industries.

Currently, more than half of the world's NEVs are running on the roads of China and the country's digital payments in terms of value account for almost half of the global total.

The total scale of China's computing power ranks second in the world, and the number of artificial intelligence enterprises in China exceeds 4,400, said the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

In a move to map out the development of strategic emerging and future industries, China has recently made developing new quality productive forces a catchphrase in its policymaking.

By underscoring this concept, China aims to foster advanced productivity through revolutionary tech breakthroughs, innovative allocation of production factors and deepened industrial upgrading.

"In the face of unprecedented changes in the world, scientific and technological innovation has become a center of China's economic and social development," said Xue Lan, dean of Schwarzman College at Tsinghua University.

XINHUA



An aerial view of the economic and technological development zone in Pinghu, East China's Zhejiang province. XINHUA

## Multinational firms take a shine to Zhejiang province

Pinghu zone grabs spotlight due to favorable policies, fast-growing sales

HANGZHOU — Since the end of the Spring Festival holiday, Shen Yafeng, operations manager at Thermofin Heat Exchanger (Pinghu) Co Ltd, has been busy overseeing the construction of the company's two new plants.

Upon completion, the production area is expected to quadruple, enabling it to efficiently handle substantial orders.

Thermofin is a German-funded enterprise specializing in high-end heat exchangers, and its products are mainly used in indoor ski resorts, high-end cold storage and other industries. In 2018, the company established a factory in Pinghu, East China's Zhejiang province.

"At first, we rented a 5,000-square-meter factory in the Pinghu economic and technological development zone, hoping to gradually expand in the Chinese market by localizing our production," said Shen, adding that he did not expect the Chinese factory to reach an output value of 20 million yuan (\$2.78 million) in just a single year.

Since then, the annual output value of the company's Pinghu branch has soared, nearly doubling on average every year.

Thermofin's rapid growth in China can be attributed to the strong integrated support of technologies, market demand and production capacity. "We have core technologies in rapid cooling and precise temperature controls, including the ability to keep the minimum temperature difference of large cold storage at no more than 0.1 C," Shen said.

"These technologies give us an advantage in the construction, oper-



Workers operate on an air conditioner assembly line of Gree in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on March 1. ZHANG XIANGRONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

ation and maintenance of high-end commercial ultra-cold storage and data center cooling," Shen added.

Combining cutting-edge technologies with China's efficient and dynamic production capabilities, many foreign companies like Thermofin have opted to expand their investment in the country.

In 2023, Thermofin initiated a plan to build new factories and its Asia-Pacific regional headquarters in China, with an estimated investment of 155 million yuan.

"We chose to acquire land to build a factory while further improving employee training. This proves that we attach great importance to the Chinese production base and the Chinese market," Shen said.

Over the years, the Pinghu zone has attracted over 300 foreign-funded enterprises, with intelligent manufacturing of advanced equipment and biotechnology being key indus-

tries. Many foreign companies have expanded their investments and production there.

In 1994, Japan's JFE Group ventured into China to invest and establish Zhejiang JFE Shoji Steel Products Co Ltd. Over the past three decades, the Chinese branch has undergone nine rounds of investment expansion, with the group's total investment increasing 20 fold, the company said.

Maeda Tatsushi, managing director of Zhejiang JFE Shoji Steel Products Co Ltd., said that in order to adapt to the development trend of China's new energy vehicle market, the company invested \$34 million in 2022 to implement a specialized project aimed at achieving an annual output of 20,400 metric tons of engine core stamping parts.

"The project is expected to be put into production in June, mainly producing NEV motor and electric

power steering parts. It is expected to reach an annual output value of 700 million yuan," said Maeda.

The company's entire chain of raw material procurement and product sales is now concentrated in China. He said that the continuous development of enterprises is more closely integrated with Chinese industries.

"In 2023, our raw materials mainly came from Baosteel and Shougang Group. Regarding our products, 98 percent of the total 80,000 tons shipped were sold in China," he added.

According to data from the Pinghu municipal government, in 2023 alone, the city signed 27 foreign investment projects, with a total investment of \$2.54 billion. Its actual use of foreign investment during the period topped \$480 million.

XINHUA



Employees carry out quality tests at an SAIC Motor factory in Ningde, Fujian province, in February. JIANG KEHONG / XINHUA

## Foreign investors sanguine on China's economic potential, prospects for profits

GUANGZHOU — US energy giant ExxonMobil plans to invest 10 billion yuan (\$1.39 billion) in its Huizhou ethylene project in South China's Guangdong province this year.

Addressing the Guangdong Provincial High-quality Development Conference in Shenzhen recently, Jean-Marc Taton, chairman of ExxonMobil China, said ExxonMobil has already invested over 30 billion yuan in the first phase of its Huizhou ethylene project.

ExxonMobil is just one of the many foreign companies expanding investment in China.

The Ministry of Commerce said that in 2023, China's investment structure continued to be optimized, and the proportion of investment in high-tech industries reached 37.4 percent, marking a record high. Foreign investors

poured capital into 53,766 newly established foreign-funded enterprises in China, a year-on-year increase of 39.7 percent.

Foreign firms are optimistic about the Chinese market, said Harley Seyedin, president of the American Chamber of Commerce in South China, adding that the potential growth of the Chinese market is the primary driver behind increasing investments in China — or shifting investments from other markets to China — followed by industrial cluster effects and preferential policies.

The majority of the 183 companies surveyed are optimistic about the growth of the Chinese market, according to a recent report released by AmCham South China.

Of these companies, 76 percent plan to reinvest in China in 2024. Of those who have plans for reinvest-

ment in China in 2024, 45 percent state that their primary area of investment focuses on sales, marketing and business development. Other key areas include research and development, automation and productivity development.

Over half of the companies surveyed believe that their overall return on investment in China is better than their overall return on investments globally. Some 88 percent have already made profits in China, among which 46 percent reported that they have met their budget expectations. Moreover, 90 percent of US companies have achieved profitability in China, according to the report.

Although sales volume decreased slightly in 2023, the profit margin of Fluidmaster China, a US-funded sanitary ware products enterprise,

increased more than expected.

David Yang, managing director at Fluidmaster China, said: "This reflects the trend of quality development, and high-end products are more competitive. We can also see that the entire market is recovering rapidly, and an increasing number of people are seeking a higher quality of life. Our goal is to achieve 5-10 percent growth this year."

Despite challenges in international economic cooperation and trade exchange, 86 percent of the companies studied claim that they will not decouple from the Chinese market due to US-China trade tensions.

In 2023, 62 percent of companies surveyed chose not to shift their investments out of China. Some 66 percent of US companies claim that they will remain committed to the Chinese market, representing

the highest proportion of all businesses studied, said the AmCham South China report.

David Jacques Roumanie, Asia general manager of EuroKera (Guangzhou) Co Ltd, a US-France joint venture, feels optimistic about the Chinese market.

"We are quite representative of the economy of China somehow, because we followed the growth, we benefited from the growth until now. And I think we can replicate that in the future as well."

Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong — a major manufacturing hub in South China — has maintained its status as the top investment destination in the country for seven consecutive years, followed by Shenzhen, Shanghai and Beijing. Over half the companies polled see an improvement in the

business environment in South China, an uptick of 5 percent compared with 2022, said the report.

The development of regional convergence and improvement of the business environment also provide more opportunities for foreign companies.

William Huang, managing partner at consulting firm Ernst & Young China South, said: "In April 2023, we opened a Greater Bay Area center of excellence in Qianhai focusing on technology and innovation. We hope to cooperate with enterprises and other parties in developing AI blockchain and big data technologies and supporting the companies in the unit, which will result in better development in the GBA."

XINHUA

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Smokescreen of trade can't hide true troublemaking intent of visit

Although US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo stressed that what she led to the Philippines was a "presidential trade and investment mission on behalf of President Joe Biden", the impression her trip has left is that she was promising mercenary money if Manila continues to do Washington's dirty work in the South China Sea.

With details few and far between on how it will be spent, the fact that the \$1 billion the United States proposes to provide will be given through the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity is a telling sign of its true intent. Washington has made no bones about the IPEF being a geopolitical tool targeting China.

Although Raimondo repeatedly stressed the \$1 billion investment "delivers on President Biden's commitment during Philippine President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr's May 2023 visit to Washington to work together to advance US-Philippines economic ties", it is clear what the US expects the Philippines to deliver for the money — a major contribution to its "Indo-Pacific" strategy.

That the deal between the two is unlikely to go as smoothly as they anticipate is foreshadowed by the Philippine side raising a small request during Raimondo's visit that Raimondo chose to prevaricate on. Her hosts asked for the Biden administration to give a green light to several shipments of garments made by a Philippine clothing company that it has held up since November last year on suspicion that the cotton was produced by what it alleges is "forced labor" in China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

But Raimondo would only say that she "has committed to assist" the Philippines on that issue, Philippine Trade Undersecretary Ceferino Rodolfo told the media after raising the question in his meeting with the US commerce chief.

Even though Manila is well aware the "forced labor" in Xinjiang is another lie of Washington to smear China — the Philippine garment industry's broad cooperation with its Chinese partners these years speaks volumes of the mutually beneficial nature of bilateral collaboration — it acts so timorously on the issue, as it is concerned that being tarred with that brush might tarnish the image of its apparel exports to the US, one of Manila's largest export markets, as told by an anonymous Philippine official.

Raimondo's delegation comprised US businesspeople as was to be expected for a visit by a commerce official whose purpose was reported in detail. But an incongruous presence was that of Commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command Admiral John Aquilino, whose appearance in the trade and investment mission was akin to a square peg in a round hole.

Yet it has been surmised that Raimondo's trade delegation only acted as a front for Aquilino, whose remit was to take advantage of the visit to try to weave the Philippines further into the US' anti-China net in the region. Last month, President Biden nominated Samuel Paparo, currently the commander of the US Pacific Fleet and a tougher China hawk, to replace Aquilino as commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command, a position he has only held since April 2021. It is believed that Aquilino was using his presumably last visit to the Philippines in that role to pave the way for his successor.

Aquilino met with General Romeo Brawner Jr, chief of staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, in Quezon on Tuesday, for what an AFP spokesman said were discussions on continued cooperation between the two militaries and exchanges on the programs and activities that have been lined up so far.

Since the cooperation between the two militaries so far has been primarily on provocations targeting China, it can be anticipated that more are on the cards.

## ROK's dependence on US its real risk

After Washington revealed its strategy to ensure secure and reliable supplies of critical minerals in June 2019, the Republic of Korea followed suit with its own critical mineral strategy in 2023, focusing on its "dependencies" on Chinese imports.

The strategy identified 10 minerals as critical, including lithium and nickel, which have been placed under special regulation, with the strategy aiming to reduce the ROK's reliance on Chinese supplies of the minerals by 50 percent before 2030.

With ROK enterprises stepping up their efforts to diversify their suppliers, a Yonhap News Agency report on Wednesday predicts that "decoupling" from China on critical minerals will become "even more conspicuous" as the year progresses.

According to the report, imports from China of key minerals needed for manufacturing electric vehicles in the ROK dropped for the first time in years in 2023 — lithium hydroxide from 87.9 percent to 79.6 percent year-on-year and neodymium magnets from 87.5 percent to 84.7 percent.

While diversifying and de-risking crucial supply chains may be reasonable to avoid overdependence on a single supplier in the event that supplier becomes unreliable for whatever reason, that is not what the ROK and the US are doing.

As the Yonhap report states, the decline in imports of the minerals from China is due to intensive government efforts to "de-sinicize" the ROK economy. With both the government and businesses striving to diversify supply chains, "specific accomplishments" will begin to emerge this year, according to the report.

This seems a matter of course correction under the present circumstances as the US is pushing its allies and partners to force China out of their supply chains as it tries to impede China's development. Despite benefitting from China's development and the strong economic cooperation forged since China launched its reform and opening-up more than 40 years ago, Seoul has been prompted to do Washington's bidding as the current government wants to strengthen the ROK's security ties with the US, as it considers the efforts of its predecessor to achieve a rapprochement with Pyongyang to have been a failure. It wants to take a tougher line toward the ROK's northern neighbor. Washington, on its part, views the ROK as a key part of both its strategy in Northeast Asia and its "Indo-Pacific" strategy.

The acceleration of the ROK's critical mineral strategy comes after it received Washington's assurance about it being covered by the US' "extended nuclear deterrence". It is Seoul's inability to forge cordial relations with Pyongyang that has created its real dependency, which is on the illusory comfort of the US' security umbrella. The upshot of this is a vicious circle in which the ROK's dependency on the US further alienates the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, leading to a worsening security environment that pushes Seoul further into Washington's embrace.

That is why despite the risk of ruining its long friendly and tremendously profitable relations with China, the ROK is by and large doing Washington's bidding.

A key government-sponsored think tank in the ROK published a proposal for building stable supply chains of core minerals on March 6. According to this, to stabilize supplies of key minerals, the ROK should first formulate a relationship of mutual trust with China, which the think tank believes will assume a dominant position in the global market, and make the country's China policy accordingly. As multiple industry sources in the ROK have indicated, in spite of ROK enterprises having increased imports from countries such as Chile and Australia, the ROK's dependence on Chinese imports remains high.

Seoul should reconsider its approach, as it will be paying unnecessary costs for its ill-considered dependency on the US.

Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## New real-estate development mode key to solving housing market woes

The road ahead for China's housing market, which is still undergoing a period of adjustments, is a topic of concern in the public domain these days. The policies recently announced by the top authorities indicate that the country will strive to seek breakthroughs by stabilizing the market, preventing risks and promoting transformation, while actively building a new mode of real estate development.

It should be noted that China's real estate market still has a foundation for long-term, stable and healthy development. For a period of time, the relevant departments have introduced a series of policy measures, such as lowering thresholds for first-home buying, reducing down payment ratios, cutting lending rates, and offering preferential fees and taxation. Local governments have also adopted a series of targeted policy measures to promote the delivery of houses to buyers, and keep the bottom line of no systemic risks. Although the task of stabilizing the real

estate market is still arduous, from the perspective of China's urbanization process, there are still more than 30 billion square meters of old houses in the cities and towns that need renovation, which leaves great potential and space for the development of the domestic real estate market.

The authorities should strive to promote the stabilization of the housing market and its recovery as a primary task. All cities should make good use of regulatory means at their disposal and make differentiated and precise measures based on their respective supply and demand relationship. After taking into account the local population, and supply and demand, the governments of all cities should formulate local housing development plans, and optimize real estate-related policies, to stabilize the local real estate market.

In terms of risk prevention, all localities should equally treat and meet the reasonable financing needs of real estate enterprises of different ownership. So far, a

financing coordination mechanism has been established by hundreds of cities across the country and more than 6,000 real estate projects, of which 82 percent are projects of private real estate and mixed-ownership enterprises, have been included in a "white list", which means financing support can be given. In promoting transformation, the country will focus on exploring the establishment of multitiered housing supply products, and strive to solve the housing problems for new citizens, young people, migrant workers and other groups.

In the long run, the construction and improvement of a new mode of real estate development that has diversified housing demands under market-based and government-subsidized housing supplies is the key to solving the problems and dilemma facing China's current real-estate development and promoting its healthy development.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

## Sanhe offers lessons on how not to treat media

Journalists from the China Media Group were pushed away when they went to report from the site of a natural gas explosion in Sanhe, Hebei province, on Wednesday, in which seven people were killed and 27 injured as of Thursday morning.

Local authorities issued a written apology later, attributing what the journalists had encountered to "poor communication skills ... by our on-site personnel".

It is clear some officials still see journal-

ists as "troublemakers". But by covering the situation on the spot, journalists can keep the people informed of the latest development of the incident.

Had there been no journalists reporting live from the spot, the public would have either had to depend on some official news release or on whatever rumor was circulating on social networking sites. While the former may be lacking in detail, the latter would have the potential to create distur-

ance. That makes the presence of journalists important.

The Sanhe incident should offer all local governments a lesson. During major emergencies, apart from rendering every effort to carry out search and rescue operations, local governments also need to facilitate media interviews. The authorities should not hinder journalists from performing their duty.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## False range claims will come back to bite EV makers

A number of electric vehicle brands are suspected of exaggerating the distance their EVs can go per charge by as much as 45 percent. In response to customers' doubts, the companies claim the disparity is because of driving styles, weather conditions and different measurement standards.

In the north of China, affected by low temperatures in winter, the battery life of EVs is understandably compromised. However, even though some consumers are well aware of that, they complain that the mileage they get from their vehicles is still way below their expectations.

EV companies are actually using a theoretical endurance mileage per charge to mislead consumers into believing that their EVs can really drive that far. The actual battery life is one of the core indicators of EV performance. The EV makers are obliged to tell their consumers the true data, especially how far the EVs can go per charge in extremely low temperature or under undesirable traffic conditions.

This information is of crucial importance to consumers and it will influence their buying decision. If the EV enterprises always use theoretical data to promote sales, they will soon reap what they have sown as it is their own credibility and brand image that will bear the brunt of what is in essence a fraudulent marketing practice.

Friday marks the annual World Consumer Rights Day. As shown by relevant media reports, the exaggerated battery life in EV advertisements has already become a focus of many consumers' complaints.

Once there are disputes between the EV enterprises and consumers, the latter is invariably required to present the testing reports of third-party institutions. However, although China is the largest EV producer in the world, it lacks corresponding testing standards. And because of that, the third-party testing institutions cannot provide what the consumers demand from them.

The absence of third-party testing makes it difficult to effectively supervise the enterprises, whose exaggerated claims violate the legitimate rights and interests of consumers. This problem deserves great attention from the indus-

try and market regulators.

China urgently needs to establish professional and rigorous testing procedures, systems and standards for EVs. That will be conducive to not only protecting consumers' rights and interests but also promoting healthy competition in the EV industry and market.

Meanwhile, the commerce and industry regulators should tighten their grip on false advertising. For example, by formulating mandatory industry standards, the EV companies can be required to clearly reveal the true battery life data in real driving environments.

It should be a basic consensus of the industry that the EV enterprises must not make misleading claims about their products. China's EV market is already quite large and it is expanding rapidly. Against this background, the EV companies should focus on long-term development, not short-term profits. Only by adopting a down-to-earth attitude and actively seeking to make breakthroughs in core technologies can they ensure the steady and long-term development of the industry and its competitiveness in the world.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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## COMMENT

Hu Xiaofei and Gao Shan

## Navigating the chip industry's landscape

China's semiconductor industry has made remarkable progress on almost all fronts in recent years. The Chinese government's implementation of strategic, favorable policies and incentives, from financial support to tax exemptions and talent attraction, has played a pivotal role in propelling the industry forward. These measures have borne fruit across the semiconductor production spectrum, including chip design, manufacturing, testing and packaging.

China's prowess in chip design has greatly improved, with domestic companies making breakthroughs in specific domains. Products such as Huawei's MATE60, equipped with the domestically developed Kirin 9000s chip, have underscored the Chinese semiconductor industry's capability to make competitive, cutting-edge products despite the global challenges.

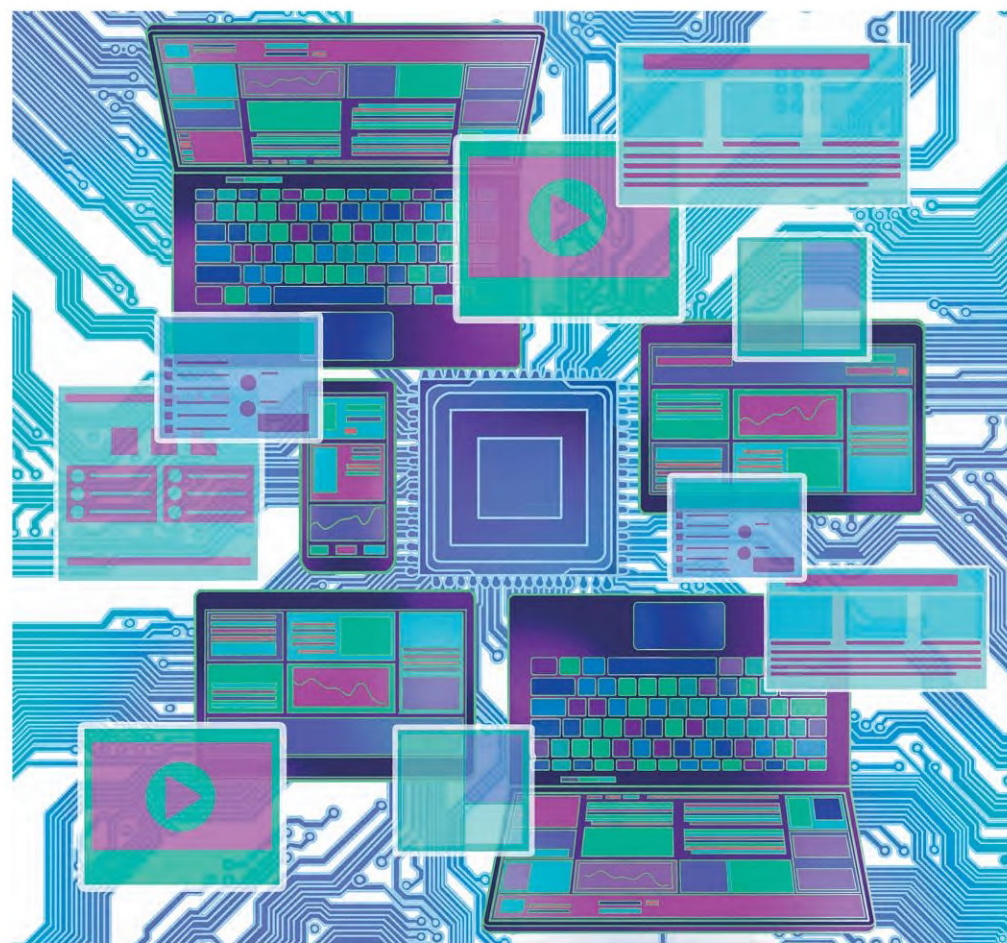
While acknowledging these accomplishments, it is essential to recognize that certain gaps and challenges still exist when compared with some front-runners in the global semiconductor industry. To achieve breakthroughs and clear the bottlenecks, the Chinese semiconductor industry must strategically focus on multiple key areas.

A critical milestone in the global semiconductor landscape happened in December last year when Dutch lithography machine company ASML delivered the world's first 2 nanometer lithography machine to Intel. It is hoped this will pave the way for the global adoption of 2nm technology.

In stark contrast, China's mainstream lithography machines still hover around 28nm and 14nm, with 7nm chips achieved through the use of multiple exposure techniques. To close this technological gap, substantial efforts are required to achieve breakthroughs in advanced process technology, particularly in semiconductor equipment such as lithography machines. A proactive government approach, including increased support in terms of funding and policies, is indispensable to promote research and innovation in domestic chip equipment manufacturing.

The quality of materials used in chip manufacturing has a direct bearing on chip performance and reliability. There is a gap between Chinese semiconductor enterprises and leading global chipmakers in terms of both research and manufacturing capabilities, as well as in high-end materials. To narrow this gap, China needs to increase investment, augment research, and promote technological innovations.

The field of chip design relies on various electronic design automation (EDA) tools and software, a market traditionally dominated by industry giants such as Synopsys, Cadence and Siemens. While some domestic companies have taken big strides in tool coverage, the practicality, maturity and reliability of their tools still lag behind those offered by the industry



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

**However, to achieve global leadership, Chinese enterprises have to increase investments and make sustained efforts. With the industry continuing to evolve, China is poised to make important technological breakthroughs and expand its market share.**

behemoths. It is therefore imperative to bolster collaboration with EDA tool suppliers, and propel the development of domestic tools to raise China's standing in the global chip design industry.

Besides, the rapid growth of China's domestic chip industry in recent years has led to a surge in the number of enterprises, with many blindly following the trend of "domestic substitution". While the integrated circuit design industry is progressing toward higher-end applications, the mainstream still remains entrenched in the mid- to low-end spectrum. Some companies, in their quest for market share and expansion, may inadvertently neglect technological innovation and the development of high-end products.

This has given rise to internal competition within the mid- to low-end chip market. So, striking a balance between market expansion and substantial investment in research and development for high-end products is crucial to

ensure sustainable growth.

In conclusion, China's semiconductor industry has undeniably made significant achievements, particularly in burgeoning sectors such as the internet of things and automotive electronics. And the collaborative efforts of the government, coupled with the tireless endeavors of chip enterprises, have borne fruit.

However, to achieve global leadership, Chinese enterprises have to increase investments and make sustained efforts. With the industry continuing to evolve, China is poised to make important technological breakthroughs and expand its market share. The future of China's semiconductor industry is promising, with the potential to make significant contributions to technological advancements not only in the country but on a global scale.

*The authors are founders of Yanfen Online and integrated circuit specialists. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*



Chen Weihua

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## EU should advise Russia, Ukraine jaw-jaw is better than war-war

Pope Francis made headlines last week for his comment on ending the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In an interview with Swiss broadcaster RSI, recorded in February but released last week, Pope Francis said: "I think that the strongest one is the one who looks at the situation, thinks about the people and has the courage of the white flag, and negotiates."

He also said "the word negotiate is a courageous word. When you see that you are defeated, that things are not going well, you have to have the courage to negotiate", and added, "don't be ashamed of negotiating before things get worse", meaning before many more people die.

Ukrainian leaders and many Western politicians have rebuffed the Pope's remarks, interpreting the words "white flag" as telling Ukraine to surrender. But the Vatican spokesman said the Pope referred to the image of the white flag suggested by the interviewer to indicate a cessation of hostilities.

While what exactly Pope Francis said might be debatable, the message he sent is clear. The only solution lies in negotiations, because there is no solution on the battlefield, only more deaths and devastation.

The strong backlash against the Pope in Ukraine and some Western countries is not surprising. The words "negotiation" and "diplomacy" have become taboo in much of the West, especially after the United States sabotaged early peace talks between Russia and Ukraine in the spring of 2022.

**The world needs more diplomacy and negotiations to restore lasting peace, and cessation of weapon supply to end conflicts.**

French President Emmanuel Macron tried that approach in 2022, but he was sharply criticized by many EU politicians for his attempt to "appease" Russia. Recently, he was criticized for saying that he doesn't rule out sending Western ground troops to Ukraine.

The only politically correct thing for the US and European politicians to do now is to talk tough on Russia and call for and supply more weapons to Ukraine.

On Wednesday, European Union member states agreed to provide an additional €5 billion (\$5.47 billion) military assistance to Ukraine until the end of this year. That comes on top of the €6.1 billion the EU has committed since early 2022.

The EU decision came a day after White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan announced a new round of military aid to Ukraine worth \$300 million, which Pentagon officials described as an "ad hoc" package made possible through US Army procurement savings.

The US and the EU are desperate to show their support for Ukraine after the US Congress blocked the funds for military aid to Ukraine. Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, who is expected to have a rematch with President Joe Biden in the presidential election later this year, said, that if elected, he would "end the conflict" by cutting off funding to Kyiv, according to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban who met with Trump at Mar-a-Lago in Florida on March 8.

A survey by the European Council on Foreign Relations in 12 EU member states in January showed that only one in 10 persons think Ukraine will emerge victorious in the conflict, with most saying a "compromise settlement" is necessary to end the hostilities. This means Pope Francis expressed the views that many share but dare not say publicly for fear of being criticized for being politically incorrect.

Since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in February 2022, most developing countries, including China, Indonesia, India, Brazil and South Africa, have called for a cease-fire and urged the two sides to hold negotiations to end the conflict.

Li Hui, special representative of the Chinese government on Eurasian affairs, concluded his second round of visits to Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Germany, France and the EU headquarters in Brussels on Tuesday, in a bid to find a political settlement to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

China, which has maintained friendly relations with both Russia and Ukraine, hopes the two sides would demonstrate political wisdom to de-escalate the situation, declare a cease-fire and work with the EU to build a sustainable European security architecture.

The world needs more diplomacy and negotiations to restore lasting peace, and cessation of weapon supply to end conflicts.

Mourad Alami

## GCI a leading advocate for cultural exchanges

On March 15 a year ago, the Chinese top leader proposed the Global Civilization Initiative, emphasizing the importance of common development and common prosperity for the world.

Cultural exchanges, essentially, involve sharing by people from different countries and backgrounds ideas, values, traditions and customs, and other knowledge about each other's countries. In our increasingly intertwined world, cultural exchanges help broaden our vision and enrich our perspective by exposing us to different traditions, values, beliefs.

The impact of cultural exchanges goes beyond the personal level; it extends to the social and cross-border levels, and the lessons inherent in them go beyond the lessons of textbooks. The least cultural exchanges do is to provide an opportunity to learn the different aspects of different societies, the ways of different people's lives, their traditions and customs, and their opinions on important national, regional and global issues, and help build mutual understanding and trust.

The ancient Silk Road, for example, embodied these traits thanks to the massive economic and cultural exchanges among people of many regions. The trade route facilitated conversations among different traders coming from distant lands. Thanks to this valuable trade route, the world came to know about silk, tea, paper, typefaces and printing, compass and gunpowder.

In modern times, cultural exchanges, an integral part of international relations, involve the exchange of not only

**It is important to mention here that the most important task of cultural exchanges is to promote mutual understanding and mutual trust, and facilitate dialogue among people from different countries.**

goods but also ideas and artifacts. Yet cultural exchanges are not necessarily limited to a group of people travelling from one country to another to exchange ideas and perspectives on important national, regional and global issues. They also include translating books, especially literary works, written in a language or languages spoken in one country, into a language spoken in another country, and telecasting one country's films in another country.

Talking about translations of literary works, I once walked into a bookstore in Hefei, Anhui province, and, out of curiosity, inquired whether they had any books by Austrian author Stefan Zweig. I was told, to my pleasant surprise, that the entire work (30 volumes) of one of the most popular writers in the first half of the 20th century had been translated into Chinese.

More surprisingly, the poems of Austro-Bohemian poet and author Franz Werfel and Romanian-born German poet Paul

Celan, whose poetry is described as closed and aloof, are freely accessible in the Chinese language on the internet. Surprisingly, the reverse (translation of Chinese authors' works into other languages) is also true. For instance, the poems of famous Chinese poets have been translated from Chinese into English, French and German. This means one can enjoy the poems of Tang Dynasty (618-907) poets Du Fu, Li Bai, Meng Haoran and Du Mu, Song Dynasty (960-1279) poets Su Shi and Lin Bu, Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) poet Gao Qi.

Pinyin, the phonetic transcription of spoken Chinese based on the Latin alphabet and developed by economist and linguist Zhou Youguang has been of immense help to non-Chinese people in learning the Chinese language, as well as to native Chinese speakers in accessing European languages. Indeed, it is cultural exchange that helps integrate the knowledge, experiences and skills of one people with another, and promotes better understanding between them.

When it comes to food and music, well-known Western fast food chains have opened thousands of outlets in China, although they try to prepare the items in a way that suits the palette of the Chinese people. The fact that some Chinese fast food chains offer the same food items but under a purely Chinese label shows some sort of resilience.

Economic globalization has greatly influenced people's lifestyle and consumption habits, and impacted the media landscape. And with the development of economic globalization, cultural exchanges among countries will increase.

It is important to mention here that the most important task of cultural exchanges is to promote mutual understanding and mutual trust, and facilitate dialogue among people from different countries. As a matter of fact, this is already taking place through lectures, concerts, exhibitions and meetings, be it in the Confucius Institutes in the universities in German cities or in the German consulate building in China.

Town twinning, too, plays an important role in building mutual understanding among different countries. Town twinning refers to pairing of cities across the world in order to foster human and cultural links, and is sometimes called "the diplomacy in small format". In this context, Hamburg, which is the sister city of Shanghai since 1986, organizes a high-level event called "China Time" every two years to promote cultural exchanges and dialogue between Germany and China.

The other sister cities in Germany and China are Cologne and Beijing, Trier and Xiamen, Braunschweig and Zhuhai, Dresden and Hangzhou, Frankfurt am Main and Guangzhou, Nuremberg and Shenzhen, Regensburg and Qingdao, and Augsburg and Jinan.

Cultural exchanges not only promote dialogue on culture but also facilitate joint research and help ease the access to archives. Cultural exchanges are like glue; they join different societies and promote friendship.

*The author is a professor at Hainan College of Foreign Studies. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## GLOBAL VIEWS



**Editor's note:** The world has undergone many changes and shocks in recent years. Enhanced dialogue between scholars from China and overseas is needed to build mutual understanding on many problems the world faces. For this purpose, the China Watch Institute of China Daily and the National Institute for Global Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, jointly present this special column: The Global Strategy Dialogue, in which experts from China and abroad will offer insightful views, analysis and fresh perspectives on long-term strategic issues of global importance.



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

VLADIMIR NOROV

## In alignment

Synergizing China's BRI with the EU's Global Gateway would promote the economic growth and sustainable development of the whole of Eurasia

The world is currently facing increasing geopolitical tensions that have exacerbated the fragmentation of the global economy and the disruption of the supply chains, which have led to shortages and rising prices, calling into question the reliability of global trade. There is an urgent need to deepen the interconnection between regions as a basis for promoting sustainable global development.



In this regard, the Belt and Road Initiative, an effective platform for international economic cooperation, has given additional impetus to the development of the world economy and formed a global network of interconnectedness, consisting of transport and information corridors.

The China-Europe Railway Express has completed more than 85,000 trips since it was launched, reaching more than 200 cities in 25 countries in Europe and creating tens of thousands of local jobs. Over the past 10 years, trade in goods between China and other Belt and Road countries has doubled.

From 2016 to 2022, the number of trains passing through Central Asia increased over nine times from 1,702 to nearly 16,000 per year. In the Xi'an Declaration of the China-Central Asia Summit, the parties emphasized the need to increase the status of Central Asia as one of the most important trans-Eurasian transportation hubs.

At the same time, the development of safe corridors connecting China and Europe with Central Asia for access to the Middle East and South Asia is of strategic importance. In this regard, the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway and road project, as well as Termez-Mazar-i-Sharif-Kabul-Peshawar Railway, will play key roles. Currently, due to the attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route has every chance of becoming the largest global transport route.

At the end of 2021, the European Union approved a new international initiative called the Global Gateway. According to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, it represents a new global "alternative" to Chinese investment.

At the Investors Forum for EU-Central Asia Transport Connectivity launched on Jan 29 in Brussels, the European Investment Bank signed memorandums of understanding on co-financing projects with

Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Uzbekistan and the Development Bank of Kazakhstan worth in total 1.47 billion euros (\$1.6 billion).

However, it is worth noticing that within competition there are also areas of cooperation and interaction between parties to develop transport infrastructure and improve access to markets. The conjunction of the BRI with the Global Gateway would create the necessary conditions for economic growth and the sustainable development of the entire Eurasia, especially Central Asia and the South Caucasus. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said at a news conference following the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in October 2023 that the BRI and the Global Gateway strategy could be aligned to leverage their respective strengths and create synergies to help developing countries accelerate infrastructure development.

Despite the EU's declared interest in expanding transport corridors for the integration of Central Asia, there is an insufficient level of investment in infrastructure projects in the region. Within the framework of the forum in Brussels, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development signed a memorandum of understanding with Kazakhstan to allocate 1.5 billion euros to projects already under preparation for the comprehensive development of transport communications in the Central Asian region. But, Minister of Transport of Kazakhstan Marat Karabayev emphasized that the implementation of large infrastructure projects will require at least 40 billion euros.

The Global Gateway strategy was only launched in 2021 and it is planned to mobilize up to 300 billion euros by 2027. Yet of this amount, only 10 billion euros are allocated for Central Asian countries. Over the past 10 years, EU member states have invested more than \$121.3 billion in Central Asia, more than 40 percent of the total foreign direct investment in the region. The bulk of EU countries' FDI went to Kazakhstan, and more than 50 percent of this FDI went to the mining industry, in particular oil and gas production. Transport and warehousing accounted for only 5 percent.

The BRI has been implemented since 2013 and has stimulated \$1 trillion investment over 10 years. By 2019, China had implemented 261 projects in Central Asia with a total value of \$136 billion. Most of these investments were aimed at creating or improving infrastructure for transporting goods and cargo

and developing natural resources. China remains the main investor in transport and logistics infrastructure in Central Asia. In order to make rational use of allocated financial resources for the development of the infrastructure of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, it is necessary to ensure appropriate coordination and cooperation in the implementation of projects within the BRI and Global Gateway in Central Asia.

For example, there is already the first implemented joint project between the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank — the construction in 2016 of a highway connecting Dushanbe in Tajikistan with the Uzbek border. The two banks have committed \$27.5 million each.

Central Asia and the South Caucasus see China and the EU as main trading partners, mainly supplying them with fossil fuels, and their exports are less diversified. To promote the diversification of the economies of Central Asia and the South Caucasus, China and the EU have enormous potential for mutually beneficial cooperation in implementing joint projects in these regions in such sectors as the digital economy, electric vehicles, energy and water saving technologies, construction, light and chemical industries, and the construction of smart cities and smart agriculture. They can also strengthen cooperation in the implementation of digital trade documents and simplification of freight transport procedures.

China and the EU, as world leaders in low-carbon and green development, can build an open and cooperative green technology cooperation chain along the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route to reduce the cost of renewable energy for developing countries, including those in Central Asia and South Caucasus.

China and the EU need to hold in-depth discussions and strive for consensus on the conjunction of the BRI and the Global Gateway in order to achieve stability and sustainable development in Eurasia and in particular in Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

The author is former director of the International Institute of Central Asia, former secretary-general of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Uzbekistan's former foreign minister. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

GAO CHENG

## Cause for concern

Countries in the Asia-Pacific are wary of being led into the trap of bloc politics by the US

The Joe Biden administration is intent on restoring US leadership in the "Indo-Pacific" by reinvigorating the United States' network of alliances and partnerships in the region.

The Biden administration is thus encouraging the US allies and partners to comprehensively strengthen relations with the US and courting its allies outside the region to engage in "Indo-Pacific" affairs.

By deeply intertwining security, political, economic and ideological issues, the US has been striving to create an all-round bloc and ecology to isolate and suppress China.

However, the situation in the Asia-Pacific region is completely different from what it was during the Cold War rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union. There is no way the Asia-Pacific region will tread the old path of the Cold War.

To start with, currently in the Asia-Pacific region, there do not exist two confrontational military alliance systems. On the one hand, there will be no China-led military alliance system in the Asia-Pacific region as the country maintains a non-alliance stance.

On the other hand, the US can hardly rally its allies to jointly contain China through multilateral measures. The US' alliance system in the Asia-Pacific region is based on the country's bilateral relations with its allies, but the cohesiveness of US-led multilateral mechanisms is relatively low. Due to the historical disputes and great differences in geopolitics and culture between the US and its Asia-Pacific allies, the US' alliance system in the region can hardly accomplish the transformation toward a networked system. Thus, a US-led, China-focused multilateral military alliance system that resembles the North Atlantic Treaty Organization can hardly take shape in the Asia-Pacific region.

Second, different from the US-Soviet Union Cold War rivalry, the competition between China and the US is focused on economic and technological competition.

China has deeply participated in the regional division of labor amid economic globalization, and its economic growth to a great extent benefits from economic globalization. Despite a possible "decoupling" in certain sectors, a full-scale "decoupling" of the world's top two economies is unlikely. In a world where the Chinese and US economies are highly interdependent and economic globalization is deeply advanced, there can hardly be two parallel economic systems completely decoupled from each other in the Asia-Pacific region, like the one during the Cold War period.

Last, the differences in ideologies and political systems between China and the US are in no way like the two ideological camps dominated respectively by the US and the Soviet Union.

Differences in values between China and the US are not based on ideological confrontation between capitalism and socialism, but rather, are based on the two nations' vastly different development models and governance models.

The so-called value-based alliance stressed by the Biden administration, which attempts to bundle economic and political exchanges between countries with ideology, is not warmly received by the US' allies.

In sharp contrast to the US' narrow-minded egoism, China has always been upholding the principle of pursuing the greater good and shared interests in its foreign diplomacy, which receives wide acclaim from the vast majority of countries.

The US is attempting to create a politics-based bloc ecology in the "Indo-Pacific", by turning regional priorities from open, inclusive development and regional governance to security issues and ideology. In military and political areas, the US has been isolating and suppressing China and coercing other countries to take sides. In the economic field, the US is building anti-China club-style multilateral mechanisms under the pretext of "security concerns". Regarding ideology, the US is seeking to build a so-called value alliance to contain China, trying to curb China's development.

Under the US' "carrot and stick" strategy, its allies in the "Indo-Pacific" and major regional countries that have strategic competition with China are showing a tendency of taking sides. But most Asia-Pacific countries are striving to maintain strategic independence, which is the foundation for China to build a surrounding environment beneficial for its development and for the Asia-Pacific region to maintain a regional order based on peace and stability.

To start with, most Asia-Pacific countries have chosen to stay non-aligned amid the China-US competition, rather than taking sides.

Despite pressure from the US, most of the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have chosen not to follow the US lead in containing China. Most ASEAN members are indifferent toward the US' "Indo-Pacific" strategy, fearing that the quadrilateral security dialogue among the US, Japan, India and Australia (the Quad) will evolve into an anti-China multilateral alliance that poses a big underlying security risk to the region. In the meantime, they think the US courting Japan, India and Australia will undermine ASEAN's international status. ASEAN's stance on this matter is a result of the sound neighborhood environment created by China's neighborhood diplomacy in recent years and provides ample room for further development of China's neighborhood policy.

Second, the US has gradually lost the willingness and ability to be the economic growth engine and provider of public goods for the Asia-Pacific region, whereas China's contribution

to and status in the regional economic order have been ascending amid the industrial chain and value chain restructuring.

In the post-Pandemic era, all developed economies are seeking to bring back industries domestically or to their surrounding areas. China's neighboring countries pin high hopes on China's critical role in the restructuring of regional industry chains and value chains in the years to come. Thus, regional economic cooperation and China's influence on its neighboring countries will rise accordingly. China will gradually replace the US as the center of the Asia-Pacific economic order.

Last, despite the US' relentless efforts to create an ideology-based bloc to counter China, most countries in the Asia-Pacific region and in the world are unwilling to join such a confrontational camp. Instead, they are more focused on how to establish a more fair and reasonable international order and how much major countries can contribute to equitable global governance.

Although the Western society is concerned that China's rise will break the current international order, many people have good intentions toward and high hopes of China, wishing to have a more diverse and balanced world. Most of China's neighboring countries focus on China's role in the regional supply chains in the post-pandemic era, resulting in their great willingness to advance economic collaboration in the Asia-Pacific region.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, China has demonstrated its major-country responsibility in global health governance, whereas the US-led West has demonstrated weakness and fatigue amid humanity's common disaster due to their governance model based on self-centeredness and capitalism.

The demonstration effect of Western development models for non-Western countries has been declining. The US' lack of leadership in global governance and the EU's malfunctioning in the face of collective dilemmas have made more and more countries skeptical of Western countries' so-called universal values, development path and the international order dominated by them.

If China and these countries have more common ground in development models and China provides more public goods for regional and global governance, particularly for its neighborhood area, non-Western countries will have more confidence in prosperity and stability brought by Chinese solutions to global governance.

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an all-round bloc and ecology to isolate and suppress China.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

# CULTURE



Details of *Jiuge*, a Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) painting inspired by *Chuci* (Songs of Chu) on display at the National Museum of China.



Dragon shadow puppets also on display at *A New Year Guarded by the Dragon*, an ongoing exhibition at the museum.



**Left:** A pottery *chiwen* (center), a dragon-head creature in Chinese mythology, rests between *wadang* eave tiles from different dynasties, used as roof decorations. **Center:** A crescent jade, reputed to be "the top dragon of China", belonging to the Neolithic Hongshan Culture. **Right:** Two Song Dynasty (960-1279) stone tablets with dragon (left) and tiger reliefs on show. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG AND LIN QI / CHINA DAILY

## China's most cherished creature

Dragon artifacts celebrate a year of auspiciousness and vigor, **Lin Qi** reports.

Of the 12 Chinese zodiac signs, the dragon (*long* in pinyin) is the only animal that doesn't exist in the real world. But despite its mythological status, the dragon is not purely imaginary, as it displays the physical features of a number of different animals.

Speculation about which creatures the dragon has borrowed from include the serpent, crocodile, fish, lizard, salamander, horse, ox, deer, tiger and silk worm.

In his thesis on Fuxi, the mythological emperor with a serpent's body, the renowned scholar Wen Yiduo, who died in 1946, wrote that the dragon is a synthesis of many different totem animals, a "composite" formed during the merging of various tribes, whose respective totems were combined. As the body of the dragon resembles a snake, Wen suggested that the creature was the emblem of the most powerful tribe — likely the family of Fuxi — that had absorbed other clans into its forces.

The dragon is a symbol of distinction that unites and motivates Chinese living in different corners of the world. Images of it make repeated appearances in festivals and on ceremonial occasions. So, when it comes to celebrating the Year of the Dragon, it is not surprising that it appears even more frequently.

From Neolithic jade objects and Shang Dynasty (c. 16th-11th century BC) oracle bones, to ceramics, the Qing Dynasty (1368-1644) throne, and ink finger paintings, some 200 artifacts from the collection of National Museum of China are currently on display in *A New Year Guarded by the Dragon*.

The exhibition illustrates the wide spectrum of

dragon images, a cultural symbol that embodies good wishes and which has been integrated into all aspects of life during the long course of Chinese history. It presents a panoramic view of the dragon as an often revisited motif and popular image in arts and crafts.

The show opens with a dark green jade crescent, reputed to be the top dragon in China, which was made by the Neolithic Hongshan Culture. It was found buried about 50 centimeters under the ground as people were planting trees in Chifeng in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region in 1971. Years later, it was added to the national museum's collection and since then, it has been displayed at various exhibitions.

Zhang Weiming, a deputy director of the National Museum of China, says that the piece "has a clear-cut and smooth profile that renders it great strength and vigor", and that it shows a dragon image made some 6,000 years ago, which is similar to other jade dragons found at other Neolithic sites in southern China.

The dragon is about 28 centimeters long. According to Zhang, it was most likely used during sacrificial ceremonies and, given that it has a small hole in it, it might have been hung in the air attached to another object.

Crescent dragons continued to be made until the Shang Dynasty, as the jade pieces of the same shape found in the tomb of Fu Hao, China's first female general and consort of King Wu Ding, in Anyang in Henan province, attest. The dragon varied as a decorative motif and pictographic character, an example

of which can be found on one of the Shang oracle bones on display.

No more than 4 centimeters in length, the bone is inscribed with several characters including one believed to represent *long*, which looks like an "s" with a circle at each end facing in opposite directions. Researchers say the epigraph was possibly made to pray for rain, as in Chinese mythology and folk custom, dragons were viewed as the deities that regulate water.

Shang artifacts also show the tendency toward dragon patterns becoming increasingly elaborate, paired with other elements, such as clouds, flowers and water. Dragons were often depicted crawling, curling and surrounded by circling patterns, and sometimes with a head on both ends, or two or more dragons together.

Over time, objects decorated with dragons, sometimes also functional, were created as objects of beauty. Examples on display include a bronze iron dated to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), which consists of two parts; a bowl to contain burning coal and a long handle, the end of which is a dragon's head. It is believed to have been used as an instrument of torture during the Shang Dynasty, and was later used to iron cloth during the Han Dynasty.

Some other objects at the exhibition witness the exchange and fusion between different ethnic groups. One vivid example is a green ceramic flask from the Liao Dynasty (916-1125) that shows two circling dragons flying above clouds.

The earthenware flask was styled after the leather bags commonly used by the nomads known as the

Khitans, who founded the Liao Dynasty. The Khitan learned ceramic techniques from the Han during the 10th century, and made the leather bag-shaped flasks to store water, milk and other liquids. The style is also known as a saddle pot, or a chicken crest pot, after the unique shape of its mouth.

The flask has two holes in its top to put a string through, making it convenient to carry on horseback.

Later, as the Khitan shifted from the nomadic to the settled life, the holes were replaced by a hooked handle and the flask bottoms were flattened so that they could stand upright, but the leather bag shape was retained not only because it looked special, but also out of nostalgia for the carefree nomadic life.

According to Zhuge Yingliang, the exhibition's curator, visitors will see the evolution of the dragon over the long course of history. For example, depictions of it were bold and simple in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and before, and later became more refined.

"The exhibition also shows the role of the dragon to different social groups. It symbolized imperial authority and also embodied the auspicious wishes of ordinary people," she says.

The show ends with a section of folk handicraft dragons, including shadow puppets, toys and embroidered pieces that were collected across the country by the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

"Ultimately, the dragon has become a collective embodiment of prosperity and peace, union and harmony," Zhuge says.

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### What's on



#### Showing the rites stuff

Nearly a hundred objects of historical value from the Confucius Museum are now on show at the exhibition, *Rites, Music, and Costumes*, which runs until May 26 at the China National Silk Museum, in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. It shows how Confucianism was an integral part of the Chinese *lignue* culture, an education of social etiquette through engaging in poetry, rites, music and dancing.

The Confucius Museum in Qufu, Shandong province, the hometown of the renowned philosopher and location of the Confucius family mansion, has an assembly of portraits, paintings, bronzes, attire and other kinds of ceremonial utensils,

formerly used by the descendants of the great thinker.

These artifacts mark the prominence of Confucius and how his teachings have been followed throughout centuries. Several exhibits are being shown in Zhejiang for the first time, including a square bronze *ding*, a caldron featuring dragon patterns from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), and court robes worn by the Dukes of Yan-sheng, a marquis title held by generations of the direct descendants of Confucius.

9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 73-1 Yuhuangshan Lu, Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. 0571-8703-5223.

#### A brush with greatness

In his life, Li Jianchen taught at several universities to help cultivate for the country many artists and architects of note. Besides his respectable accomplishments in teaching, he was also acknowledged as the "father of modern Chinese watercolor". He studied painting and sculpture in Europe in the 1930s and, after returning to China, he created and

wrote, establishing a style that blended the aesthetics of China and the West.

An exhibition now on at Jiangsu Art Museum shows selected watercolors by Li, from his donations to the museum. Painted at different stages of his career, these works trace the evolution of his art, reflecting changing social needs



and artistic tendencies. The show ends on March 31.

9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 333 Changjiang Lu, Nanjing, Jiangsu province. 025-8961-0810.

#### Spanish expression

*Different Cycles from Different Eras United by a Single Paintbrush*, an exhibition currently running at Shenzhen Art Museum in Guangdong province, brings together 118 paintings produced by Spanish expressionist Jorge Rando since the 1960s. They are from the dozen series he has created over the past five decades, revisiting themes such as a mother's love, nature, landscapes, butterflies and cycling, to name a few.

In his long career, Rando has formed a semi-figurative and semi-abstract painting style to express his brushes with nature and others, and his belief that art can unite people and nations. In 2015, a museum named after him was opened in Malaga, the city of his birth. In 2019, Rando's works were shown in Hunan and Sichuan provinces.



The current exhibition in Shenzhen runs until May 26. 9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 32 Donghu Yijie, inside Donghu Park, Aiguo Lu, Luohu district, Shenzhen, Guangdong province. 0755-2542-6069.

#### Poetic narratives

He Duoling is best known for several paintings he made in the 1980s, such as *The Awakening Spring Breeze* and *Snow Goose*. Imbued

with subtle sorrow and a feeling of distance, his work kept evolving, while he eschewed the limelight. *Non-Narrative*, an exhibition at Hubei Museum of Art, brings He, and his art, back into the general public consciousness. It compares the works that brought him fame and his more recent output. He has tried to move away from the distinctive style of painting that made him famous, and explores a new approach, showing a greater sense of ease and a sometimes playful mood. 9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 68 Huangli Lu, Wuchang district, Wuhan, Hubei province. 027-8679-6062.

CHINA DAILY



## LIFESHANGHAI



**Top and middle:** Mario Alonso Herrero participates as the tourism ambassador in Shanghai city's celebration of the Chinese New Year plays a recital at Shanghai Oriental Art Center in 2022.

**Right:** The Spanish pianist in traditional Chinese attire.



“As you age, your life experience becomes a treasured asset that can help you to interpret music better and find more depth.”

**Mario Alonso Herrero,**  
Spanish pianist and Shanghai tourism ambassador

# A key figure promotes the city

Spanish pianist, who made the bustling metropolis his home, named as tourism ambassador, **Zhang Kun** reports.

Spanish pianist Mario Alonso Herrero has been appointed as ambassador in the promotion of Shanghai as an international tourist destination. Having lived in the city for more than seven years, he believes Shanghai is the perfect home for a musician like himself.

In the role, he recently witnessed China's first domestically built cruise ship depart on her maiden voyage, and attended the lighting ceremony of the lantern show at Yuyuan Garden during the city's Chinese New Year celebrations. He speaks and reads fluent Chinese, cooks authentic Chinese food and, in playing more than 30 concerts around China every year, he always manages to include some Chinese music into his repertoire.

One of Spain's most internationally renowned pianists, Alonso Herrero was described by Audio Classical magazine as "a pianist possessing the talent and intelligence necessary for piano interpretations and endowed with the maturity and professionalism needed to overcome any technical difficulty".

Alonso Herrero has received awards in 15 national and international competitions in Cagliari, Parma, Valencia and San Sebastian. He was winner of the first Grand Prize and a gold medalist in the International Piano Competition Panama in 2006. In 2005 and 2008, he received the prestigious Juventudes Musicales award in Madrid from Her Majesty the Queen Sofia of Spain.

The 41-year-old musician used to study music and has lived in the Netherlands, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Having traveled to more than 50 countries, in 2017, he chose to settle down in Shanghai.

"After a week in Shanghai I felt like I belonged here — I didn't feel that way living three years in the UK," he says, and attributed that to the friendliness of people in Shanghai, and common values between Spain and China.

Another important reason why he feels at home in Shanghai is that, as a musician in constant need of inspiration, Shanghai offers a rich cultural life, with colorful theater shows, museums, art exhibitions and a multicultural landscape that integrates both the old and new, and Chinese and Western elements.

In Shanghai, he has played at the 97-year-old Shanghai Concert Hall, the Shanghai Oriental Arts Center in Pudong, and the Poly Grand Theater in the suburban Jiading district. Next month, he will play in another new concert hall, the AIA Grand Theater, a 1,715-seat hall sit-



ting on the northern tip of the Western bank of the Huangpu River that officially opened in September.

Alonso Herrero notes that, in the past decade, new performing arts venues have mushroomed not only in Shanghai, but also the second- and third-tier cities in China. Equipped with modern facilities, they have nurtured wider public interest in classical music and, as a result, he has found that audiences are more knowledgeable about music, compared to 2014, when he played his first concert in Shanghai.

Next week, he will embark on a recital tour to 15 cities around China, playing a repertoire of Bach, Chopin, Liszt and Prokofiev, visiting cities such as Changsha in Hunan province, Fuzhou in Fujian province, Zhengzhou in Henan province, and Hefei in Anhui province.

Later this year, Alonso Herrero will collaborate with Shanghai native and violinist Wu Zhengyu,

recording Polish composer Karol Szymanowski's complete works for the violin and piano. The duo will also play several concerts in Europe including performances in Madrid and Granada in Spain, and Salzburg in Austria.

On March 30, he will collaborate with the Suzhou Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Chinese conductor Liao Guomin, performing Sergei Prokofiev's *Piano Concerto No. 2*, a difficult piece that is both emotionally demanding and technically challenging.

The pianist explains that Prokofiev composed the piece after Max Schmidthof, a pianist friend of his, took his own life. The original score was destroyed in a fire and reproduced two years later, when the Russian composer, an accomplished pianist himself, premiered it as the soloist in 1924.

Alonso Herrero believes that the technique is the easiest part of the

performance, because all it takes is muscle movement. "The really difficult part is the cultural background and message behind the music," he says. "Only when you really understand the piece can you play it well, and transmit the rich cultural and emotional meaning to the audience."

"When playing a piece of music, you try to express the composer's ideas, as well as your own interpretation — that's what makes a performance unique," the Spanish pianist continues. "There may be something different every time you play a piece, because you have different thoughts on your mind, so playing the music is a perpetual process of searching for the truth in the piece."

There can never be a 100 percent perfect rendering of a composition, he says. "As you age, your life experience becomes a treasured asset that can help you interpret music better and find more depth."

He also believes that living in a different culture offers an important opportunity to enrich a person's experience. For the encore piece at his concerts, he always tries to learn some local music, often transposing traditional Chinese melodies to the piano.

Another way to embrace the culture and lifestyle of China is cooking. Alonso Herrero has enjoyed Chinese food since childhood, when his Chinese schoolmate would throw birthday parties at the local Chinese restaurant. Moving to China he learned to cook authentic Chinese food. He cooks yellow croaker with rice cake, and makes dumplings from scratch. He even created a vegetarian version of the Sichuan cuisine Mapo Tofu, swapping out the minced meat for chopped mushrooms.

As well as all this, Alonso Herrero is an avid runner and yoga practitioner, with his best marathon time registered at under four hours. Something athletes and pianists have in common, he says, is endurance. It takes long hours of practice every day to be a capable performer, just as it takes hours of training to be a marathon runner.

There is also the breathing element, which is equally important in both running and playing the piano. "You need to find the intricate points in your performance to catch a breath, and relax your muscles just a little, just as finding the right rhythm of breathing while running. In that way, you can communicate with the audience and better convey to them the meaning of the music."

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## The phantom of the opera is here (well ... he will be in July)

By ZHANG KUN

Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Phantom of the Opera*, one of the most popular theatrical shows ever, will kick off a new international tour in China later this year, starting at the Bay Opera of Shenzhen in Guangdong province on July 2.

Produced by SMG Live, the live entertainment arm of Shanghai Media Group, in collaboration with Crossroads Live and Webber's Really Useful Group, or RUG, the China tour will travel to another six cities: Xi'an of Shaanxi province, Shanghai, Suzhou of Jiangsu province, Chengdu of Sichuan province, Beijing and a final destination that is yet to be announced.

Ticket sales for the Shenzhen performances, from July 2 to Aug 4, and the Shanghai performances, at the Shanghai Grand Theatre, from Aug 27 to Oct 13, began on Thursday.

The show, often referred to simply as *Phantom*, has toured 193 cities in 46 countries since its premiere in the United Kingdom in 1986. In 2004 the production made its first tour of China, and played a record-



**From left:** Stage scenes from the *Phantom of the Opera*. The world-acclaimed show by Andrew Lloyd Webber will entertain audiences in six Chinese cities starting from July. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

breaking 100 shows at the Shanghai theater. From 2013 to 2015, the show toured again, visiting Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou.

*Phantom* is a show of special significance in the history of musical theater, says Ma Chencheng, president of SMG Live.

"In many countries all over the

world, the development of musicals started from the show of *Phantom*, and in China, it nurtured wide public interest in the genre, and many lovers of musicals later joined in the industry," Ma says.

Over recent decades, *Phantom* has led the way in the growth and prosperity of the market for musi-

icals in China, says Zhang Xiaoding, general manager of the Shanghai theater.

"Shanghai has become a most important center in China for the performance and production of musicals," she says.

Ma says the upcoming tour will take *Phantom* to five new cities in China.

"Every time *Phantom* is performed in China, it inspires new love for not only musicals, but also the whole live theater industry," he says. "We hope this tour will introduce new audiences to musicals, and maybe attract more people to join the industry and further develop the production of original



Chinese musicals."

In 2018, the Shanghai media group and RUG jointly announced the *Phantom* China project, aiming at propelling the development of China's musical theater industry through a series of initiatives to nurture talent, cultivate the market and promote productions.

In May 2023, the Chinese version of *Phantom* was premiered at the Shanghai theater, the 18th language adaptation for the show. The Chinese production toured nine cities with 159 shows drawing box-office receipts totaling more than 150 million yuan (\$20.87 million), says Ma.

In September, the sequel to *Phantom*, *Love Never Dies* was the opening show at the new AIA Grand Theatre in Shanghai, and went on a tour of 18 Chinese cities.

The new touring production will star Jonathan Roxmouth, the youngest actor to take on the eponymous role in an original English touring production. As part of both the 2012 and 2019 world tours, *Phantom* took him to the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Israel, Dubai and South Korea.

# CULTURE



**Above:** A scene from the film *YOLO* shows director-actress Jia Ling's character training with her romantic interest, a boxing coach portrayed by Lei Jiayin. **Left and right:** The film stars Jia. **Far right:** action choreographer Wang Cheng coaching on the set. **Below:** Li Miao (second from right), the movie's production designer, discusses details on set. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



## Winner by unanimous decision

Box-office hit *YOLO* beats its competition to the punch, becoming the year's highest-grossing film so far, **Xu Fan** reports.

In the summer of 2021, action choreographer Wang Cheng received a call from Jia Ling, one of the most successful female filmmakers in China, offering him the opportunity to join the team for her new movie, *YOLO*.

During their first meeting, Jia revealed her seemingly incredible plan. To portray the protagonist — a woman named Du Leying, who rediscovers her self-esteem after a boxing competition — Jia intentionally gained weight and then spent over 10 months shedding 50 kilograms.

Wang was a student at a sports school before working for more than a decade as an action choreographer for the domestic film industry. He tells *China Daily* that he has become accustomed to seeing people endure physical difficulties and engage in extensive exercise to shape their bodies.

"However, it's still very challenging for me to imagine that Jia — who also needed to be heavily involved in her directorial and acting roles — could achieve this goal in just 10 months. I know it must have been a very tough and difficult time," says Wang.

For almost a year, Jia disappeared from the public eye, making *YOLO* — an anagram of the phrase "you only live once" — one of the most highly anticipated blockbusters when it made its Spring Festival debut on Feb 10.

Thanks to headlines about Jia's herculean effort and the down-to-earth tale resonating with many theatergoers, the 129-minute film has earned over 3.4 billion yuan (\$472.3 million), soaring to the title of highest-grossing blockbuster of the year so far.

Sony Pictures, which acquired the English remake rights to Jia's directorial debut, *Hi, Mom*, in October last year, once again demonstrated its confidence in her by announcing the acquisition of the international distribution rights to

*YOLO* last month.

*Hi, Mom*, a time-travel comedy inspired by the passing of Jia's own mother, earned 5.4 billion yuan in 2021, propelling her to the position of world's highest-grossing female director. It was a record she held for around two years until she was overtaken by American director Greta Gerwig on the back of her 2023 global box-office smash hit *Barbie*.

*YOLO* also stars Lei Jiayin, and Jia's longtime collaborator, Zhang Xiaofei, who plays Du Ledan, Du Leying's younger sister. The story unfolds as the long-unemployed protagonist, who is introverted and directionless, refuses to participate in a TV show that might lead to a job opportunity for her, causing a dispute in the family.

Further turmoil arises when she discovers that her boyfriend and best friend are cheating on her with each other. Crestfallen and frustrated, she decides to leave home and start anew as a waitress in a barbecue restaurant. She encounters a boxing coach, portrayed by Lei, who she mistakenly believes is a man deserving of her love and trust.

After experiencing all these set-



backs, Du Leying is rocked further after she discovers that she is also being exploited by her relative, a journalist working for the TV station that aired the show. In desperation, she turns to boxing to vent her frustrations and discovers a new sense of purpose, pouring all her passion and effort into the sport as she trains to enter a tournament.

The competition scenes, which took nearly four months of prepara-

tion, were shot over eight days and were the most important for Wang.

"We choreographed more than 10 versions, and the final scene contains around 150 moves," recalls Wang.

"When the scene was being shot, I didn't sit by the monitor screen as usual. I walked to the boxing ring, standing close to Jia. I needed to encourage her again and again," says Wang.

For Li Miao, the movie's production designer, *YOLO* has provided him the

opportunity to witness the progress of the Chinese film industry.

Despite being set in a city, and with most of its scenes taking place in ordinary locations, like a neighborhood gym, a small restaurant, and an inconspicuous apartment building, Li reveals to *China Daily* that most of the scenes were shot on soundstages.

"The light in the studio can be artificially controlled, making the shooting process more relaxed and unhurried in terms of time. Even at night, we can shoot daytime scenes without having to wait for natural light," Li explains.

One of the most impressive scenes was shot in a four-floor set, standing 14 meters high, on a 28-meter-tall soundstage in Qingdao, Shandong province. The scene features the protagonist attempting to take her own life by jumping out of her apartment window after being overwhelmed by all of her painful experiences.

"We shot the scene in one long take. The audience will have an immersive experience, feeling as though they are following Du as she ascends the stairs, sits on the edge of the window, and then jumps out in a desperate emotional state," says Li.

As one of its most highlighted visual effects, the movie uses a mirror as a key prop. Revealing his inspiration from the 1941 novel *The Garden of Forking Paths* by Argentine writer and poet Jorge Luis Borges, Li mentions a scene featuring Jia's character walking through a hallway leading to the boxing ring before the competition begins. The protagonist suddenly shifts her head, looks at herself in a mirror, and sees her previous self smiling back at her.

Li explains that the scene seeks to convey a thought-provoking message: A person's fate can be completely altered when they encounter a crossroads in life and choose a different direction.

A graduate of the fine art and design department at the Communication University of China, Li was invited to work on the movie shortly after concluding shooting of the drama, *Home Coming*, in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region in 2022.

Expressing gratitude for the opportunity to collaborate with an exceptional director like Jia, Li said after the movie's release that he hoped to see the movie shown abroad so that it reached a wider international audience. He added that the film would provide foreign viewers a closer look at the lives of ordinary people in China.

Currently, *YOLO* has a score of 7.8 points out of 10 on the popular review aggregator Douban.

The movie has since been released in over 200 cinemas across North America, starting on March 8, and pulling in \$800,000 on its opening weekend. It then became the highest-grossing Chinese film in the US market during its opening week, according to American box-office tracker Box Office Mojo.

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## Series depicts realities of a bureaucratic environment

By XING WEN  
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A recent television drama highlighting the government's commitment to building an ecological civilization in the new era has received extensive praise and positive reviews.

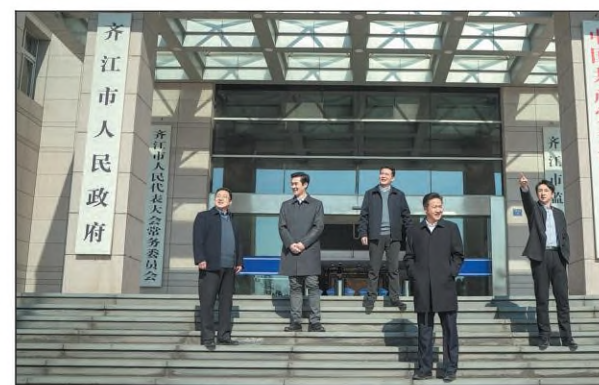
The series *Sunrise on the River* brings together a cast of seasoned actors, including Huang Zhizhong, Mei Ting, Jiang Wu and Zhang Guoqiang. It also weaves suspenseful plotlines into its portrayal of political and bureaucratic settings grounded in realism.

The narrative unfolds in the fictional city of Qijiang, which is renowned for its plentiful wetlands, but which is grappling with severe water pollution issues.

One day, Wang Wu, the deputy mayor responsible for environmental protection in the city, mysteriously drowns.

In the wake of this tragedy, Zheng Hanjiang, a professor from the School of Environmental Studies at Qijiang University, is thrust into the role. The character is played by Huang.

As the story progresses, it revolves around how Zheng unites other officials to address various environmental crises facing the city. Amid the competing interests of different



Still images from the TV series *Sunrise on the River* show the fictional members of the Qijiang city government (left), who are working to protect the local environment, and actress Mei Ting (right) in her role as a doctor. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

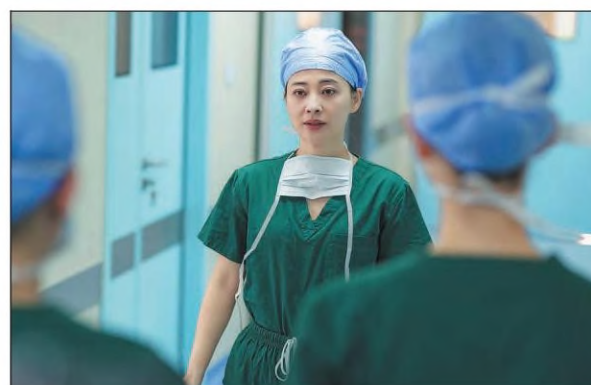
groups, he tries to navigate the challenge of achieving a balance between environmental conservation and economic development. Throughout this journey, the truth behind Wang's demise gradually surfaces.

The main plot intertwines with stories such as the renovation of a food street, the handling of garbage in unfinished residential buildings and the hazardous pollution caused by illegal business activities affecting the health of residents.

The diverse storylines incorporate multiple environmental issues, illustrating the close connection between environmental governance and the everyday lives of people.

Huang was also the executive producer of the drama.

"From a professor teaching environmental protection at the university, to the deputy mayor in charge of environmental protection, the character I play undergoes a transition from a role scrutinizing the government to being the one under scruti-



nating, and this transformation is quite intriguing," he says.

He mentions that the primary challenge in shaping the role lay in the extensive dialogue.

"The volume of complex dialogue is substantial, but I hope the series will inspire viewers to take a more conscious environmental approach to life," he adds.

The drama is adapted from a novel of the same name.

Its scriptwriter, Zhang Ting, is known for several well-received TV

series. Among them, *Wild Bloom*, which is about a group of entrepreneurs in the 1990s. Another notable work is *The Long River*, which depicts how two capable officials managed to control flooding from the Yellow River during the reign of Emperor Kangxi in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). The former has earned a score of 8.2 out of 10 points on the review site Douban, while the latter boasts a score of 8.3.

"We need artistic work that focuses on real life issues and addresses

themes related to environmental protection," Zhang Ting says.

He adds that during the filming of the series, environmental experts provided advice, with the aim of creating a television drama that offers a professional perspective on environmental protection.

The series dedicates a great deal of attention to portraying the various facets of officialdom, such as the power struggle among officials with differing work philosophies. The depiction extends to the oppressive atmosphere and the verbal sparring, often filled with implicit meanings, in conference rooms and the corridors of power.

"In this drama, there isn't a 'villain.' Everyone is just carrying out their respective duties," Zhang Ting says.

Faced with the urgent demands of ecological and environmental development, each character must make a significant choice, he adds.

"The drama showcases the intricate interplay between individual interests and societal responsibilities in each character's choices. While the primary focus remains on the depiction of officialdom, the story also incorporates lighthearted and humorous moments, ensuring a well-rounded and engaging viewing experience," writes one viewer on Douban.