

Wellspring of wishes

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CHINA DAILY

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Xi congratulates Indonesia president-elect

Message stresses China's readiness to build on robust bilateral relationship, envoy says

By XU WEI
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The congratulatory message from President Xi Jinping to Indonesian President-elect Prabowo Subianto underscores China's readiness to build on the robust diplomatic ties, fueling expectations for more outcomes from the bilateral community with a shared future, said Beijing's top envoy to Jakarta.

In the message extended to Subianto on Wednesday, the Chinese president stressed his strong emphasis on the development of ties with Indonesia, saying that he looks forward to concerted efforts with the president-elect to usher in greater achievements in building a bilateral community with a shared future.

The two nations should set an example of solidarity and coordination for common development among major developing countries, deliver more benefits to the two peoples and give strong impetus to regional and global prosperity and stability, Xi said.

Subianto, who is the defense minister of Indonesia, was announced as the winner of the Southeast Asian country's presidential election on



Indonesia's President-elect Prabowo Subianto greets supporters at a gathering in Jakarta on Wednesday. The nation's General Elections Commission announced on Wednesday that Subianto and vice-presidential candidate Gibran Rakabuming Raka had won the presidential election, which was held on Feb 14. AGUNG KUNCAHYA B./XINHUA

Wednesday, securing the Feb 14 contest with nearly 60 percent of the votes.

In an interview with China Daily, Chinese Ambassador to Indonesia Lu Kang underlined Beijing's readiness to work with the new Indonesian

government to continue building high-level strategic trust, deepening comprehensive strategic cooperation and promoting substantial development of the China-Indonesia community with a shared future.

Lu said Chinese leaders extended congratulatory messages to Subianto and his running mate, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, immediately after the official announcement of the election results.

"This speaks volumes for the high regard Chinese leaders have for the development of China-Indonesia relations," he said.

"It is the common aspiration of the Chinese and Indonesian people to

maintain the sustained and steady development of bilateral relations," Lu said. "We believe that in the future, we will see more frequent and closer interactions between the leaders of the two countries," he added.

The envoy noted that the relationship between China and Indonesia, under the strategic guidance of Xi and President Joko Widodo, has grown rapidly.

The two sides have kept enhancing alignment in development strategies, jointly established a high-level dialogue and cooperation mechanism, and formed a new pattern of "four-wheel drive" cooperation in the political, economic, cultural and maritime fields, he said.

As one of the landmark projects of the Belt and Road Initiative, the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway has proved to be a resounding success, facilitating the travel of the Indonesian people and propelling economic growth.

Lu said one of the key experiences of the success of the project is that the two partnering sides have always adhered to the principle of wide consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits.

The success will enable both nations to further substantiate their Belt and Road cooperation and set a new landmark for pragmatic cooperation across various sectors, especially in infrastructure and production capacity, said the ambassador.

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TOURISM INDUSTRY CASHES IN ON WANDERLUST OF FEMALE TRAVELERS

With age no barrier, Chinese women are spreading their wings and spending big on journeys

By YANG FEIYUE
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More Chinese women are taking the driver's seat in making travel decisions, seeking personalized travel experiences and leaving male travelers in their wake when it comes to spending.

Chen Yan, from Chengdu in Southwest China's Sichuan province, has booked flights to Nepal for the upcoming Holi Festival,



also known as the festival of colors, which falls on Sunday and Monday. "It is one of Nepal's most widely celebrated events and I'd like to soak myself in the local folk customs and festival atmosphere," she said.

The 20-something travel influencer said she wants to see how festivalgoers throw colored powder and water at each other, dance, and feast on traditional foods.

About two months ago, she went on a trip to join a lantern celebration in Chiangmai, Thailand. "Local festivals are one of the major elements that prompt me to travel," she said.

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Focus on developing new productive forces

In an era in which the race toward technological supremacy defines the contours of global economic competition, China's emphasis on the development of new quality productive forces marks a significant pivot in its quest for sustainable growth and technological innovation.

Participating in deliberations with fellow deputies from Jiangsu province's delegation to the 14th National People's Congress on March 5, President Xi Jinping stressed the need to foster new quality productive forces tailored to local conditions and to leverage new technologies to upgrade traditional industries.

The Government Work Report delivered by Premier Li Qiang to the second session of the 14th NPC listed speeding up development of new quality productive forces as one of the major government tasks.

This concept, which places a premium on high technology, efficiency and quality over traditional quantitative growth metrics, is not



By Tahir Farooq

merely an economic strategy, but also a comprehensive vision that integrates advanced technological innovations with the principles of sustainable development.

As championed by President Xi, the development of new quality productive forces offers a glimpse into the future of economic growth and development — one characterized by technological advancement, sustainability and enhanced quality of life.

This vision, while ambitious, charts a course toward a more resilient and sustainable global economy, underscoring the need for continued innovation, collaboration and reform. This development will be profound, setting the stage for a new era of economic and technological cooperation.

The Government Work Report delivered by Premier Li represents

a significant moment in China's economic policy direction, marking a lift of the Chinese economy to a more sustainable, innovation-driven future. The focus on new quality productive forces not only aims to enhance China's economic resilience and global competitiveness, but also contributes to the global agenda on sustainable development and technological innovation.

The implications of China's shift toward these new productive forces are profound and multifaceted. On the domestic front, it necessitates a series of systemic reforms — from policy innovation and educational reform to fostering an ecosystem conducive to research and development. These steps are essential for cultivating a new generation of technologies and industries that can drive high-quality economic growth and enhance China's global competitiveness in a rapidly evolving technological landscape.

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老酒醬
LAOHONG JIANGJIU

一口醬香
一生情緣

A mouthful of Jiangxiang flavor, a life long love

中国茅台镇酱香白酒
CHINESE MAOTAI TOWN SAUCE-FLAVOR LIQUOR

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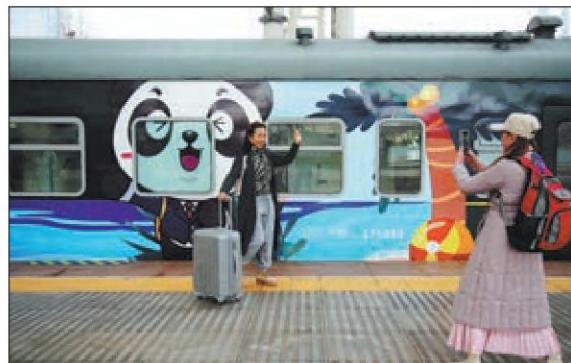
Trips: Women widen their travel choices



Visitors admire a rapeseed flower field on Feb 1 in the Qianxinan Bouyei and Miao autonomous prefecture, Guizhou province. LIU CHAOFU / FOR CHINA DAILY



A woman tries curling on Dec 16 at the Ice and Snow Winter Fair in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region. WANG KAIYAN / XINHUA



A traveler poses in front of the Panda Express special tourist train on March 11 in Yantai, Shandong province. TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

From page 1

Chen, who travels to a dozen destinations at home and abroad every year, is at the vanguard of a new wave of Chinese women travelers.

According to the 2024 Women's Travel Consumer Insight Report recently released by the online travel agency Trip.com Group, average annual per capita travel expenditure for women exceeded that of men by nearly 8 percent in the past year.

The report was based on the analysis of data recorded between Feb 20, 2023 and Feb 20, 2024.

The unstoppable spending power of Chinese women in the tourism industry is evident, as tens of millions of them realize their dreams to travel, with significant growth momentum seen in lower-tier markets.

Regardless of their age, travel is a strong desire for all women, according to the report, which looked at female users who traveled for nonbusiness reasons over the survey period.

Middle-aged women born in the 1970s and 1980s accounted for 62.2 percent of the female travelers and were by far the main force when it comes to consumption, the report showed. Young women born in the 1990s and 2000s accounted for 28.5 percent of tourism spending, indicating their emerging potential as consumers. While the older generation born in the 1950s and 1960s constituted just 9.3 percent of female travelers, the research showed they had a strong preference for premium travel experiences.

"Women wield greater decision-making power in travel product bookings, and they excel at meticulous planning and hav-

ing a good time for their money," said Sun Jie, CEO of Trip.com Group.

Female users account for over 65 percent of the agency's live-streaming audience and are looking for "cheap and cheerful" deals that can save 780 million yuan (\$108 million) in travel expenses annually. Moreover, they are more sensitive to travel trends, according to the report.

Since the start of the year, daily average online visits by female users to view the agency's rankings of tourism service operators as well as new travel hot spots have increased by 42 percent.

Female travelers rely on such information to prepare their travel plans, Sun said, adding that for millions of women travel is a way to overcome fatigue and pursue things they find beautiful. "The powerful and beautiful force of female travel is blossoming," Sun said.

Mother and daughter

Zhao Tingting, from Shanghai, was born in the 1980s and runs an immersive educational experiences business, which gives her plenty of latitude to indulge her passion for travel.

She is a veteran traveler who not only considers costs when choosing a travel destination, but also the experiences she can have exploring new places.

"I'm not really picky about destinations. It's about whether a particular activity or way of traveling can give me a new feeling," said Zhao.

Sometimes she visits the same destination several times using different modes of transportation.

"For example, the Eastern Oriental Express (train) I took years ago allowed me to travel from Singapore to Thailand through

Malaysia, which is quite different from when I had to drive or fly," she said.

Her vast experience often means she is put in charge when it comes to arranging a trip for herself and others.

"If I travel with my husband I'll opt for a stay in a city for one or two weeks, because I know he loves to dine and shop and to see how the locals live," she said.

If she travels with her girlfriends, Zhao makes a point of setting aside chances for photo opportunities.

At the moment, she is sailing with her 11-year-old daughter on a cruise ship around the world. "She loves watching animals, and we're going to see as many of them as possible," Zhao said.

She became aware of the cruise in 2019 when it was introduced to the travel market, but the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted her travel plans. Zhao immediately grabbed two tickets for herself and her daughter when they became available last year, and the pair have now been onboard the liner for two months.

"When I first looked at the itinerary of this cruise, I noticed it's very, very different. Sixty percent of the time you can go ashore, and it goes to over 60 countries, 150 ports. And these ports are not just random ones, they are all very famous places, which saves a lot of time," she said.

"If you were to travel on your own, you might not be able to cover this much territory in the same amount of time."

Running her own business means she can take care of her work online, but scheduling her daughter's studies is more difficult.

In the end, she decided to have her daughter attend an online school. Zhao also believes the trip has greater meaning for her daughter than herself.

"It's the right time for her, she doesn't have too many assignments from school and she is able to understand what she's seeing," Zhao said.

While on board, her daughter is studying ancient civilizations and is learning about cultures around the world, such as the Incas in South America.

"These experiences will surely help pave the way for my daughter's future studies," Zhao said.

Baby boomers

Li Muzi is in her 60s, but is not content to play the traditional role of a grandmother and stay at home to take care of her grandson.

Li, from Tianjin, has traveled more than 100,000 kilometers with her husband around the world after she retired a decade ago from doing management work at a State-owned company.

The couple has taken self-driving tours abroad, including in the United States, Mexico, Thailand and Singapore, and visited ethnic areas and villages across the country including in Yunnan province, and the Xinjiang Uygur and Xizang autonomous regions.

"I have been mainly responsible for planning ahead and settling on a destination," said Li, who is currently on a road trip from Tianjin to Yushu Tibetan autonomous prefecture in Qinghai province.

She believes travel is about going beyond stereotypes and



A female visitor checks prices at the China (Guangdong) International Tourism Industry Expo 2023 on Sept 15. LU HANXIN / XINHUA



Female skiers practice at a ski resort on Jan 24 in Aba Tibetan and Qiang autonomous prefecture, Sichuan province. WANG XI / XINHUA

refusing to follow others' opinions. "One must see the world for themselves, and talk to interesting people in person," she said.

Over the years, Li's diverse travel experiences have helped her pick up new skills and develop hobbies such as tennis, photography, pickleball, driving and cycling.

She and her husband exercise for one to two hours every day to build their physical strength and prepare for long-distance trips.

The couple joined a tropical rainforest expedition a few years ago in Hainan province, with all their fellow travelers aged in their 20s and 30s. "We still managed to walk at the front of the group throughout the journey. The team leader couldn't believe that we were in our 60s," Li said with pride.

She believes she is at the "golden age" for travel as her parents have passed away and her children are grown up, leaving her with no major family obligations.

"So, why not enjoy the freedom of time and the spontaneity to travel wherever we want?" Li said.

Internet services have made it a lot easier for her to make travel plans, she said. She usually makes plans a month before her departure and recently has been leaning toward adventures off the beaten track.

"When you are tired of the complexities of social interactions in big cities, these places are like a breath of fresh air. You will see something new, or rather, something deeper — the traditions, culture, kindness and simplicity of the Chinese ethnic groups as well as landscapes undisturbed by crowds. These are the most touching aspects of our journeys," Li said.

"As we get older, travel naturally

becomes about nourishing the eyes and the heart while getting away from the hustle and bustle," she added.

New career

Chen Yan, from Sichuan, says she has traveled for half of her life, which has allowed her to appreciate the diverse beauty of the world.

Coming from an ordinary family, Chen said she tries to cut back on unnecessary travel costs, but will not compromise when it comes to the quality of her trips.

"For instance, I will save money if the transfer flights are cheaper than the direct ones," she said, but added she will not skimp on experiences that give her access to the typical way of life at a destination.

Chen discovered her passion for travel during her third year at college. "I even found temporary jobs that provided accommodation to support my travel in certain places," she said.

Her experiences enabled her to share stories about her encounters with interesting people on major social media platforms, including Xiaohongshu, where she started to gain a following.

In 2019, she quit her job operating medical testing equipment at a hospital in Sichuan and became a full-time travel influencer. "It doesn't bring in good money, but it is enough to satisfy my passion for travel," Chen said.

As her travel experiences have increased, her friends have looked to her for advice and often invite her to join their trips. "It's nice recognition," she said.

Chen said travel has also given her a better understanding of herself. "You should do whatever you want as long as you're happy," she said.



Above: Chen Yan, a travel influencer; Li Muzi, a retired manager; and Zhao Tingting, a businesswoman. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Below: Two tourists take photos on Aug 29 in Sanya, Hainan province. PU XIAOXU / XINHUA



TOP NEWS



Lee Gardner (left) shows an album of his family history in Kuliang to Guo Ningning, vice-governor of Fujian province, China, on Sunday in El Segundo, California, the United States. RENA LI / CHINA DAILY

“Like many other children who spent their childhoods in Kuliang with their families, my granduncle cherished his time there so much throughout his life... The memories (were) passed on and have bridged the gap between past and present.”

Lee Gardner, whose grandfather and father were both born in Kuliang and who described it as his second hometown

CENTURY-LONG CHINA TIES STILL GOING STRONG

The story of Kuliang dates back to 1886, and the album is a historical record for both the Gardner family and the area

By RENA LI in Los Angeles
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A Chinese delegation led by the vice-governor of Fujian province met in California on Sunday with the grandnephew of the late Milton Gardner, whose last words — “Kuliang, Kuliang” — reignited the long-standing bond between his family in the United States and the summer retreat in Fujian where he spent 10 happy years in his childhood.

“Your visit today symbolizes a unity that connects East to West,” said the grandnephew, Lee Gardner, as he raised a toast to welcome Vice-Governor Guo Ningning to his home in El Segundo, a beachside city in Los Angeles County.

Guo replied, “Cheers for our friendship!”

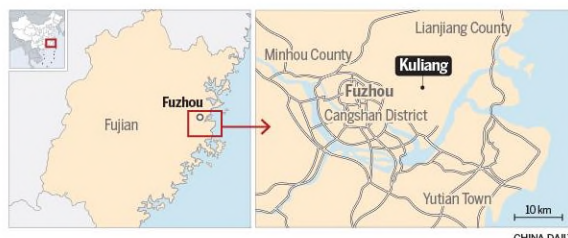
Gardner, 84, shared with the visitors a family photo album that documents the enduring bond between the Gardner family and Guling — known as Kuliang in the local dialect — a resort area in the suburbs of Fuzhou, the capital of Fujian.

“This album is a historical record for both my family and Kuliang. I’m proud to have presented it to the Chinese people last year,” he told China Daily.

Gardner, whose grandfather and father were both born in Kuliang, described it as his second hometown. His living room is adorned with souvenirs collected from China.

The story of Kuliang dates back to 1886, when a British doctor built the area’s first residence. Since then, hundreds of foreigners established their own summer houses there, and Kuliang flourished as a sanctuary for expatriates seeking a rural life.

The expats built villas, hospitals, tennis courts, swimming



pools, post offices and other amenities in Kuliang, fostering a profound connection with the local Chinese.

Milton Gardner, who in later life was a physics professor at the University of California, was born in the United States in 1901. He arrived in Fuzhou with his parents as an infant and spent his early years in Kuliang. The family returned to California in 1911.

Throughout his life, Gardner had a deep desire to revisit his childhood home in China, but he never had the chance to fulfill his wish, and his last words were “Kuliang, Kuliang”.

“Like many other children who spent their childhoods in Kuliang with their families, my granduncle cherished his time there so much throughout his life,” said Lee Gardner. “The memories (were) passed on and have bridged the gap between past and present.”

After Milton Gardner’s death in 1986, his wife, Elizabeth, made several trips to China in an attempt to honor his dying wish, though she was unable to determine where exactly Kuliang was.

Eventually, however, she discovered among her late husband’s belongings 11 faded stamps with postmarks that said “Kuliang, Fuzhou”. With the assistance of a Chinese student, Elizabeth Gardner

eventually learned that Kuliang was in the suburbs of Fuzhou.

Upon learning of Gardner’s story in an article published in 1992 with the headline “Ah! Kuliang”, President Xi Jinping, who was then Party secretary of Fuzhou, sent government officials to reach out to Elizabeth Gardner and extend an invitation for her to visit Kuliang.

“My family and I are so grateful to Xi for realizing our dream; it’s a cherished dream,” said Lee Gardner.

Gardner, who has been working with a legal aid office that provides free services to impoverished people in Los Angeles, has visited China four times — in 1985, 2012, 2018 and 2023.

“I have witnessed the remarkable changes in Kuliang since 1985,” he said. “And what impressed me the most is the spirit of friendship between the two peoples. Our family was always greeted warmly and enthusiastically in China.”

In June last year, a group of former Kuliang residents, including Lee Gardner, returned there. Kuliang Friends, a group of descendants of US families who resided in Fuzhou a century ago or longer, convened to participate in the Bond with Kuliang: 2023 China-US People-to-People Friendship Forum.

President Xi sent a congratulatory

letter to the forum, emphasizing that amity between people holds the key to sound relations between countries, and the people are the cornerstone of the growth of state-to-state relations.

In the letter, Xi expressed his hope that both sides will continue to write the Kuliang story and carry forward the friendly sentiment it embodies, so that the friendship between the two peoples will continue to grow and thrive, like the millennia-old cedar trees in Kuliang.

Lee Gardner said his granduncle remembered climbing the big cedar tree, known as King Tree, in the center of town and, along with his Chinese playmates, finding baby birds.

“The King Tree is a symbol of friendship between us,” Gardner said.

Over the past few decades, members of Kuliang Friends and individuals from all walks of life in both countries have delved deeply into Kuliang’s history, actively promoted its culture and worked tirelessly to deepen mutual understanding and friendly exchanges between the people of China and the US. A digital archive has been established.

Four rounds of comprehensive renovation and preservation have been carried out in Kuliang since 2017. In 2018, Kuliang was designated a national tourism resort, and it receives millions of tourists each year.

“It’s very exciting to see that Kuliang has been developed into a tourist destination; it offers visitors a glimpse into life as it was a century ago when my family resided there,” said Lee Gardner.

After presenting Chinese tea from Fuzhou to Gardner, Guo, the vice-governor, also gave him an invitation letter for the Bond with Kuliang: China-US Youth Week later this year.

With the theme of “carrying forward the bond of Kuliang and deepening friendship”, the week will feature workshops, field trips and cultural experiences on topics including diplomacy, climate and religion. The intent is to build a platform for young people from China and the US to exchange ideas, strengthen understanding and enhance friendship, according to the delegation.

“We hope the friendship can be passed on to the next generation,” said Guo, adding that young people from both China and the US are welcome to participate in this year’s Kuliang friendship forum in June.

Growth: Steps to reshape global economic dynamics

From page 1

Internationally, the move toward new quality productive forces is set to reshape the dynamics of global economic competition and cooperation. As China ascends the value chain, its role in global supply chains will undergo a significant transformation, necessitating adjustments from multinational corporations and economies worldwide.

However, this shift also offers new opportunities for international collaboration in tackling some of the most pressing global challenges, such as climate change and sustainable development, through shared technological innovations and solutions.

Moreover, China’s focus on high technology, efficiency and quality underscores a broader recognition of the limitations of traditional growth models, which have often come at the expense of environmental sustainability and long-term economic resilience. By prioritizing the development of industries and technologies that align with these new productive forces, China is not only aiming to secure its technological sovereignty and economic vitality, but also contributing to the global pursuit of a more sustainable and resilient economic future.

As we look toward this future, the significance of China’s strategic pivot cannot be overstated. It represents a bold reimagining of the pathways to economic growth and development in the 21st century, one that balances the imperatives of technological innovation with those of environmental stewardship and social well-being.

This strategic shift acknowledges the complex interdependencies of the modern world and highlights the importance of proactive adaptation and leadership in the face of emerging global challenges.

For the global community, engaging with and understanding this shift is crucial, not only in terms of navigating the evolving landscape

of international trade and economic relations, but also in leveraging the potential of these new productive forces to address shared challenges and opportunities.

As China embarks on this transformative journey, the world watches closely. The success of this strategy will shape the future of China’s economy and influence global economic patterns, technological development and environmental sustainability.

China’s focus on high technology, efficiency and quality underscores a broader recognition of the limitations of traditional growth models, which have often come at the expense of environmental sustainability and long-term economic resilience.

Engaging with China’s new economic model offers the global community an opportunity to collaborate on shared challenges, driving collective progress toward a more sustainable and technologically advanced future. This collaborative spirit, fostered by mutual respect and shared goals, could pave the way for a new era of global economic cooperation, underscoring the importance of adaptability, innovation and partnership in the 21st century.

The author is editor-in-chief at *Daily Ittehad Media Group and Pakistan Economic Net*, and vice-president and chairman of the *Foreign Relations Committee of the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors*. The views do not necessarily reflect those of *China Daily*.

Swing and sway



Folk dancers perform in Tegucigalpa, capital of Honduras, on Wednesday. These dances incorporate elements from the indigenous, European and African ancestors of the people. LI MENGXIN / XINHUA

Relations: Cooperation in emerging fields to deepen

From page 1

Xu Liping, director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences’ Center of Southeast Asian Studies, said “the trend of friendship between China and Indonesia has become irreversible” after decadelong efforts to build up bilateral relations.

“This friendship has given the Indonesian people a concrete sense of gain, and laid a solid foundation for the bilateral relationship going forward,” he added.

Lu said that China will continue to utilize its technology, equipment and manufacturing to boost bilateral cooperation in connectivity, continue to promote the “Two Countries, Two Parks” and other landmark projects of the BRI, and carry out more projects for improving public well-being.

He also stressed China’s readiness to deepen cooperation in emerging fields such as the digital economy, the green economy and Silk Road e-commerce.

China, already the largest trading partner of Indonesia for 11 consecutive years, has long been a major

source of investment for the Southeast Asian country. The total trade volume between both nations reached \$139.4 billion last year.

There are now over 1,000 Chinese businesses in Indonesia, covering sectors such as energy, telecommunications, power grids, mining, internet and the digital economy.

Lu highlighted the immense potential for the two countries to bolster trade and economic ties, saying that both nations will step up cooperation in sustainable development, food security, energy infrastructure and clean energy.

“The two sides will also expand collaboration in high-tech and emerging sectors, such as smart cities, 5G and the digital economy,” he said. To further bolster people-to-people links between China and Indonesia, the envoy said both sides will open more tourism flight routes, strengthen subnational cooperation, enhance cooperation and exchanges in talent training, and encourage more exchanges and visits between nongovernmental and religious groups.

CHINA

Tech company finds profit in coal waste

By LI MENGHAN
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A technology company in Shanxi province is pioneering the transformation of coal waste into valuable industrial materials, offering a solution to a mounting environmental challenge.

Shanxi Bright Kaolin Technology Corp, located in a major coal-producing region, has developed a technique to manufacture kaolin, a white clay mineral, from coal gangue — a byproduct of coal mining that creates environmental problems.

Coal gangue not only occupies land but also pollutes the air through sulfur emissions and poses a risk of spontaneous combustion. In Shanxi alone, coal gangue storage has reached 900 million metric tons, with its output accounting for 18 percent of coal production.

"Coal gangue is mainly utilized for low-value purposes in China," said Wu Qiang, a national political adviser and professor at the China University of Mining and Technology (Beijing). "Despite a national utilization rate exceeding 70 percent, it's primarily used in building materials, combustion and road paving."

The new technology offers a solution, transforming waste into valuable products.

"We've achieved breakthroughs in manufacturing coating kaolin and high-performance coal-based kaolin with exceptional porosity from coal gangue," said Li Yunxia, deputy director of the company's technology center. "Our products boast a large surface area, high oil

absorption and strong coverage, meeting international standards."

Through a multi-step process including crushing, grinding, drying and calcination, the company produces ultra-fine kaolin particles exceeding 8,000 mesh — 100 times finer than flour. These particles possess valuable properties like wear resistance, moldability, fire resistance and electrical insulation, making them ideal for various industries such as coatings, aerospace, ceramics and wiring.

Shanxi Bright Kaolin consumes 600,000 tons of coal gangue annually, producing 500,000 tons of ultra-fine kaolin exported to over 40 countries.

"The strong export performance is a testament to the high quality of our coating products," said Yan Hongguang, a senior engineer at a partnering coating company. "While kaolin makes up only 5 to 10 percent of raw materials, its quality significantly impacts the final product."

Recognizing the company's innovation, Shanxi designated the comprehensive utilization industry chain for abandoned resources as a key provincial chain in 2023. Shanxi Bright Kaolin was chosen to lead resource integration and industrial development within this chain.

"We plan to increase investment in research and development, coordinate the development of upstream and downstream sectors, and upgrade the entire industry chain to contribute to the province's high-quality development," said company head Luo Xunqiao.

Sun Ruisheng contributed to this story.

Chun ready for chow



Giant panda Chun Sheng prepares to enjoy his cake at a party held at Hangzhou Zoo to celebrate his fourth birthday in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on Thursday. DONG XUMING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Metro line to link Wuxi, Suzhou and Shanghai

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai
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Shanghai and Jiangsu province's Suzhou and Wuxi will be interconnected by a metro system in 2030 as scheduled, according to a recent announcement of a line that will run between the two Jiangsu cities.

Shanghai and Suzhou have already been linked through metro lines since June.

Starting at the east point of Suzhou's Huqiu district, the new metro line that is scheduled to be completed in 2030 will stretch into Xinwu district of Wuxi, according to a document released online by the two city's metro operators on Monday to solicit public opinions.

The line will help facilitate trips between the two vibrant cities in the Yangtze River Delta region, of which the integrated development is a national strategy.

Zhang Haohan, chairman of the Jiangsu Regional Development Research Association, said that the integrated development of the delta region used to focus heavily on Shanghai and other cities, and this marks the first time that two cities other than Shanghai are joining hands to establish an intercity metro project.

"Cities in Jiangsu have a strong sense of competition with one another. Now they've joined hands, transforming cross-city transportation into commuter transportation. It'll certainly help residents both in

Wuxi and Suzhou to be more integrated in commuting and accessing life services," he said.

The project has not been totally well-received by residents. Some have complained that the entire project, which will involve nearly 100 stops on four metro lines through the three cities, is too time-consuming, and they might prefer taking a regular train.

A train ride from Shanghai to Wuxi can take between 42 minutes to an hour. Prices range from 47 yuan (\$6.50) to 69 yuan.

But others said the metro system will serve as a favorable option when train tickets are sold out, and it will save them from having to travel to many railway stations.

Li Jian, who researches the economy of the Yangtze River Delta region at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, said that he prefers a design with more layers for regional public transportation, especially in the large, densely populated delta region.

"By more layers, I mean intercity railway is the best choice for trips between cities, and the high-speed train is better for a larger geographical scope. Metros work best within cities," Li said.

"So such time-consuming trips on the metro will not be very attractive for young people working across cities. But they may appeal to some older people who are not so time-sensitive, and those who need to cross cities but only need to go a few stops," he said.

Early blossoms



Tourists take a ride on a rotating swing during the 2024 Turpan Apricot Flower Festival in Xinghua village in Turpan, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Wednesday. The festival commenced on Wednesday and will run through April 10. Due to its unique geographical location and abundant photothermal resources, Turpan usually witnesses the earliest blooming of apricot blossoms in Xinjiang. LIU JIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

China improving treatments for mothers and newborns

High-risk pregnancies and screenings of congenital birth defects are targeted

By WANG XIAOYU
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China has improved treatments for high-risk pregnancies and stepped up screenings of congenital birth defects in recent years, as part of efforts to deal with the rising number of older mothers and an emphasis put on quality care for newborns, the National Health Commission said this week.

Shen Haiping, deputy director of the commission's department of maternal and child health, said at a recent news conference that the proportions of women at an advanced maternal age — widely defined as those over age 35 — and women who have previously given birth are rising due to women choosing to have babies later and shifts in the nation's family planning policy.

Official data shows that the average marital age of women rose from 22 years old in the 1980s to 26.3 in 2020. It also shows that women are also giving birth to their first children later, at the average age of 27.2.

In May 2021, China began allowing all married couples to have up to three children. Meanwhile, the

nation has managed to continue lowering maternal and infant mortalities, Shen said.

Last year, its maternal mortality rate fell nearly 11 percent from 2020 to 15.1 per 100,000 live births, and its infant mortality rate decreased about 17 percent during the same period to 4.5 per 1,000 live births, she said.

Shen said that more effort will be made to carry out pregnancy risk assessments and categorize and manage pregnant women based on their risk levels. It is also important to formulate individualized treatment plans for those deemed to be in dangerous conditions.

She added that nearly 3,500 treatment centers for seriously ill pregnant women, as well as about 3,320 centers for infants in critical condition, have been set up nationwide, signifying that a comprehensive and coordinated treatment network for pregnant women and newborns has been established.

"A large number of pregnant women may suffer complications such as diabetes and high blood pressure, so we are guiding medical institutions to assemble a multidisciplinary emergency care group to

improve treatment," she added.

Amid a drive toward building a birth-friendly society and promoting a long-term balanced population, authorities have also emphasized preventing birth defects.

Shen said that the mortality rate of infants due to birth defects and that of children under age 5 have both fallen over 30 percent compared to five years ago.

"The incidence rate of disabling birth defects, such as neural tube defects and Down syndrome, decreased 23 percent," she said.

Nationwide, the rate of pre-pregnancy examinations has reached nearly 92 percent, and the rate of prenatal screenings during pregnancy has also exceeded 88 percent. Among newborns, the screening rates of genetic metabolic diseases and hearing impairments have surpassed 98 percent, according to Shen.

Meanwhile, early examinations and interventions are being rolled out.

"Screenings targeting phenylketonuria (a rare inherited disorder that can cause brain damage) are being carried out nationwide to detect infants born with the disease as soon as possible," she said. "Special milk formula that can lessen the disease's impact on intelligence will

be delivered to newborns who have the disease, and most patients receiving early treatment can develop nearly normal intelligent capabilities eventually."

Shen said that the commission will build more screening and diagnosis facilities for birth defects and step up rehabilitation services to safeguard the health of children.

Li Jie, head of the Nanjing Drum Tower Hospital's prenatal diagnosis center, said during an interview with Xinhua Daily, a newspaper in Jiangsu province, that pre-pregnancy examinations that aim to identify potential risks of congenital disorders, and prenatal screenings that can discover most congenital heart diseases, cleft lip and palate and other malformations have formed the first two lines of defense.

"But no screening techniques can guarantee 100 percent accuracy, and there is the possibility of false negatives or false positives," she said. "For newborns that were born with defects, we can also deliver timely treatment as a third layer of defense."

"For instance, newborns who are found with congenital deafness will be fitted with cochlear implants promptly to prevent lifelong hearing loss," she said.

Water conservation regulations announced

By LI MENGHAN
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China has unveiled its first national-level regulations on water conservation, which experts say provide legal guarantees for water security and ecological protection.

The regulations, issued by the State Council, China's cabinet, on Wednesday, will take effect on May 1. Prioritizing critical issues in water conservation work, the regulations established comprehensive provisions covering water usage, water saving and water management.

Previously, water use management lacked legal supervision, said Zhang Zhiguo, deputy dean of the China Academy of Urban Planning and Design's water affairs institute.

"The regulations establish a comprehensive water management framework encompassing water measurement, planning, quotas, equipment and education, which is conducive to controlling overall water usage, optimizing the structure, improving efficiency and reinforcing a culture of water saving throughout society," Zhang said.

The regulations proposed determining rules on water use manage-

ment to align it with socioeconomic development. This involves setting water usage quotas for key corps, industrial production and service sectors.

To leverage pricing mechanisms in water conservation, the regulations suggested implementing differentiated metering and pricing based on water sources and usage. This includes the application of tiered water pricing for residential water usage, and the imposition of additional charges for agricultural irrigation water usage that exceeds allotted quotas.

Additionally, China will restrict water-intensive projects in areas with severe water shortages or groundwater over-exploitation, and gradually phase out outdated and water-intensive technologies, equipment and products.

In addition, the regulations detailed water conservation measures in sectors such as agriculture, industrial production and urban areas.

This promotes a fundamental transformation from extensive and inefficient to conservation and intensive, said Zhang Qingyong, director of the Ministry of Water Resources' water conserva-

tion promotion center.

Governments at the county level and above will guide agricultural production and operation entities to adjust the structure of planting, breeding and water usage, and develop water-saving agriculture and dryland farming suited to local conditions, the regulations said.

New technologies are assumed to have great potential in optimizing agricultural production methods. The country will continue to support the research and development of new strains of drought-resistant crops and promote the scientific use and eco-treatment of aquaculture wastewater. Additionally, efforts will be made to promote irrigation technology to improve water use efficiency.

The regulations said industrial companies should set up a water conservation system, employing substandard water for manufacturing and recycling water from production equipment, air conditioners and boilers.

Existing irrigation facilities that fail to meet technical standards of water conservation and water-intensive companies that exceed allotted quotas will be ordered to carry out water-saving upgrades

within a set period.

In urban landscaping and greening, water use efficiency should be a primary consideration. In regions facing significant water scarcity, the use of drought-resistant plants, implementation of water-saving irrigation techniques and regulation of water usage for artificial lakes should be prioritized.

Public water supply companies should improve the management of pipe facilities and ensure smooth operations. They are obligated to establish a leakage control system and reduce water losses; otherwise, any excess losses will not be factored into water pricing.

The regulations stipulate the legal responsibilities for illegal acts. For example, individuals who tamper with water meters may face fines ranging from 10,000 (\$1,390) to 100,000 yuan. Similarly, businesses that resist water-saving renovations and neglect water recycling will be penalized.

Chen Maoshan, director of the Ministry of Water Resources' development research center, said strengthening supervision and clarifying legal liabilities will make the regulations more feasible and effective.

WORLD

Cultural exchanges bolster China-Italy ties, envoy says

By XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong
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Italy-China cultural exchanges help contribute to the stabilization of international relations, representing a new cooperation paradigm, says Italy's ambassador to China.

"Diversity is key for cultural dialogue", which plays an important role as we navigate a complex world rife with tensions, Massimo Ambrosetti told China Daily during a Hong Kong visit.

The ambassador made the remarks in response to a China Daily question on the Global Civilization Initiative proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2023, which advocates respect for the diversity of civilizations and the common values of humanity.

The envoy said the bilateral strategic partnership between Italy and China is going to be relaunched. The year 2024 marks the 20th anniversary of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Italy and China, as it was first signed in 2004, he noted.

"So this is a very important year," Ambrosetti said, while pointing to several exchanges that took place last year, including a meeting between China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi and the Italian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani in Rome, as well as several visits of Italian ministers to China. This year, planning is underway for visits to China by Italian President Sergio Mattarella and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

Speaking of the common values of humanity, the Italian ambassador said these values are at the heart of our identities as civilizations.

Ambrosetti said 2024 marks 700 years since the death of the famous Italian explorer Marco Polo, who traveled through the ancient Silk Road during the 13th century and spent many years in China.

Embodying cultural dialogue, "Marco Polo is a great example of the common humanity which links the East and the West", he said.

The ambassador views China and Italy as the most important civilizations in the East and the West, respectively.

The Silk Road is an ancient con-



Massimo Ambrosetti

nection, that has been revived over the centuries, he said.

"Marco Polo is very important because ... his book is the first book that created in the West a better knowledge of China."

Through culture, the exchanges will continue "as it is not just part of our cultural dialogue, but also part of our political dialogue", he said. "And in our dialogue, of course, principles, rights and values play a very important role."

The diplomat said that in ancient times, the contacts between the two civilizations were very purpose-oriented, for several reasons, starting with trade. "Rome imported a lot of silk, for instance, from ancient China," he said. "In fact, in the Latin language of Rome, the name of the Chinese was 'People of the Silk.'"

At the same time, "during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD220), the largest amount of precious metal coming into the Chinese empire was from Rome. Gold and silver ... etc," Ambrosetti said.

Longtime links

The ambassador noted that though Italy's links with China go back to ancient times, "we have to renew these civilizational links to foster cultural dialogue."

The diplomat was in Hong Kong in the past weeks as the La Scala ballet company from Italy staged performances in the city. The sixth China tour of the Teatro alla Scala Ballet, one of the most important cultural institutions in Italy and in Europe, kicked off in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region with shows held from March 15 to 17, before it moved to Shanghai for the next stop.

In a globalized world, "people-to-people links and exchanges play a very important role", he said, adding that the exchanges "can contribute to the strengthening of international relations".

Ambrosetti said after the pandemic, Italy became one of the top destinations for Chinese tourists in Europe, with France and Switzerland.



Migrants plead with the Texas National Guard to be allowed into the US side of the Rio Grande in El Paso, Texas, which borders Mexico, on Wednesday. JUSTIN HAMEL / REUTERS

States follow Texas on immigration bill

With Texas law's fate still with courts, other states seek to stem illegal entry

By MAY ZHOU in Houston
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While Texas SB4 — a law that makes illegal border crossing a state crime and allows local law enforcement to arrest and local courts to deport migrants — is still waiting its fate in the court system, other states, primarily Republican, are following Texas' example, passing or in the processing of passing similar laws aimed at migrants at the state level.

SB4 has gone through a roller coaster of rulings since February, when a federal judge in Austin first blocked it, based on the US Constitution.

The decision was overturned, and the law was allowed to take effect by a federal appeals court. Then, the Supreme Court blocked it at first but on Tuesday allowed the law to remain in place while the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals considered its legality.

The decision was overturned, and the law was allowed to take effect by a federal appeals court. The Supreme Court on Tuesday allowed the law to remain in place while the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals considered its legality.

The appeals court blocked the law again hours after the Supreme Court's decision, while deliberating on its merits. The appeals

President Biden and his administration have failed to enforce our immigration laws and ... have compromised the sovereignty of our nation and the safety of its people."

Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds

court has yet to issue a ruling. Other states have started to follow Texas. On Tuesday, Iowa passed Senate File 2430 — that would make illegal reentry into the US a state crime and allow state law enforcement to arrest, and local courts to deport undocumented immigrants.

State law enforcement would be able to escort deportees to border entry to ensure they leave the country. Republican Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds said she will sign it into law.

"President Biden and his administration have failed to enforce our immigration laws and, in doing so, have compromised the sovereignty of our nation and the safety of its people," Reynolds said in a statement Tuesday.

"States have stepped in to secure the border, preventing illegal migrants from entering our country and protecting our

citizens. Americans deserve nothing less. I look forward to signing SF 2340 into law," Reynolds said.

A few other state legislatures are still going through the process. In Missouri, SB 1372 would make illegal entry into the US a state crime subject to imprisonment of one to seven years, a \$10,000 fine and deportation. The bill would also prohibit undocumented immigrants from enrolling in any post-secondary educational institution or receiving any state or local public benefits.

In Oklahoma, House Bill 4090 would deport anyone "found to be unlawfully present" in the state and punish those who are "unlawfully present" and have violated a criminal law of Iowa with imprisonment of at least 10 years.

In Georgia, following the killing of a young woman by a migrant, a bill similar to Texas SB4 was proposed. It would require law enforcement to check immigration status during encounters; check and report undocumented immigrants at the time of detaining; and identify those among the imprisoned population who have entered the country illegally.

Earlier this year, Arizona passed a similar bill, but it was vetoed by its governor.

Texas has been setting legislative trends in bills relating to foreigners. Last year, it was the first state to propose but failed to pass bills limiting real property ownership of Chinese and foreign nationals from a few other nations. However, a similar bill was passed in Florida.

EU leaders explore ways for military funding

By JONATHAN POWELL
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European Union leaders gathered for a two-day summit in Brussels on Thursday for discussions on plans to enhance the military capabilities of both Ukraine and the bloc itself.

While most EU countries support the notion of strengthening Europe's military industry capabilities through joint purchases and common production, divergences have emerged regarding the financing of these initiatives.

The contentious idea of funding the enhancement of the EU's military capabilities through eurobonds will be a topic of discussion among the bloc's 27 leaders, reported the Euronews website.

French President Emmanuel Macron is among some leaders proposing the concept of defense bonds as a method to finance enhanced military investments, it said.

"We are raising the issue to say that we need to have innovative sources of funding," said an official from the Elysee as quoted by the Financial Times newspaper. "What we want is not to start the debate with limitations on the sources of financing that can be imagined or mobilized. So eurobonds for us ... should be examined."

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas also backed the idea of defense bonds. At the EU leaders' summit last month, Kallas suggested that the bonds should amount to a total of 100 billion euros (\$109 billion).

Euronews cited a senior diplomat from a northern EU country as saying they had reservations about endorsing defense bonds, preferring a market-driven strategy and more private investments.

"We have to find a way to finance the boosting of our defense industry and how to help Ukraine. We need European money" Petteri Orpo, prime minister of Finland, told reporters on the eve of the summit.

'Difficult' situation

"But (joint borrowing) is very difficult," he was quoted as saying by FT.

However, most diplomats find the alternative prospect of raising taxes or cutting public services for military funding unappealing, reported The Guardian.

It cited one diplomat as suggesting that mandating each country to contribute 2 percent of their national GDP to the EU military was another possibility to be considered.

Plans to seize billions of euros in interest from Russia's frozen assets and allocate a large portion of the funds to Ukraine would be scrutinized at the meeting as well, said The Guardian.

On Wednesday, the Kremlin stated that such action would constitute an "unprecedented breach of international law".

Earlier this week, EU Council President Charles Michel highlighted Russia as a significant military threat to EU countries, emphasizing the need to transition to a "war economy mode" in response to the current situation.

In an opinion piece published by several media outlets, Michel proposed utilizing the European budget and the windfall profits from Russia's frozen assets to provide continuous support to Kyiv, and demonstrate unwavering commitment to supply military equipment to Ukraine for as long as necessary.

European defense bonds "could be a powerful means to strengthen our technological innovation and industrial base", he said.

Agencies contributed to the story.

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US sues Apple, alleging iPhone monopoly

By AI HEPING in New York
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An antitrust lawsuit filed against Apple by the US Justice Department on Thursday takes direct aim at the company's iPhone, could take years to play out, and force the tech giant to make changes in some of its most valuable businesses.

They include the iPhone, in which Apple reported more than \$200 billion in sales in 2023; the Apple Watch, part of the company's \$40 billion wearables business; and its profitable services line, which reported

\$85 billion in revenue.

US Attorney General Merrick Garland announced the landmark suit at a news conference.

He claimed that Apple has a monopoly over the smartphone market, alleging the tech giant blocked software developers and mobile-gaming companies from offering better options on the iPhone, resulting in higher prices for consumers.

"We allege that Apple has consolidated its monopoly power, not by making its own products better, but by making other products worse,"

Garland said.

The long-anticipated lawsuit comes after years of allegations by critics that Apple has harmed competition with restrictive app store terms and high fees.

The Justice Department, which began its investigation of Apple in 2019, focused on its entire system of products and services.

"This lawsuit threatens who we are and the principles that set Apple products apart in fiercely competitive markets," an Apple spokeswoman said. "If successful, it would hinder our ability to create the kind of

technology people expect from Apple — where hardware, software, and services intersect. It would also set a dangerous precedent, empowering government to take a heavy hand in designing people's technology."

Apple plans to file a motion to dismiss the case in the next 60 days. In its filing, the company said it plans to emphasize that competition laws permit it to adopt policies or designs that its competitors oppose, particularly when those designs would make using an iPhone a better experience.

Apple is worth nearly \$3 trillion, making it one of the highest valued

companies in the world.

Apple, based in Cupertino, California, had 64 percent of the market share for US smartphones in the last quarter of 2023, versus 18 percent for Samsung, according to Counterpoint Research.

Colin Kass, an antitrust lawyer at New York-based Proskauer Rose, told The New York Times that the most compelling allegation is that Apple could be contractually preventing rivals from developing apps that work with other app providers, as "super apps" could.

Other legal experts noted that companies are legally allowed to favor their own products and services, so the government will have to explain why that is a problem with Apple.

Global population on 'baby boom', 'baby bust' divide

BENGALURU, India — Fertility rates in nearly all countries will be too low to sustain population levels by the end of the century, and most of the world's live births will occur in poorer countries, according to a study published on Wednesday.

The trend will lead to a "baby boom" and "baby bust" divide across the world, with the boom concen-

trated in low-income countries that are more susceptible to economic and political instability, senior researcher Stein Emil Vollset from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, or IHME, at the University of Washington in Seattle said in a statement.

The study, reported in The Lancet, projects that 155 of 204 countries and

territories worldwide, or 76 percent, will have fertility rates below population replacement levels by 2050. By 2100, that is expected to rise to 198, or 97 percent, researchers estimated.

The forecasts are based on surveys, censuses and other sources of data collected from 1950 through 2021 as part of the Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors Study.

More than three-quarters of live births will occur in low- and lower-middle-income countries by the end of the century, with more than half taking place in sub-Saharan Africa, researchers said.

The global fertility rate — the average number of births per woman — has fallen from around five children in 1950 to 2.2 in 2021, data show.

By 2021, 110 countries and territories (54 percent) had rates below the population replacement level of 2.1 children per woman.

The study highlights a particularly worrying trend for countries like South Korea and Serbia, where the fertility rate is less than 1.1 child per female, exposing them to the challenges of a dwindling workforce.

Many of the most resource-limited countries "will be grappling with how to support the youngest, fastest-growing population on the plan-

et in some of the most politically and economically unstable, heat-stressed and health system-strained places on earth", Vollset said.

While tumbling fertility rates in high-income countries reflect more opportunities for education and employment for women, researchers said the trend signals an urgent need for improvement in access to modern contraception and female education in other regions.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

WORLD

Ex-Disney executive's book bridges cultural gap

LOS ANGELES — Former Disney executive producer Marc Handler's recently released new book, *Collaborative Screenwriting and Story Development: A Global Guide for Writers, Story Teams, and Creative Executives*, rises above dozens of more run-of-the-mill screenwriting guides by teaching existing and aspiring filmmakers how to bridge cultural divides, most notably between the narrative traditions of China and Hollywood.

"In a world that lurches from one war to another, where nuclear arsenals are being rebuilt and the destruction of humanity is a contingency plan, stories and films are among the few things that can bring us back to sanity," Handler says.

Handler explains that they do that in the humblest way "by reminding us that we are all human and that life is precious ... Our differences are small, and our common humanity is infinite."

In his book, he imparts invaluable insights into the collaborative nature of modern storytelling. He articulates a vision of global cooperation, stating, "The world needs international cooperation."

He says: "We need to learn from each other, understand each other, and develop effective ways to work together."

When author and screenwriter Handler first embarked on this book, he was an executive producer at Disney, China, where he spearheaded international co-productions and facilitated learning exchanges to bring Chinese media professionals to Disney in Los Angeles to learn from the top filmmakers in the entertainment industry.

Broadening perspectives

"As the Chinese groups learned from their American counterparts, they adapted the things they did like to their own style. This broadened their perspectives and gave them new tools to work with on their stories," Handler recounts.

That gave participating Chinese writers, filmmakers and entertainment executives "the best of both worlds," he says.

"I realized that we Americans could learn from that approach too; in fact, all the international writing groups could learn from each other. Imagine new cultural ideas ping-pong in all directions, inspiring us, and making our writing more daring and inventive," he enthuses.

Handler says he appreciates the mutual learning between Chinese and US groups, emphasizing that such exchanges "broadened their perspectives and gave them new tools to work with on their stories."

Throughout the book, Handler meticulously dismantles the Hollywood-centric view of screenwriting, presenting a more inclusive perspective that values stories and storytelling techniques from diverse cultures. This approach not only broadens the writer's toolkit but also fosters a deeper appreciation for unique cultural differences and storytellers from around the world.

XINHUA

Private sector holds key to climate finance

By OTIATO OPALI in Nairobi, Kenya
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The private sector, government and international organizations have reiterated that Africa needs to attract more private sector finance in order to bridge its climate finance gap.

They made the remarks during a two-day meeting in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi that concluded on Wednesday to discuss ways to increase climate finance in Africa.

During the Climate Change Global Business Summit, speakers called on multilateral development finance institutions to strengthen their role in de-risking green projects. This will make it more attractive for domestic and international private sector players to enter Africa's green space.

While addressing the media at the event, Adele Fusi, think tank Euro-



Workers rest during a break at the Eastern Industrial Park, a Chinese-built complex, in Dukem, Ethiopia, on Feb 16. LI YAHUI / XINHUA

Chinese investments bring Africa benefits

Cooperation platforms like BRI can help boost relations, observers say

By EDITH MUTETHYA in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
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As Africa strives to industrialize, the ability to bring prosperity, create jobs and improve incomes for all will be greatly helped by Chinese investments in the continent, as well as helping deepen the relationship between the two partners, experts say.

According to McKinsey & Company, a US multinational strategy and management consulting firm, Africa only represents 2 percent of total manufacturing output globally and only 0.6 percent of imports of manufactured goods globally come from the continent.

Experts believe that through cooperation platforms like the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the Belt and Road Initiative, Africa's industrialization dream could become a reality.

According to Humphrey Mushi, director at the Center of China Studies in Tanzania, through the BRI, the level of industrialization in Africa has increased in terms of its contribution to the gross domestic product.

"In Tanzania, for example, 60 percent of Chinese investments are in manufacturing," he said.

Ezechiel Nibigira, former Burun-

di minister of foreign affairs, said Africa has manpower that is young and not expensive, terming it a good opportunity for Chinese enterprises to establish industries in the continent.

Maged Aboulmagd, former deputy assistant minister in Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said for the China-Africa partnership to move wider and upward, the parties might have to consider adding industrialization to their priorities.

Creating value

He specifically suggested transforming Africa's agriculture through agro-industry, noting that it would link two sectors together, create value and jobs, get Africa in the global supply chain and boost food security, consequently reducing poverty and creating growth.

"The recent establishment of industrial parks in Tanzania and in Egypt and elsewhere are excellent starting points in this direction," Aboulmagd said.

He said Africa's manufacturing sector has not only been minimal in its contribution to the continent's GDP and employment but it's also concentrated in only 10 countries that dominate almost 80 percent of Africa's manufacturing activity.

"This sector needs a healthy dose

of investments not only in the food sector but also in products like beef and fish processing, leather and cocoa to mention a few," he said.

"Manufacturing needs to take hold in African economies, and there's no better partner to co-invest in our drive for industrialization than China."

Sheriff Ghali Ibrahim, director of the Center for Contemporary China Studies at the University of Abuja in Nigeria, said he hopes China can help Africa increase manufacturing capacity to develop an export-led economy.

Noting that the African Growth and Opportunity Act, a trade agreement between the US and the sub-Saharan African countries, expires next year, Sheriff suggested the establishment of a similar pact between China and Africa.

With the African population projected to hit 2.5 billion by 2050, Sheriff said China could help Africa to increase food production through agricultural mechanization to feed the expected high population.

According to the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, because of new technologies and approaches such as biotechnology, digitalization, artificial intelligence, and nanotechnology, there are more options available to make agriculture more productive and water and land use more efficient, improve diet structure, and reduce waste and greenhouse gas emissions.



Flooded out

Local residents use a makeshift boat in a flooded street in Kudus, Central Java, on Wednesday. Flash floods that continue to ravage certain areas of 31 villages in Indonesia's Kudus district, have affected 39,272 residents, according to the district's Regional Disaster Mitigation Agency. DEVI RAHMAN / AFP

pollutants in the world. She urged African nations to tackle challenges like high interest rates for green projects such as geothermal, solar and wind energy projects in order to attract private sector financing.

In his presentation at the summit, Hennie Heymans, the chief executive officer at logistics company DHL in South Africa, pointed out that the implementation of Africa's nationally determined contributions in mitigating climate change from 2020 to 2030 is estimated to require about \$2.8 trillion.

The summit comes after the African Union and the government of Kenya co-hosted the inaugural Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi in September, culminating in the Nairobi Declaration that calls for a significant overhaul of the global financial system to facilitate climate action financing.

Special envoy pushes for peace, stability in region

By WANG QINGYUN
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A Chinese special envoy has concluded a nine-day trip to Switzerland, Russia and the headquarters of the European Union, making a new round of diplomatic efforts to maintain stability in Northeast Asia.

The trip, which concluded on Tuesday, took Liu Xiaoming, special representative of the Chinese government on Korean Peninsula Affairs, to the Tenth Zermatt Roundtable on Security Issues in Northeast Asia held in Montreux, Switzerland, the Foreign Ministry said.

He had discussions on regional security and other issues of mutual interest with officials and scholars, including Alexandre Fasel, state secretary of Switzerland's Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Andrey Rudenko, Russian deputy foreign minister, and Niclas Kvamstrom, managing director for Asia and the Pacific at the European External Action Service, and shared China's position and views.

Those who interacted with Liu spoke positively of the role China has played, and said they hoped to

strengthen exchanges with China to jointly safeguard peace and stability in Northeast Asia.

During Liu's visit to Russia, the two countries agreed to maintain close communication and coordination over the situation on the Korean Peninsula and security issues in Northeast Asia.

Liu's trip came as the United States and the Republic of Korea held their annual Freedom Shield joint military exercise, which lasted for 11 days. Reports quoted Japan and the ROK as saying the Democratic People's Republic of Korea fired short-range ballistic missiles on Monday, days after the military exercise concluded.

China has on various occasions called for the restoration of talks and addressing the reasonable security concerns of all parties to the Korean Peninsula issue, especially those of the DPRK.

At a news conference earlier this month, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said it is urgent for the parties to stop deterrence and pressure to prevent further escalation of tensions.

Anyone who disrupts peace in the peninsula "will pay a huge price," Wang warned.



Palestinians mourn their lost relatives who were killed in a strike on a building in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Wednesday. SAID KHATIB / AFP

Former US officials urge tough steps against Israel

WASHINGTON/GAZA — Nearly 70 former US officials, diplomats and military officers on Wednesday urged US President Joe Biden to warn Israel of serious consequences if it denies civil rights and basic necessities to Palestinians and expands settlement activity in the West Bank.

"The United States must be willing to take concrete action to oppose" such practices, the group said in an open letter to Biden, "including restrictions on provision of (US) assistance (to Israel) consistent with US law and policy."

Among the signatories were more than a dozen former ambassadors, as well as other retired State Department officials and former Pentagon intelligence and White House officials, including Anthony Lake, a national security adviser to former president Bill Clinton.

The letter underscored rising dismay in the US over Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip after Hamas militants went on the rampage on Oct 7 in southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people and taking 253 people hostage.

Much of Gaza has been destroyed and nearly 32,000 Palestinians killed, according to Gaza health authorities. The United Nations says the population of 2.3 million has little food, water and shelter, and food shortages in some parts exceed famine levels.

In its letter, the group said that an Israeli military operation against Hamas was "necessary and justified". But Israel's operations "have been marked by repeated violations" of international law.

Israel denies its operations breach international law.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who began his regional tour with meetings in regional powerhouse Saudi Arabia, has warned that Gaza's "entire population" is suffering "severe levels of acute food insecurity".

Despite mounting international pressure, Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu told US Republican senators on Wednesday that Israel will continue its efforts to defeat Hamas in the Gaza Strip, senators told reporters.

The Israeli military said on Thursday that it killed more than 50 Palestinian gunmen over the past day in fighting around the Gaza Strip's Al-Shifa Hospital. The military said it was continuing with its "precise operational activity in the Al-Shifa Hospital."

'Main killers'

Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, warned on Wednesday that siege, hunger, and diseases will soon become the main killer in Gaza.

"This fabricated and catastrophic level of hunger can still be reversed by flooding Gaza with food and life-saving assistance," he said. "More than ever, humanity requires political will."

According to an Israeli business community leader, Israeli managers are "generally in favor" of the return of Palestinian employees whose work permits were canceled after Hamas attack.

Dan Catarivas, the president of the Israeli Federation of Bi-national Chambers of Commerce, called for a discussion on this question which has serious consequences for Israel's economy, where the construction sector relies on Palestinian labor.

Some 120,000 Palestinians, the majority from the occupied West Bank, had permits before the conflict in Gaza to enter Israel to work, but those were canceled.

The permits are approved by COGAT, an Israeli defense ministry body governing civilian affairs in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Now, more than five months into the conflict, only 8,000-10,000 Palestinians have been allowed back to work in Israel.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

GLOBAL LENS



A Chinese visitor throws coins into the Trevi Fountain in Rome on Feb 16. PHOTOS BY GUGLIELMO MANGIAPANE / REUTERS

WELLSPRING OF WISHES

Tourists' coins thrown into iconic Rome fountain also help with charitable causes



Items collected with coins from the Trevi Fountain are pictured at the office of Catholic charity Caritas in Rome on Feb 26.



Coins collected from the Trevi Fountain are counted at the Catholic charity Caritas office in Rome on Feb 26.

What happens to the coins tossed into Rome's Trevi Fountain?

As visitors' coins splash into Rome's majestic Trevi Fountain carrying wishes for love, good health or a return to the Eternal City, they also provide practical help to people the tourists may never meet.

For centuries, when in Rome, visitors have flocked to the fountain to make a wish. Few gave their coins a second thought.

Today, coins pile up for several days before they are fished out and taken to the Rome division of the worldwide Catholic charity Caritas, which counts the bucketfuls of change and uses them to fund a food bank, soup kitchen and welfare projects.

In 2022, Caritas collected 1.4 million euros (\$1.52 million) from the fountain and it expects to have gathered even more in 2023.

Up to four workers collect the coins twice a week, regional utility Acea manager Francesco Prisco said. The fountain is drained for cleaning twice a month. Extracting the coins is a spectacle and involves utility workers balancing on the edge of the vast Baroque fountain, using long brooms and suction hoses.

The coins are then given to Caritas, where they are dried with hair-dryers and cutlery dry-



“I wanted to make a wish which is dear to my heart. But I also know that this coin is not just staying there but will help needy people. I made a wish but hopefully this money will help other people's wishes too.”

Yula Cole, from Brazil

ers and sorted and counted.

Signs around the fountain explain that the change will go to charity — a thought that pleases many of the tourists posing by the landmark.

“I wanted to make a wish which is dear to my heart,” said Yula Cole from Brazil after throwing in a coin. “But I also know that this coin is not just staying there but will help needy people. I made a wish but hopefully this money will help other people's wishes too.”

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



A customer shops in Rome on Feb 27 at a local supermarket financed with money collected from the Trevi Fountain.



From top: Utility worker Alexio Cola uses a broom to gather coins from the emptied Trevi Fountain in Rome on Feb 19. Caritas employee Fabrizio Marchioni, at the charity's office in Rome on Feb 26, uses a hair-dryer on coins collected from the fountain. Coins from the fountain are placed in a container in Rome on Feb 19.



Volunteers carry bags containing coins collected from the Trevi Fountain in Rome on Feb 19.

BUSINESS

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RRR cut buzz gathers steam

By ZHOU LANXU and OUYANG SHIJIA

Lukewarm financing demand and the upcoming issuance of a large amount of treasury bonds may necessitate a cut in the reserve requirement ratio in the second quarter of the year as the external financial conditions are set to improve, experts said.

They commented as senior central bank officials pointed to the scope for further reducing the RRR — the proportion of money lenders must hold as reserves — a second time this month. Such hints are seen by some analysts as a harbinger of the People's Bank of China cutting the RRR in the near future.

"The second quarter remains a window for aggregate (monetary) easing," said Li Chao, chief economist at Zhesang Securities. "If the renminbi exchange rate is still under pressure, the probability of interest rate reduction would be small, and an RRR cut may be effected."

On Thursday, Xuan Changneng, deputy governor of the PBOC, said China has ample policy space and a rich reserve of monetary tools, with scope to further cut the RRR, reiterating the tone delivered by PBOC Governor Pan Gongsheng earlier this month.

The average RRR of China's banking industry is currently 7 percent after a 50-basis-point cut in February, official data showed.



A pedestrian walks past the headquarters of the PBOC in Beijing. JIANG QIMING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Xuan said at a news conference in Beijing that the declining deposit costs and shifts in the monetary policies of major economies would give China greater flexibility in interest rate adjustments, vowing to provide ample liquidity and promote the stability and gradual reduction of financing costs for enterprises and households.

On Wednesday, the US Federal Reserve kept its overnight benchmark borrowing rate in a range between 5.25 percent and 5.5 percent while implying 75-basis-point interest rate cuts by the end of this year, which will mark a shift from monetary tightening to easing.

Xuan's remarks reinforced expectations that the PBOC may cut the RRR in the coming months, as this year's 1 trillion yuan (\$138.9 billion) in ultra-long-term special treasury bonds may kick off issuance from the second quarter, which could tighten liquidity conditions and

necessitate measures to release long-term liquidity, experts said.

Zhou Guannan, chief fixed-income analyst at Hua Chuang Securities, said cutting the RRR should be a key policy option to ensure smooth liquidity during the issuance of ultra-long-term special treasury bonds and may be implemented when the issuance of government bonds peaks.

"Assuming that the special government bonds are issued between April and June this year, the government bond supply may peak in May," Zhou said.

The scope for monetary easing facing China would further expand if the US Federal Reserve starts to reduce interest rates in the second half of the year, said Wang Tao, who expects to see cuts in policy interest rate benchmarks of 10 to 20 basis points and RRR cuts about 50 basis points this year.

On Thursday, traders bet that there are 73.8 percent odds that the

Fed will start cutting interest rates in June, according to the CME Fed-Watch Tool.

Experts said the subdued financing demand of the real economy should also be a key reason justifying an RRR cut. The increment in aggregate social financing — the total amount of financing to the real economy — reached 8.06 trillion yuan in the January-February period, down by 1.1 trillion yuan year-on-year, PBOC data showed.

"If the economy was not performing well in the first quarter, there is likely to be a monetary expansion, but more likely in terms of cutting RRR rather than the direct cuts of the interest rate," Wang Dan, chief economist at Hang Seng Bank China, said during a webinar hosted by the International Finance Forum on Wednesday.

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More effective investment key to growth

Private investment 0.4 percent higher in first two months, NBS data show

By OUYANG SHIJIA and ZHOU LANXU

China will implement a series of policy measures aimed at boosting effective investment in a bid to promote steady economic growth this year, officials said on Thursday.

Liu Sushe, deputy head of the National Development and Reform Commission, the country's top economic regulator, said the commission will coordinate effective utilization of policy tools including investment from the central government budget, the issuance of ultra-long-term special-purpose treasury bonds and local government special bonds.

"We will accelerate the approval of local government special bond projects, giving full play to the guiding role of government investment," Liu said at a news conference in Beijing, adding that more efforts will be made to boost private investment enthusiasm and expand technological innovation, spur development of emerging sectors and promote new urbanization, thus expanding the scope for effective investment.

Amid China's push to seek private investment in local government projects through a national unified platform, the private sector has participated in 1,612 such projects worth over 2 trillion yuan (\$278 billion) in all as of the end of February, the NDRC said.

With a slew of policy measures aimed at supporting private sector development, private investment rose 0.4 percent year-on-year in the first two months, up from a 0.4 percent decline in 2023, said the National Bureau of Statistics.

Liu said the country is studying and drafting a private sector promotion law in a bid to provide legal safeguards to better support the development of the private economy and create a stable and predictable institutional environment.

To further stabilize and expand private investment, he said the country will also encourage the private sector's participation in

key infrastructure projects.

During the meeting, Liu highlighted the importance of fostering new quality productive forces, saying more efforts will be made to promote the integrated development of strategic emerging sectors and create new growth drivers to support regional growth.

Data from the NBS showed China's January-February investment in manufacturing increased 9.4 percent, 5.2 percentage points higher than the overall growth of fixed-asset investment. Notably, investment in equipment manufacturing and high-tech manufacturing surged 14.3 percent and 10 percent during the period, respectively.

Liao Min, vice-minister of finance, said China's strides toward high-quality development and the nurturing of new quality productive forces are expected to offer rising growth opportunities for global stakeholders.

Liao said the country will continue to improve mechanisms to protect the rights and interests of foreign investors, further shorten the negative list on foreign investment, fully ensure national treatment for foreign investors and continue to strengthen intellectual property rights protections.

Looking ahead to the full year, Liao said the country's strengthened coordination of various policies will not only consolidate the economic recovery trend, but also help deepen supply-side structural reforms, promote technological progress and foster new quality productive forces.

Addressing a webinar hosted by the International Finance Forum on Wednesday, Steven Barnett, senior resident representative of the International Monetary Fund in China, said the IMF sees room for China's fiscal policy to be broadly neutral, but rotate away from investment and more toward consumption as a means to help secure economic recovery in the near term.

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China to speed up accession to CPTPP

By ZHONG NAN zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

China will use a variety of channels to engage in multilevel communication and exchanges with all relevant parties in order to speed up its accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, said the Ministry of Commerce on Thursday.

China is fully confident and capable of meeting the high standards set by the CPTPP, said He Yadong, a spokesman for the ministry, during a weekly news conference in Beijing.

Since applying to join the CPTPP, China has communicated and consulted with all members in accordance with the accession process. The Chinese government has conducted a comprehensive, full and in-depth study and evaluation of the agreement's content, said He.

The CPTPP, which took effect in December 2018, is a free trade agreement among 11 countries. The pact's current members are Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam.

"We have proactively aligned our policies and legislation with the CPTPP rules in relevant areas and are well-prepared for market access offers in goods trade, trade in services and investment," he said, adding the government has carried out reforms and pilot projects in related areas. Its efforts have achieved encouraging results.

For example, China has taken the initiative to exercise pilot programs on par with CPTPP standards in its pilot free trade zones where conditions are mature, as well as at the Hainan Free Trade Port.

To foster a more open, fair and competitive environment for mul-

tinational corporations, more efforts will be made by the Chinese government to end practices that hinder fair competition and refine the bidding process, ensuring foreign companies can participate in setting standards and join committees under equitable conditions, according to an action plan released by the General Office of the State Council on Tuesday.

By expanding market access, China will create a number of opportunities for foreign companies, enabling them to venture into previously unexplored markets and broaden their global presence, said Wang Xiaohong, a researcher specializing in cross-border investment at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges in Beijing.

To counter the rising trend of protectionism and trade barriers, China will continue to promote free trade and economic openness.

China aims to create a more inclusive and interconnected global trading system that benefits all participants, Wang said.

Ministry of Commerce said China had signed 22 free trade agreements, such as the China-South Korea Free Trade Agreement and the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement, with 29 countries and regions by the end of January, covering about one-third of its total foreign trade volume.

To create more favorable conditions, China has implemented several reform measures to accelerate the industrial transformation of its State-owned enterprises. These reforms aim to foster new economic drivers and upgrade the economic structure, according to the information released by the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council, China's top State assets regulator.

SOEs are also encouraged to collaborate with private businesses across a broad spectrum of areas to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

Briefly

Shanxi's coalbed methane output up

China's coal-rich province of Shanxi extracted 1.99 billion cubic meters of coalbed methane in the first two months, up 13.6 percent year-on-year, accounting for about 79 percent of the country's total, said the provincial statistics bureau. Utilizing coalbed methane, a byproduct of coal, can help reduce risks in mining, cut greenhouse gas emissions and ease gas shortages. Shanxi is one of several Chinese regions with abundant coalbed methane resources. It houses about a third of China's estimated reserves of the energy commodity.

Tencent reports net profit, revenue growth

Chinese internet giant Tencent saw year-on-year revenue and net profit increases in 2023, according to financial results the company released on Wednesday. Tencent raked in 609 billion yuan (\$86 billion) in revenue in 2023, up 10 percent year-on-year, and it made a net profit of 157.7 billion yuan, up 36 percent. Fintech and business services revenue contributed the most to the company's total top line, bringing in 203.76 billion yuan last year, with gaming revenue standing at 179.9 billion yuan.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Nuclear power plant operator sanguine on renewable energy

By ZHENG XIN zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

China General Nuclear Power Group, the country's largest nuclear power plant operator by installed capacity, has vowed to expand its footprint in the global renewable energy sector by forging partnerships with domestic companies.

The company signed contracts with China Energy Engineering Corp Ltd, known as Energy China, and Norinco International Cooperation Ltd, in Beijing on Wednesday, on overseas clean energy projects in South Africa, Laos and Bangladesh, with the total value of the contracts exceeding 6 billion yuan (\$830 million).

The project construction will cumulatively drive 1.54 gigawatts of photovoltaic modules and wind turbine equipment capacity to go global, it said.

Collaboration with domestic partners will help accelerate its reach in international renewable energy markets, while serving the power development and industrial upgrade of the host country, driving the high-quality development of the new energy industry chain, it said.

Shi Weiqi, president of CGN Energy International Holdings Co Ltd, a subsidiary of CGN, said the

company will focus on Latin America, Europe and Africa in wind projects in future, while actively developing solar projects in Southeast Asia.

The company will also further tap the solar market potential in Latin America, Central Asia and Africa, which receive abundant sunlight, he said.

"With global renewable power capacity expected to grow to 7.3 TW between 2023 and 2028 under existing policies and market conditions, according to forecasts by IEA, and solar PV and wind to account for 95 percent of the expansion, the market potential for renewable energy worldwide is massive," he said.

According to Shi, after decades of development, the company is currently operating 48 clean energy projects across 16 countries, including Malaysia, France, Brazil, South Korea, Laos and South Africa.

Installed capacity for the projects under operation and construction overseas has reached 13.63 million kilowatts, while total overseas assets have exceeded 80 billion yuan, he said.

According to CGN, the operation of the company's Tanque Novo wind power project (TN project) in Brazil, which is also the second greenfield project independently built by CGN in Brazil that was put

into operation in May, has successfully introduced the Chinese wind turbine industrial chain into the Brazilian new energy market while supporting the export of products of 24 other Chinese enterprises along the industrial chain.

With a total installed capacity of 180 megawatts, the project is equipped with 40 China-developed wind turbines with the largest blades in South America.

A result of the innovative cooperation of China and Brazil in the field of energy, the TN project provides clean energy and contributes to employment in Brazil while upgrading the country's energy transformation and wind power industry, Shi said.

According to CGN, the project is expected to generate 720 million kilowatt-hours of power annually, available for 430,000 Brazilian households, a reduction of 650,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions per year and equivalent to the reforestation of 1,800 hectares of forest.

During construction of the project, more than 1,000 jobs were provided to local people, which contributed to the country's economic and social development, it said.

With more than 40 years of operational and construction experience in the domestic nuclear power



A view of the booth of China General Nuclear Power Group during an expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

and new energy fields, the company could bring these experiences overseas while making local improvements, said Shi.

By teaming up with established domestic entities, CGN can leverage their expertise, resources, and networks to navigate complex regulatory landscapes and access new markets more efficiently, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

CGN's move underscores China's broader push toward renewable energy development and its ambi-

tion to establish a stronger presence in the global clean energy sector. With renewable energy adoption gaining momentum worldwide, CGN's partnership-driven approach positions it well to capitalize on emerging opportunities and contribute to the global transition to sustainable energy, he said.

Yang Changli, chairman of CGN, said CGN will continue to seek new partnerships and collaborations to enhance its contribution to the advancement of clean energy worldwide.

BUSINESS

Homegrown chatbot throws hat in AI ring

Moonshot AI's Kimi able to handle 2m Chinese characters in single prompt

By FAN FEIFEI
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Industry experts said the updated Kimi chatbot launched by Chinese artificial intelligence startup Moonshot AI has made breakthroughs in processing extensive textual inputs and is of great significance in expanding application scenarios for homegrown AI-powered large language models.

They added that Chinese tech companies should pool more resources into improving computing power, algorithms and quality of data, and ramp up investment in basic scientific research to gain a competitive edge in the global AI chatbot race.

The updated Kimi chatbot, which is currently in the beta testing stage, can now handle up to 2 million Chinese characters in a single prompt, setting itself apart from existing domestic AI-powered LLMs.

Moonshot AI has trained a 100-billion-parameter LLM and rolled out its first ChatGPT-like LLM Kimi Chat in October, which can process long text inputs of 200,000 Chinese characters.

LLMs refer to computer algorithms that are trained with copious amounts of data and are capable of generating content such as images, text, audio and video. They are fundamental to the core technology behind Sora, a new text-to-video generator developed by US-based research company OpenAI that has taken the world by storm.

Moonshot AI was founded in March 2023 in Beijing by Yang Zhilin, who graduated from Tsinghua University, and received his doctoral degree in computer science from Carnegie Mellon University in the United States.

In February, the company raised more than \$1 billion in a new funding round led by tech heavyweight Alibaba Group Holding Ltd, social media platform Xiaohongshu and venture capital firm HongShan.

The updated Kimi chatbot has showcased its strong ability to deal with a myriad of tasks. For instance, it can provide medical advice after perusing a Chinese medicine handbook. The company also plans to launch its own multimodal AI models this year, which will further expand the range of applications for Kimi.

Industry insiders said the Kimi chatbot is expected to become the

benchmark product in the field of AI-generated content or AIGC sector, and its capability of handling as many as 2 million Chinese characters in a single conversation will help enterprises produce high-quality text content more efficiently.

Wang Peng, a researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, said the process of handling long textual inputs — such as novels, history documents and complicated law files — will greatly improve the LLMs' capacities in context understanding and analysis.

"This requires the AI models not only to have strong computing power, but also excellent memory and management abilities to maintain a coherent understanding of long-form context," Wang said.

China's major advantages in developing AI models lie in abundant data resources and diverse application scenarios, while the US has taken the lead in basic AI research, chips, algorithms and other crucial technologies alongside a sound innovation ecosystem, he added.

AIGC-related technologies will improve the productivity of content production and inject fresh impetus into China's economic growth, said Pan Helin, a member of the Expert Committee for Information and Communication Economy, which is under the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

Chinese AI companies should beef up self-developed and proprietary abilities in underlying computing power chips and programming software, as well as increase investments in basic scientific research including mathematics, statistics and computer science, to catch up with foreign counterparts in the AI chatbot race, he added.

Zhang Xiaorong, head of the research institute at manufacturing company Deep Innovation, which is based in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, said it has always been a big challenge to deal with long-form context in the aspect of natural language processing, which requires AI models to have stronger memory capability.

The AI models, which boast the ability to process expanded length of Chinese-character prompts, will also improve the accuracy and efficiency of natural language processing, as they can better understand and generate natural language text, Zhang said.

Bridging the future



An aerial image shows the Fuchimen cross-sea bridge, an undertaking being built by China Railway Construction Corp, in Zhoushan, Zhejiang province, on Monday. CRCC, a centrally administered State-owned infrastructure heavyweight, is ramping up transportation projects nationwide to enhance integrated development. China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp, a CRCC unit, said its builders working on the Yangzijin Road project in Yangzhou, Jiangsu province, completed the second phase of a box-girder project, which weighs 2,800 metric tons and will be moved into place next month.

YAO FENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Life sciences company Cytiva to speed up localization initiatives for growth

By LIU ZHIHUA
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China remains a focus for Cytiva, as it is an important market with rapid growth and sound supply chain resilience, and accelerating localization in the country is one of its crucial global priorities, a senior executive of the global life sciences company said.

"After years of rapid growth, China's biopharma industry has entered a period of adjustment, but in the long run, this industry will continue to grow, and I believe that more and more Chinese innovative drugs will enter the international market and benefit patients worldwide," said Li Lei, president of Cytiva in China.

"The aging population and vibrant innovation ecosystem provide long-term growth drivers to our industry. We are here for the long run."

Leveraging its parent company Danaher's "Launching China" strategy, Cytiva will continuously step up localization to strengthen research and development and manufacturing capacity, while collaborating with all stakeholders from academia to industry peers to create a robust ecosystem for future growth in the country, he said.

Cytiva's 2023 Global Biopharma Resilience Index showed that 83 percent of survey respondents in China agree that the country is quite or very effective at integrating and making use of advanced digital technologies associated with the advanced pharmaceutical sector, bringing great competitive advantages.



Li Lei, president of Cytiva in China

In China, the company offers a wide range of technologies and end-to-end solutions to enable smart biomanufacturing, and has built a digital service center empowered by augmented reality and virtual reality,

and the industrial internet of things to safeguard customers' R&D and production round the clock. To support more Chinese innovative drugs, the company expanded its R&D facility in Shanghai last year and set up a new accelerator for novel therapies that uses its biomolecule R&D and GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice) pilot manufacturing platforms to facilitate the development and manufacturing of new drugs.

The company also attaches great importance to talent resources in China. It has expanded its training capacity and is now capable of training 2,000 people every year in the country. Besides, its online training platform has more than 40,000 registered members.

"China is the world's second-largest economy and the second-largest market for biopharmaceuticals. As China deepens its opening-up policies, cooperation between Chinese and foreign enterprises in biopharma will become closer, and the flow of technology, talent and capital will become more convenient," Li said.

Foreign enterprises can better share in the economic growth of China

through deeper cooperation here and achieve a win-win future with the country, he said, adding that the ability of Chinese companies to go overseas will also continue to improve, allowing more innovative drugs to benefit not only patients in China but also around the world.

"The market value of publicly listed Chinese biotech companies has grown from \$1 billion in 2016 to \$180 billion in 2021. The growth of the market has given us the confidence to further develop in China," Li said.

"We will pay more attention to the changing needs of our customers and better serve them with more innovative solutions. Meanwhile, we will keep our focus on novel therapies, as well as digitalization and automation solutions to facilitate the high-quality development of China's economy."

Nie Pingxiang, a researcher at the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said that multinational companies in China are increasingly focusing on research and development, strategic emerging industries, and future industries. "That indicates that China, in its pursuit of high-quality economic development, places greater emphasis on encouraging technological innovation and the growth of strategic emerging and future industries," Nie said.

"Multinational companies also maintain a positive outlook on China's long-term growth potential and strategic importance. All of this contributes to stabilizing and enhancing the quality of foreign investment inflows in the country."

Citrusuco reaffirms investment in China

By ZHOU WENTING
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Citrusuco, the world's largest supplier of orange juice by market share, is committed to investing further in China, a market with tremendous potential for growth globally, the company's top executive said.

The potential comes from Chinese people's unique habit of consuming orange juice on various occasions and individuals' rising health needs, said Marcelo Abud, CEO of Sao Paulo-headquartered Citrusuco Group, during an exclusive interview with China Daily in Shanghai.

"We believe the future is in China. The growth rate of NFC (not from concentrate) orange juice market share in China has been 10 times faster than the average speed of other moderately growing countries these years," said Abud.

"While mature markets, such as the United States and Europe, are likely to decline in orange juice consumption, the China market is growing at an accelerated pace," he said.

Having invested in the country for two decades, the company established its first China office four years ago to increase the level of its investments significantly.

Investments also went into empowering local distribution channels as well as new tools and systems for cultivating markets and reaching consumers, among others.

Justice is often introduced into Chinese tables for three meals and diversified social occasions as well, whereas in the West, it is usually consumed only during breakfast, said Abud.

People have also developed rising health awareness after the COVID-19 pandemic. "However, less than 10 percent of beverage consumers in China would currently choose to purchase orange juice. We still have abundant opportunities to increase market penetration," he said.

To cater to Chinese consumers' preference for orange juice, after setting up an R&D team for Chinese consumers specifically and a laboratory for Chinese tastes, the company has cultivated a different type of orange to meet consumer expectations with increased investments in farms in Brazil, said Abud.

Observing a Chinese as well as global trend where individuals are paying greater attention to sugar consumption, the company is also working on developing a low-sugar version of orange juice by joining hands with some Chinese enterprises.

John Lin, CEO of Citrusuco's business unit Evera, said that it has been collaborating intensively with Chinese biotech enterprises and research institutes, and the two countries are quite complementary in their advantages.

"For example, China and Brazil have different types of technologies to offer when it comes to agriculture. If we look at the downstream sectors, Brazil has the source of raw materials, while China has the conversion technology. Such a combination is fairly powerful," he said.

Evera was founded by the group two years ago to create natural orange-sourced ingredients that allow the food, beverages and fragrance industries to operate in a healthier and more sustainable manner.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Brazil.

Augusto Pestana, consul-general of Brazil in Shanghai, said that at least hundreds of Brazilian enterprises are present in the China market, and that he looks forward to the next 50 years of even better development in bilateral relations.

"The Brazilian side will launch initiatives to make the country increasingly perceived by Chinese consumers not only as a big supplier of food products and others, but also for quality and diversity," he said.

Zhejiang farmers gain traction from tailor-made power services

By ZHUANG QIANGHE
and PANG BO

At a tea cultivation area in Sheyang in the prefecture-level city of Quzhou, Zhejiang province, sprawling tea bushes carpet mountain slopes, where workers busily collect leaves and place them in baskets during spring tea picking.

Tea processing is one of the pillar industries in Sheyang under Longyou county, and also a main source of income for villagers. The local government has encouraged farmers to plant alpine *yanwu* (cloud and mist) tea and Anji yellow tea, to increase incomes.

But the booming business can occasionally encounter problems, said Weng Jianmin, manager of Jianmin Tea-making Co.

"I have a 2-hectare garden with tea plants in the village, and plan to rent another 1.3 hectares of hilly land to grow new varieties. But the new land is far from the village, and I have had some trouble getting electric power," he said.

On getting to know Weng's difficulties, Chen Zhongyan, a staffer from the local branch of the State Grid — the world's largest utility firm shouldering a dual task of safeguarding the nation's energy security and its economic lifeline — rushed to the new site to conduct a joint survey with him.

"I never expected that the whole process — from consultation to design, construction and power connection — would only take six days, and a low-voltage line could be put in place, providing me with electricity," Weng said, adding that now he can start his new business expansion.

Currently, agricultural planting has progressed from traditional modes to scientific planting, and electrification is changing energy consumption habits in agricultural production, while new kinds of power needs are growing day by day, said Yan Mingliang, a staffer from State Grid Quzhou Electric Power Co.

Assessing the new cultivation needs, State Grid is taking tailored measures to serve farmers to better realize rural vitalization, Yan said.

In Zhejiang, for example, State Grid has been optimizing its drive to "set up models in 1,000 villages while upgrading services in 10,000 villages" with upgraded power supplies by joining hands with local governments beginning in 2003.

In Longyou county, a service system — with special service windows, on-duty personnel, service rules and excellent service quality — has been established to extend power supply services to every villager, said Yan. "If there is any electricity issue in

a village or a town, villagers can go to nearby village-network power service stands for consultation, which greatly hastens their access to critical power resources," said Yan, who serves as a deputy director at the Huzhen subbranch.

In addition to spring tea harvesting, it is also the busiest season for spring plowing and irrigation, which maximizes rural electricity consumption used by irrigation equipment, said Su Hang, a farmer in Sheyang's Shantou village.

"I had a problem myself, as overloaded circuits in my pump house rendered pump motors inoperable, causing my irrigation efforts to be stalled," he said, adding that he went to the nearby power service stand for consultation.

The power staffers immediately went to check on the situation and saw that it was caused by insufficient current flows and faulty overload protection. So, they increased power capacity while replacing the protector.

"With reliable electricity supplies now, I'm sure that my crops will flourish, and a handsome income is expected," Su said.

In Shicun in Xiaonanhai town, power workers also recently visited a strawberry plantation base at Future Agricultural Park to assess power usage and met with its technical director Wang Xionglong to



Employees of State Grid Quzhou Electric Power Co check a greenhouse at Future Agricultural Park in Longyou county, Zhejiang province, on Tuesday. WANG JIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

see if any assistance was required.

Equipped with drip irrigation equipment, supplementary lights as well as integrated water and fertilizer irrigation facilities, the base can accurately control ambient temperatures for strawberries and automatically monitor water and fertilizer irrigation activity.

"With improved conditions, we have installed a smart agricultural system in the park, and temperature and humidity levels can be

monitored round the clock. But we need your help for power," Wang told the visitors.

Mao Xiaowei, another staffer from State Grid Quzhou Electric Power Co, said their optimized services will help rural areas in Zhejiang achieve more common prosperity, as well as improve ecological conditions.

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BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

Retail MNC riding consumption frenzy in nation

Foreign fashion brands continue to hike investment in Chinese market

By ZHENG YIRAN
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When Eugenio Bregolat Lukashov, a 39-year-old Spaniard who has been living in China for 26 years, was asked about China's economic development over the past two decades, he used the word "astonishing".

Bregolat, now president of Inditex Greater China, first came to the country when he was two years old. In fact, he's lived in China longer than any other place.

As a witness to China's economic development, he said, "It is astonishing that China has been able to develop so rapidly over the past few decades."

Bregolat said that when his family first arrived in China, there was even a special currency for foreigners, as they couldn't pay in local currency.

"At that time, I remember in Beijing there was only one foreign supermarket. There were very few restaurants where foreigners could eat in those days. And I believe we were the only 40 Spanish people in the whole country, not just in Beijing."

Also, as a resident of Shanghai for 13 years, he recalled the first time that he came to the city from Beijing. The train took him many hours. Today, it takes only four and a half hours to travel from Beijing to Shanghai by high-speed train.

"I remember when I first saw Pudong, there was only the Oriental Pearl Tower and the Jinmao Tower. It's only been 20 years ago," he said.

Bregolat's confidence in China's economy and the Chinese market was reflected by Inditex's business strategies in the country over the past years.

The owner of brands such as Zara, Massimo Dutti and Zara Home said it will further adapt its business strategies to consumer needs and adjust store opening plans in China, renovate existing ones, exploit the power of digital platforms and remain upbeat about the local market where consumption upgrade and consumption recovery now form the impetus.

The company has sought to dispel rumors that Zara is gradually moving out of China, clarifying that it is only adjusting its store-opening strategies and increasing emphasis on opening more high-quality stores, following its global approach.

On Aug 17, Zara renovated and upgraded its outlet in Joy City shopping mall in Shenyang, Liaoning province, giving it a more digital edge. Its mobile app can detect the



Customers walk past a Zara store in Shanghai in May. WANG GANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

number of available clothing items, reserve an on-site fitting room, and pre-order and pick up goods. It also opened a new image store in Shanghai Sun Plaza and renovated its Han Street store in Wuhan, Hubei province.

"China is important for us and is a strategic market for Inditex. We will keep investing in new digital functionalities and high-quality stores in the Chinese market, and continue to open more stores in top commercial areas or renovate existing ones, so they reflect Zara's latest brand image and meet the needs of local consumers," Bregolat said.

He acknowledged the potential of China's consumption, as well as the inspiration the company gets from Chinese consumers.

"We all know that there are a lot of trends that first begin in China and then are exported to the world, especially with China's increasing digitalization. So we are constantly learning and taking inspiration from China and its consumers. I can feel the energy in the country, which makes me feel alive," he added.

Fast fashion, the category that Zara falls into, refers to a clothing production mode that quickly responds to shifting consumption demand from customers and fashion trends. It aims at taking advantage of the supply chain and cutting the cycle period from production to sales so as to offer fashionable clothing to consumers at relatively low prices.

Fast fashion has become a high-



Consumers are seen at a collaboration project launched by Zara and Chinese home accessory brand Xi Xing Le in Shanghai in January. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

value race of sorts in the clothing sector. Before 1980, the clothing industry was dominated by a model of separated production and sales, and sales channels were mainly department stores. Due to long links, high markup rates and low flexibility in discounts, consumers could not enjoy either good quality or cost-effectiveness at the same time.

After 1980, fast fashion, perhaps best represented by Zara and Uniqlo, rose to prominence, and achieved a vertically integrated sales model encompassing product planning, manufacturing and retail sales, allowing consumers to purchase higher-quality products at lower prices.

Fast fashion in China started at

the beginning of the 21st century. In 2002, Uniqlo opened its first outlet in China in Shanghai, unveiling China's development of fast fashion. Afterwards, a number of fast fashion brands, including Zara and H&M, entered the Chinese market one after another. The fast fashion sector in China experienced a rapidly growing period.

Data from industry research portal chinabaogao.com showed that in 2017, fast fashion brands had set up 416 outlets in China in total, reaching a peak in nearly a decade, and market volume surpassed 200 billion yuan (\$27.8 billion).

However, since 2018, affected by the sluggish commercial real estate market, the impact of e-commerce

platforms and the trend of consumption upgrading, the expansion pace of fast fashion brands in the Chinese mainland market has gradually slowed. In 2022, the growth of new domestic stores of fast fashion brands decreased to 154, a year-on-year decline of 49.51 percent, according to chinabaogao.com.

"In the past, with broad choices, fast product upgrades, rich fashion elements and high cost performance, fast fashion was popular among Chinese consumers. Now, facing a series of challenges and the fact that the dividend of the fashion era is waning, the industry has entered a stage of differentiation from the original stage of wild growth. To maintain competitiveness and realize sustainable development, fast fashion brands need to positively seek transformation. For example, they can establish diversified product portfolios, integrate online and offline channels, and highlight brand stories and culture," said the report from chinabaogao.com.

Zheng Lei, chief economist at cloud services provider Smydigtech, said: "After the three-year pandemic, fast fashion brands are shifting their business strategies in China to adapt to new market environments and new consumption demand. This also reflects the change and the upgrade trend in China's consumption sector. Consumers have higher demand for quality and experience."

Jiang Han, a senior analyst at



Eugenio Bregolat Lukashov

market consultancy Pangoal, said: "China's fast moving consumer goods sector still maintains great potential and room for growth as Chinese consumer

demand for fashion and product quality constantly grows. Although some fast fashion brands are shutting down some of their outlets in China, this does not mean foreign companies are moving out of the country.

"On the contrary, they are adjusting their strategies to adapt to new changes in the Chinese market. Through high-end transformation and digital innovation, foreign companies are striving to enhance their competitiveness in the local market."

With foreign media speculating that China's consumption remains weak and its economic growth is losing momentum, Yang Jinghao, chief economist at Concat Data Technology (Hangzhou) Co, said that the former only coincides with a statistical data gap period, while the latter is simply a replacement of concepts in macroeconomic growth models to spread pessimistic expectations.

"I hold a moderately optimistic attitude toward China's macroeconomic growth in the next two years, especially since the third quarter of last year when it was confirmed that China's economy had bottomed out in the inventory cycle. With the United States Federal Reserve launching a loose monetary policy cycle in Q3, China's external demand environment will also improve. Therefore, badmouthing China's economy at this time lacks macroeconomic logic and factual basis," he said.

Amid the backdrop of the three-year pandemic, China's consumption sector has continued to recover, serving as a strong driver of the country's economy. The latest data from the Ministry of Commerce showed that in 2023, China's total retail sales of consumer goods reached 47.1 trillion yuan, growing 7.2 percent year-on-year. The contribution rate of consumption to China's economy was 82.5 percent, demonstrating that the fundamental role of consumption is constantly rising.

Sheng Qijun, vice-minister of commerce, said at an earlier news conference that this year, the MOC and related departments have launched a series of activities to boost consumption, and introduced a series of policy measures, including those to promote automobile and home appliance consumption, to promote the sustained recovery of consumption.

South Korea's Amorepacific sees pretty prospects, profitability across China

By ZHENG YIRAN

Speaking highly of China's consumption potential, technological innovation and fashion leadership, South Korean cosmetics giant Amorepacific is confident about China's market and will continue to focus on serving its consumers, said its top executive in the country.

"Since entering China in 1992, Amorepacific's beauty business has continued to grow, and China has become one of Amorepacific's most important overseas markets. With the favorable policies frequently introduced by China for foreign investment enterprises, we are confident about increasing our investment in China," said Mike Hwang, president of Amorepacific China.

Hwang said that as a globally significant consumer cosmetics market, China — within the framework of dual circulation — plays a positive role for the company in terms of technological innovation, fashion leadership, consumer insights, new product development and other aspects, both internationally and domestically.

Amorepacific has been deeply rooted in China for more than 30 years. Based on a consumer-centric



Mike Hwang

principle, it has formed a Chinese consumer-oriented research and development system, which helps the company gain in-depth insight into

market trends, fully understand consumer needs and further expand its localized innovation footprint.

The group established a global R&D center in Shanghai. Through big data exploration, consumer behavior surveys, product blind tests and clinical tests, the R&D center explores cosmetics trends in the Chinese market, as well as the specialized technical content that meets the needs of Chinese consumers, integrating it into the entire product lifecycle.

Meanwhile, in the digital era, Amorepacific has been accelerating its digital transformation in China. By actively promoting full-link digital strategies, it is further shaping its sustainable competitiveness and forming new business modes to stimulate consumption.

Working with experts and partners in the ecosystem, the company

is deepening digital applications in the cosmetics market. Teaming up with Ali Cloud, the company has developed Dashboard, a multidimensional visualized digital platform that organically combines data from the various sub-brands of the group, helping it make better business decisions.

The company is also working with mainstream e-commerce platforms, such as Tmall and JD, and new social media platforms to better interact with Chinese consumers and offer smarter products and services to customers, both existing and potential.

Driven by many factors such as the upgrading of consumption structure, the enhancement of aesthetic concepts and a desire for higher-end livelihoods, domestic cosmetics consumption continues to grow.

According to the latest report released by market consultancy iiMedia Research, China's cosmetics industry in 2023 totaled 516.09 billion yuan (\$71.68 billion), growing 6.4 percent on a yearly basis. It is expected that the market will reach 579.1 billion yuan by 2025.

Fu Yifu, a senior researcher at the Star Atlas Institute of Finance, said:

"In recent years, China's economy and society have been developing rapidly, and household disposable incomes have continued to rise. Currently, there is still great consumption potential to be tapped into. Judging from the consumption data from this February's Spring Festival and the recent consumer price index data, China's consumer confidence is constantly improving. With favorable policies to promote consumption being implemented, the consumption potential is expected to be further released."

For foreign cosmetics companies in China, Zhan Junhao, founder of Fujian Huace Brand Positioning Consulting, suggested they deeply learn about demand and consumption trends within the Chinese market, and adjust their business strategies and brand positioning accordingly.

"They should place emphasis on innovation and R&D to satisfy consumers' pursuit of quality and individuality. They should also have good communication with consumers to establish good reputations. In addition, as China pursues green development, such firms would do well to focus on sustainable development," Zhan said.



A visitor (left) checks out skincare products at Amorepacific's booth during the sixth China International Import Expo in Shanghai in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Hwang from Amorepacific added: "In the future, we will continue to implement the three core strategies of 'consumer-centric product innovation', 'continuously advancing digitization', and 'future-oriented sustainable development' to provide Chinese consumers with more diverse and satisfying prod-

ucts and services that meet their consumption needs. Furthermore, Amorepacific will adhere to corporate social responsibility, and actively promote sustainable actions suitable for the Chinese market, such as carbon neutrality, plastic reduction, sustainable products and consumption."

COMMENT

Editorials

'Ironclad' support a blank check for trouble if Manila takes it at face value

While Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said in an interview on Tuesday that the Philippines was not deliberately "provoking the bear" in the belief that it could "run to Big Brother" for protection if the bear was provoked, he effectively made it clear that it is in fact vice versa: the Philippines has solicited the support of its "Big Brother", the United States, so that it can provoke China, which it views as "the bear".

Likewise, his claim that "we must do more to defend our territory" because "the threat has grown" is on the other foot, as it is China that is having to respond to the Philippines' US-encouraged provocations over Ren'ai Reef and Huangyan Island in the South China Sea, of which there have been at least 10 occurrences since his government took office.

It is the Philippines' frequent provocations and spreading of disinformation to mislead the perception of the international community that have caused incidents that have escalated the tensions in the South China Sea. The latest was 34 Filipino personnel ignored China's warnings and dissuasion and illegally landed on China's Tixian Reef on Thursday, according to China Coast Guard spokesperson Gan Yu. The CCG dealt with the incident according to the law.

As the Chinese Foreign Ministry has pointed out, it is the Philippines which is breaching the common understandings with China and heightening the tensions in the South China Sea by attempting to change the current status of Ren'ai Reef and make it a fait accompli, and it is the Philippines that has courted external forces to put pressure on China. It is primarily the support of the US, which is not a party to the South China Sea issue and which has no justification for intervening in the maritime issues between China and the Philippines, which has prompted Manila to have the gumption to renege on the commitments it has made to Beijing.

The Joe Biden administration's role as the agent provocateur behind Manila's reckless moves was put in the spotlight the same day as Marcos was interviewed, when US Secretary of State Antony Blinken promised the US would "stand by our ironclad defense commitments" to the Philippines in the event of Filipino forces, ships or aircraft coming under an armed attack anywhere in the South China Sea.

In another volte-face of the facts, Blinken accused Beijing of actions "that threaten our common vision for a free, open Indo-Pacific", when it is Manila and Washington, which are trying to exploit the territorial disputes in the waters for their own agendas, that are guilty of disturbing the peace in the South China Sea.

That the Biden administration is goading Manila to "provoke the bear" for its own delight was reinforced by the White House announcing, also on Tuesday, that Biden will host a summit with the Philippine leader and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in April. Speaking at a news conference on Tuesday, Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said the meeting will provide a boost to "the free and open international order based on the rule of law" indicating that Tokyo is eager to join the bear-baiting games of Manila and Washington.

Marcos also said in his interview on Tuesday that, "We're just trying to feed our people", but the promised rewards for being the US' proxy are likely to remain just a pie in the sky given that the previous pledges of money the administration has made here, there and everywhere that have failed to materialize.

The Philippines should handle its maritime disputes with China as it has pledged to do, through dialogue and consultation, and advance practical maritime cooperation with it so as to keep the South China Sea peaceful and stable.

Central region stepping up to the plate

The high-quality development of the country cannot and should not be advanced independent of that of the central region, which is why the central authorities on Wednesday called for solid efforts to further energize the region.

The central region's development has reached a higher level since the last time the central authorities called for the collective energizing of the six central provinces five years ago. For instance, over the past five years, the economy of the central region has been generally stable, the momentum of innovative development has been continuously enhanced, its industrial foundation has been significantly improved, reform and opening-up have taken new steps, social undertakings have developed in an all-round way, people's living standards have continued to improve, and the pace of green and low-carbon transformation has accelerated.

It is fair to say that the region has better conditions for advancing its high-quality development. Yet there are still many difficulties and challenges that need to be overcome.

The region, which comprises Shanxi, Henan, Anhui, Hubei, Jiangxi and Hunan, covers an area of 1.03 million square kilometers, about one and a half times the size of Texas, and has a population of 368 million.

Thanks to the country's fast economic growth over the past more than 40 years, the region is now the country's important grain production base, energy and raw material base, modern equipment manufacturing and high-tech industry base, and comprehensive transportation hub.

In terms of economic size, the gross domestic product of the central region reached 27 trillion yuan (\$3.75 trillion) in 2023, accounting for about 22 percent of the national GDP, with a population of about 26.29 percent of the national total.

To advance the region's high-quality development, more efforts now need to be made to push forward industrial innovation led by scientific and technological innovation, and actively cultivate new quality productive forces.

It is crucial that local authorities in the region make forward-looking plans for modernizing the industrial system underpinned by advanced manufacturing.

Also, efforts should be made to better link the region with the nation's other major national socioeconomic and regional development strategies, such as those related to the Yangtze River Economic Belt, the Yellow River Basin ecological and environmental protection, the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei integrated development, and the Greater Bay Area, to help the region better integrate into and support the country's new development pattern.

The six provinces should pay more attention to strengthening their regional coordination and promoting the free flow of production factors not only within the region but also with neighboring regions, so as to promote deep reforms and high-level opening-up in a coordinated manner. The progress of the Belt and Road Initiative and the free trade agreements between China and other economies, as well as the fast development of the digital economy and cross-border e-commerce, all provide the central provinces with better opportunities, stages and channels to step up their joint efforts to grow into a more competitive inland pacesetter for opening-up that is closely connected with the world market system.

They should remove any institutional barriers obstructing their cooperation, and avoid a beggar-thy-neighbor development pattern and local protectionism. By enhancing their collaboration and coordinated endeavors across the board, and pooling their efforts and wisdom they can better play their role in ensuring the nation's food security, ecological and environmental protection and green and low-carbon development.

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Cai Meng



Opinion Line

China's economy has braved obstacles in the past, and will continue to do so

Some Western politicians and institutions recently invented the "Peak China" theory, arguing that China's development has peaked.

Despite Western countries claiming over the past decade that China's development is disappointing and will collapse, the economy has been continually developing, even under pressure, and scaling new heights. In 2023, China's GDP exceeded 126 trillion yuan (\$17.50 trillion) and its per capita disposable income exceeded 39,218 yuan, both more than double that of 2013. China's 5.2 percent economic growth last year is significantly higher than the 2.5 percent of the United States, 0.5 percent of the eurozone and 1.9 percent of Japan, making it an important engine for global economic growth.

Some people believe China's total population has already peaked, and the disappearance of the "demographic dividend" will make China's growth miracle in the

past four decades unsustainable. It is true that the size and structure of China's population have undergone major changes in recent years, but its working-age population, between 16 and 59, is still about 865 million strong, giving it one of the highest labor participation rates in the world, and labor resources are still abundant, which means China's demographic dividend has not disappeared. More important, compared with the size of the population, the key factor affecting a country's medium- and long-term economic growth is the quality of its population.

At present, China's total human resources, scientific and technological people, and the total number of research and development personnel, all rank first in the world. Despite its aging population, China's annual effective labor has been increasing, and its "demographic dividend" is transitioning to a "talent dividend", providing a solid human

foundation for its high-quality development and sustained economic growth.

Those pessimistic about China's development also argue that US-led Western technological blockades will affect the development of China's high-tech sector and contain its development. The fact is that since the founding of New China, it has been repeatedly blocked and suppressed by Western countries, but the Chinese people, by dint of their self-reliance, have tided over all difficulties to achieve one miracle after another. Now, with a solid material and technological foundation, can the "small yard, high fence" erected by Western countries block the pace of China's innovation and development? Various problems will arise as China's economy is at a critical stage of moving toward high-quality development, but as long as it faces up to these problems, and introduces targeted measures, they will all be resolved.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

Safeguard for Hong Kong's security and prosperity

After the Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region unanimously passed the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance mandated by Article 23 of the Basic Law of Hong Kong on Tuesday, some Western figures, including those in the European Council, began attacking the legislation and questioning the business environment in Hong Kong. However, they were just engaging in routine "political theater".

The latest legislation, in conjunction with the already implemented Hong Kong National Security Law, fills in the gaps in safeguarding national security in Hong Kong, truly ensures its long-term stability and the steady progress of the "one country, two systems" policy.

Around the world, countries attach importance to national security legislation.

The United States and the United Kingdom, for instance, have both enacted strict national security laws; as many as 21 in the US and 14 in the UK.

In fact, "protecting human rights" runs through every part of the Hong Kong National Security Law. The law explicitly regards respecting and protecting human rights as an important principle. Protecting the rights and freedoms stipulated in the Basic Law of Hong Kong, and the relevant provisions of international conventions continue to apply to the city. For the vast majority of Hong Kong residents and international investors, the law is a "guardian" protecting their rights and freedoms, property, and investments.

Security is the premise of development. The Hong Kong National Security Law not only ensures security but also protects devel-

opment. Data show that by 2023, the number of companies stationed in Hong Kong with their headquarters overseas or in the Chinese mainland reached 9,039, an increase of 61 compared to the previous year, returning to pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels; the number of start-ups increased by 270 to nearly 4,300, reaching a historical high.

This indicates that following the implementation of the Hong Kong National Security Law, confidence in Hong Kong's business environment remains strong among domestic and overseas investors and enterprises. With the law in place, Hong Kong has a more stable and predictable business environment, and people are more confident in investing and doing business in Hong Kong.

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

What They Say

Visit highlights rebound in Sino-Australian relationship

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi began a three-day visit to Australia starting on Tuesday, the first visit of a senior Chinese official to Australia in seven years. That the Anthony Albanese government scrapped Australia's anti-dumping measures targeting Chinese-made wind power turbines on March 15, shortly before his visit began, was a clear sign of Canberra's goodwill.

Although the move was believed to echo the anticipated lifting of China's restrictive trade policies on imports of wine and lobster from Australia by the end of this

month, its timing, along with Wang's productive visit to New Zealand that started on March 17, should have given the Chinese foreign minister a comparatively upbeat mood on his way to finish the last leg of his back-to-back visits to the two Oceania countries, which China always views as important part-

ners among developed economies.

Wang's packed schedule in Australia — he has met with the Australian prime minister, its top diplomat, the opposition leader, as well as major business leaders and strategists — also spoke volumes of the fact that the two sides not only want to repair their ties, which experienced some perceivable setbacks due to the one-sided pro-United States stance adopted by the previous Scott Morrison government, but also intend to fully tap the potential of Sino-Australian economic and trade cooperation.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the China-Australia comprehensive strategic partnership. It is an important year for the two sides to build on what has been achieved and chart the way forward. The ups and downs of the past decade have not only left both sides with lessons to learn from, but also accumulated experience worth cherishing.

As Wang pointed out, to that end, the most crucial thing is to stay committed to seeking common ground while shelving differences. The two sides should strive to

make the pie of common interests bigger and provide a sound business environment for the investment and operation of enterprises from the two countries.

That requires Australia to uphold its strategic autonomy and not let Washington dictate to Canberra how to handle relations with Beijing.

It is good to see that thanks to the joint efforts of Canberra and Beijing, trade between Australia and China bucked the overall downward trend last year, with nearly 80 percent of Australia's foreign trade surplus coming from its trade with China.

Since China-Australia relations are back on the right track, both sides should ensure there are no backward steps, as Wang urged. This serves the common interests of the two peoples and also meets the common expectations of countries in the region. It is clear that the development of China-Australia relations does not target any third party, so nor should it be influenced or disturbed by any third party.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Dominic Lee

New law to safeguard HK's future development

After years of discussions and anticipation, the Hong Kong Legislative Council finally passed the Safeguarding National Security Bill, as mandated by Article 23 of the Basic Law, on Tuesday, marking a pivotal moment in the history of the special administrative region. The new law promises to be an effective tool to prevent and punish acts endangering national security.

For more than three years since the implementation of the National Security Law, Hong Kong has remained calm. However, this outward tranquility does not mean Hong Kong is free from all national security threats. The ongoing case of media tycoon Jimmy Lai Chee-ying is a stark reminder of the underlying risks to national security and the importance of enacting such a piece of legislation as soon as possible. The new legislation will not only help maintain peace and stability in Hong Kong but also promote the city's prosperity.

The legislative process that enabled the passing of the Safeguarding National Security Bill enjoyed robust public support. Throughout the month-long public consultation that began on Jan 30, the government organized close to 30 meetings with representatives from various sectors of society to discuss and clarify the proposed legislation, addressing the concerns raised by the community. Out of 13,147 opinions received by the SAR government, a staggering 98.64 percent were in support of the new law, reflecting a broad consensus on the need for closing the national security loopholes.

Critics have been quick to characterize the LegCo's swift action on Article 23 as hasty. However, such criticism is unwarranted as the legislative work followed all the required procedures, and the deliberations were carried out with due diligence.

More important, when it comes to national security legislation, countries often act with urgency, without delay. For instance, within 21 days of the Sept 11 terrorist attacks in 2001 on the United States, then US Attorney General John Ashcroft presented a draft bill to Congress to strengthen national security. The US security law, spanning 342 pages and including 156 sections, was enacted in just 45 days, without a single public hearing and with the House of Representatives needing only 10 days to deliberate on it. Compared with the process of passing the US security law, Hong Kong's approach to the legislative process was thorough and based on the legal cornerstone of the SAR, the Basic Law. Safeguarding national security and pass-



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

The passing of the Safeguarding National Security Bill is a testament to Hong Kong's commitment to stability and proof of Hong Kong society's resilience.

ing laws based on Article 23 are a constitutional responsibility of the Hong Kong SAR, a responsibility that cannot be shirked. The 2019 violent protests against a proposed extradition bill, which many described as the "Hong Kong version of a color revolution", highlighted the urgent need for such legislation.

The riots and demonstrations not only posed a serious risk to national security but also created immense challenges for Hong Kong residents. The efficient cooperation between the executive and legislative branches of the SAR government helped overcome many obstacles to finalizing the draft bill, turning a new page in Hong Kong's development and fulfilling the aspirations of Hong Kong residents. Gratitude should be expressed to the Security Bureau and the related Bills Committee members for their tireless efforts in this regard.

With the solid legal framework for safeguarding national security in place, the Hong Kong government can now focus on boosting economic growth and improving Hong Kong residents' livelihoods and welfare, which would be a major step toward ensuring the SAR's stability and prosperity. This will further bolster Hong Kong's position as a global financial and logistics hub. Indeed, with the new law, "Asia's World City" is set to shine even brighter.

The passing of the Safeguarding National Security Bill is a testament to Hong Kong's commitment to stability and proof of Hong Kong society's resilience. Despite facing criticism, the SAR has taken a decisive step in a direction that it believes will safeguard its future development. With the whole world watching, Hong Kong is embarking on a path that it hopes will lead to a more secure and prosperous future for its residents.

The author is a convener at China Retold, and a member of the Hong Kong Legislative Council as well as the Central Committee of the New People's Party. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

West doesn't have monopoly over democracy

Editor's note: The third International Forum on Democracy: The Shared Human Values was organized by the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council Information Office in Beijing on Wednesday. More than 200 experts from different countries, regions and international organizations participated in the conference. Excerpts from the opinions of three of the experts follow:

Democracy not a value of the West alone

Many in the West think that democracy is a value of the West; it's a flag that we can wave as opposed to other parts of the world. Some would like to see the narrative, "democracy" versus "autocracy", become the new Berlin Wall of a new Cold War, of a new bipolarity and of a new confrontationist position that will make all international cooperation difficult.

We Western people are proud of the democracy we have won and established in our countries, particularly in Europe. It is the fruit of a long historical process that began with the French Revolution, and whose main protagonist was the workers' movement, which was aimed at winning effective, popular sovereignty against the politically narrow oligarchies that had long dominated Western societies.

But this legitimate pride should not prevent us from seeing that our model of democracy, because it is the result of a long, peculiar historical process, cannot be exported to and imposed on other parts of the world, as the failed experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq and other Middle East countries have again shown in recent years. It is also evident that today's world cannot be reduced to a binary contest between two democracy models. Those who believe, as I do, in the values of democracy should also realize that the logic of the Cold War and ideological challenge are not conducive to the circulation of ideas in which different civilizations and cultures can influence one another. On the contrary, acting on this logic, we could give rise to rigidity, which again is not conducive to the affirmation of human rights and democratic principles.

The ways to achieve sovereignty may be different, but the honor is on those who pursue an alternative model to the West to show in practice the compatibility between the absence of political pluralism and the effective exercise of freedom of expression and dissent, and the control on political power.

It's time for different civilizations and cultures to openly come together on the significant issue of human freedom and find ways to safeguard it, rather than merely engaging in ideological or propaganda confrontations.

While every country's political system is autonomously determined, there must be a transition toward a multipolar order in an interconnected world. This is the real global dimension of democracy, not to return to bipolarity, not to accept a unipolar world, but a world to govern together, a multipolar reality.

Massimo D'Alema, former prime minister of Italy

A more global transparent governance system needed

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 not only started the end of the Cold War, but also the decade following the historic event perhaps marked the high tide of global democracy. At that time, there were high expectations that liberal democracy would spread across the world.

Three decades on, we realize that those expectations never really materialized. Instead, people are now lamenting the fact that democracy appears to be in regression. Issues that are relevant include poor governance undermining trust and credibility in many democratic institutions around the world, and economic inequality creating fertile ground for populist, ultra-nationalist and extremist leaders. With the advancement of technology, the new challenges that democracy faces now include the fact that artificial intelligence and big data can be used as tools by those engaged in divisive information campaigns and polarizing societies.

But my focus is on a different aspect. Over the past three decades, we have also been unable to reform international organizations that make up the global governance system. Indeed, our inability to do so contributed to the failure of the global governance system to keep pace with economic

An OECD survey shows that the majority of people in Western countries believe their governments are not taking measures to promote the general people's interests; instead, they are promoting the interests of the wealthy and the powerful.

globalization. This means we don't have an effective or democratic global governance system.

Some of the above deficiencies require urgent fixing. The first is the global governance structure. Many international organizations were designed at the end of World War II, that is, almost three quarters of a century ago. The world has moved on considerably since then, and there has been a shift in the economic and political powers among the countries.

There are many emerging countries and economies which are now very influential and more relevant to global affairs, yet they continue to be underrepresented in international organizations, and they include countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. It is time to correct this imbalance because it is democratic and the right thing to do.

Also, time and again we have seen the dominant powers enjoy the privilege of picking and choosing which rules or which agreements they comply with, sometimes even using veto powers to shoot them down if there is a conflict of interest. One cannot have a global governance system that can be called democratic if there is no equality under the same rules and same laws. This, too, needs to be fixed.

Besides, the decision-making process of many international organizations lacks in openness, transparency and inclusivity.

It's time to improve the process and ensure widespread consultations on every important issue with more diverse stakeholders, maybe even civil society, taking part, in order to make the process inclusive. A more transparent and open process will also allow scrutiny from the global media.

More important, the decisions that are taken by international organizations often have a profound impact on many people around the world, and yet there is no system of accountability. It is time we built a system that would hold these organizations accountable, beginning perhaps with the creation of an ombudsman's office.

I believe this process itself will help build the foundation for a comprehensive global governance system that would ensure international organizations play a constructive role in spreading true democratic values in countries around the world.

Abhisit Vejjajiva, former prime minister of Thailand

Deficit of trust in Western democracies increasing

More than 2,500 years ago, Confucius and the ancient Greek philosophers deliberated on the same concept of moral governance almost simultaneously, yet they arrived at different conclusions. But their ideas laid the foundation for different civilizations in the East and the West, that allow us to not just live in peace but also carry out meaningful exchange of ideas.

In the same way, democracy is a universal value but it can take different forms. The Western countries should therefore accept political systems that are different from their own.

That the Chinese government enjoys a high level of trust among the people is easy to understand not only because China has lifted about 800 million people out of abject poverty — a unique achievement in human history — but also because it is the only country which has doubled its development index, which is measured by the

United Nations taking into account the GDP as well as qualitative indicators such as equality, education and life expectancy.

What about the deficit of trust in our Western democracies? There are not only economic or political reasons but also a combination of reasons for that. It is also because wages have not increased in tandem with the rise in productivity. In other words, our societies have wealth but that wealth is not distributed equally. These economic inequalities are a major reason behind the lack of political trust.

An OECD survey shows that the majority of people in Western countries believe their governments are not taking measures to promote the general people's interests; instead, they are promoting the interests of the wealthy and the powerful. This also reflects the feeling that globally Marxism is versus capitalism. A recent survey also shows that more than 52 percent of the respondents see capitalism as a negative force which does more harm to the world than good, with the majority of the respondents saying they believe capitalism is failing them.

We are living in a multipolar world, where countries including developing ones should adjust and consider policies based on their real socioeconomic conditions. The global approval for China is higher than that of the United States, at 62 percent, in the developing world. And yet Western propaganda claims the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative has created debt traps for other countries, which is not the view held by Belt and Road countries.

I hope in the future the East and the West, the North and the South will hold regular consultations and avoid confrontations, while trying to promote the common interest of all humankind.

Georgios Katrougkalis, former minister of foreign affairs of Greece

The views don't necessarily represent 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

CHAI QIMIN AND LIU BOHAN

Raising the bar

EU has been the first to propose a new 2040 climate target as required by the Paris Agreement

COP29 is due to be held in late 2024 in Baku, Azerbaijan, and countries are setting new climate targets. Under the Paris Agreement reached in 2015, a new round of climate targets for mitigating and adapting climate change are to be submitted by the parties before COP30 in Belem, Brazil.



Chai Qimin



Liu Bohan

The European Union is striving to demonstrate its leadership on climate action. It released its "Communication on Europe's 2040 climate target and path to climate neutrality by 2050", in which it proposes reducing the net greenhouse gas emissions by 90 percent by 2040 relative to 1990 as the EU's mid-term climate target. Nevertheless, this is considered to be a case of the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

According to the European Climate Law passed in 2021, the EU should set a climate target for 2040 within six months after the First Global Stocktake of the Paris Agreement issued by COP28 in December 2023, then incorporate it into the European Climate Law. At the same time, the proposed 2040 climate target is also the basis for formulating the Nationally Determined Contribution goal by 2035 submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change before COP30.

The European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change recommended that the EU must strive for net emission reductions of 90 percent to 95 percent by 2040, relative to 1990.

The European Commission regards achieving the 2030 climate goals, ensuring a just transition, adjusting the EU's energy structure, reducing its industrial and transport sector emissions, developing green agriculture and the bioeconomy, and empowering climate actions through policies and innovation as the main ways to achieve the 2040 climate target. Needless to say, the EU's climate actions have encountered many obstacles. Two different evaluation reports, by the European Court of Auditors and the European Com-

As the world's largest developing country, China is expected to basically achieve modernization and build a beautiful China by 2035. Its Nationally Determined Contribution to climate change is also a very important factor for economic and social transformation, the development of new quality productive forces and the construction of an ecological civilization.

mission in 2023, both indicate that the EU is struggling to achieve its "FIT 55" target by 2030. From the perspective of geopolitics, the Ukraine crisis has dragged down the EU's green transformation. Funding has become a dilemma. The EU is allocating funds to prolong the Ukraine crisis, consequently reducing its support for its green transition.

Politics is another factor that can't be ignored. Considering the decision-making process of the EU, there are still variables in the 2040 climate target. On the one hand, the proposed target has just been suggested by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and the official proposal will be handed in by the next president of the European Commission after the European Parliament election in June. It is unknown whether the next Commission president will treat green policies as a priority. On the other hand, the proposed target must be reviewed and discussed by the European Council and the Council of the EU to achieve a consensus, and ultimately it must be approved by the European Parliament.

The EU is not united as one. Hungary is a member state that opposes the climate goals. Some right-wing and nationalist parties

oppose the climate goals as a policy proposition in this year's elections. What's more, some stakeholders such as farmers are opposing the climate target. The EU's climate goals will also cause wider ripples. As an economy that has announced its mid-term climate goals early, the EU has put paradigm pressure on other countries, similar to the situation that the EU proposed the "climate neutrality" goal in 2019. Across the Atlantic, the United States is once again facing a partisan climate split. The US presidential election will affect the future global climate governance process this year, and the EU climate goals may be a strong card for Joe Biden.

It is clear that the EU will continue to apply its trade defense instruments to protect its industry and ensure resilient supply chains, as it believes that China and the US engage in unfair trade by means of fiscal incentives, public subsidies and integration to lead dominance of many raw materials, electric vehicles and clean energy supply chains.

Although the EU 2040 climate target has not yet been finalized, its assessment of mid- to long-term international trends, technological innovation, and industrial competition still provides a valuable reference for other economies. In addition, the EU has fully leveraged the modeling studies and think tanks.

At present, China is formulating its 2035 climate target under the Paris Agreement. As the world's largest developing country, China is expected to basically achieve modernization and build a beautiful China by 2035. Its Nationally Determined Contribution to climate change is also a very important factor for economic and social transformation, the development of new quality productive forces and the construction of an ecological civilization.

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MARCOS CORDEIRO PIRES

Out with the old, in with the new

China's place in the world economy is being cemented by the creative destruction of its innovative clean technologies

In 2023, Chinese car manufacturer BYD surpassed Tesla and took the lead in the global electric vehicle market by selling over 3 million vehicles. This is a significant achievement for the company. Additionally, BYD produces the blade battery, which offers superior performance, greater autonomy and safety. It's worth noting that other Chinese companies such as Great Wall Motor, Chery and Geely are also making rapid progress in the global EV market.

China is also leading in other sectors linked to the energy transition, such as producing photovoltaic panels and rotors for solar energy turbines. Wind turbine company Goldwind Science & Technology Co edged out Danish company Vestas from the top slot last year. Six of the seven most significant solar energy producers, led by Tongwei Solar, are now Chinese.

China's great productivity in generating clean and renewable energy, offering high-quality goods at low prices, is helping other countries develop their own clean energy production. But, fearing the competitiveness of the Chinese companies, the European Union imposed additional fees in 2013, following complaints from European solar panel manufacturers that they were being forced out of business. After finding that the measures made energy generation companies unviable, the EU had to revoke the fees in 2018. The United States is taking a different path, trying to beat the competition by imposing sanctions or additional taxes on Chinese suppliers.

China's global role in the energy transition market can be exemplified by Brazil's production of renewable energy, which primarily uses tools made in China: Brazilian solar energy production multiplied 13-fold between 2017 and 2022,

making the country rank the eighth globally, led by China, the US and Japan. Brazil also showed considerable performance in wind energy, making it the sixth-largest producer in the world. In 2024, Goldwind will open its first factory in Bahia, Brazil.

It is very interesting to observe how a developing country such as China is displacing established industrial powers and causing a revolution in the renewable energy sector. With Chinese companies advancing with EVs, large automakers in the US and Europe are finding it difficult to cope with this new competition. A new idea always surpasses the old one. This situation makes us refer to Joseph Schumpeter's concept of "creative destruction", a historical norm.

According to Schumpeter, the economic system is not static. It develops through productivity growth resulting from innovation, whether by creating a new product, new energy sources, a new production process, new capital goods, or the opening of new markets. This process of innovation and creation destroys established industries.

Take the example of the photography industry. Thirty years ago, the global market was dominated by companies such as Kodak, Fujifilm, Agfa and Polaroid. This segment involved the production of cameras, film, developing paper, chemicals, an extensive sales and development network, and even the industry that produced albums to protect and present the photographs. The vast chain was destroyed by five innovations: increased computer capacity, the internet, digital photography, smartphones and social networks. Because of this, hundreds of thousands of jobs and businesses were destroyed worldwide, but the number of photographs posted increased exponentially.

This same process is occurring in several other sectors and will be further accelerated with the devel-

opment of artificial intelligence. China's unique place in industrial production today is unavoidable, as, in addition to a gigantic production capacity, the country is advancing in the quality and innovation of its products. Currently, the country is pursuing high-quality growth, highlighting that quality must prevail over quantity. And in this sense, attempts to contain China's advance in the world economy are doomed to failure. In this aspect, let us return to Schumpeter's ideas.

Waves of innovation take place when there is a competitive and challenging economic environment, as productive agents need to act in a system marked by competition and uncertainty. The quest for profit and business survival makes entrepreneurs seek measures to increase their productivity through more efficient equipment, innovative processes, new products or by replacing workers with machines. Currently, conditions that force entities to adopt innovative practices are the new wave of technologies, climate change and global warming. Hence, new products related to the green economy and the digital revolution are being created.

China's success should be an example for other developing countries such as Brazil. It is impossible to offer a decent standard of living for the population without developing productive forces and the capacity for innovation. In this sense, quality education and adopting efficient public policies are essential, which the Chinese government has done since the founding of the People's Republic of China.

The author is a professor of international political economy at the Sao Paulo State University. 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.



ZHANG YUJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

LIFE

When Russian actress Yulia Peresild appeared at a downtown cinema in Beijing, she quickly stole the spotlight. "Hello, everyone, I'm *taikong jie* (space sister)," says Peresild, wearing a bright smile, greeting the local audience in her newly learned Mandarin.

As the first actress in human history to shoot a film in space, she was selected from around 3,000 candidates to spend 12 days aboard the International Space Station for the filming of the Russian movie, *The Challenge*.

Nearly one year after its debut in Russia, the film, which fictionalizes the story of a female surgeon sent to space to perform an operation on an injured cosmonaut, hit Chinese mainland theaters on March 15.

In addition to the tense plot, which is a race against time to save a life, the movie showcases the stunning scenery of space, taking the audience on a journey with the actress, offering a close look at how the cosmonauts work and live inside the ISS, which orbits more than 400 kilometers above the Earth.

Despite a tight schedule, Peresild, a 39-year-old native of Pskov in northwestern Russia, participated in a series of activities, from sharing her space-travel stories with Beijing fans, to visiting scenic spots like the Great Wall and bustling Nanluoguxiang lane.

Peresild recalls that she and director Klim Shipenko underwent rigorous training for three-and-a-half months at a cosmonaut training center in Russia between late May and early October in 2021, including 17 days in quarantine due to the pandemic. The training included taking a centrifuge test — Peresild endured a very respectable 22 minutes — and observing how thoracic surgeries are performed.

Before her historic space journey, Peresild wrote a farewell letter to her two young daughters. She only recently shared it with them while recording her book, *It's Space, Baby!*, detailing her journey into orbit.

After completing the space flight and docking at the ISS on Oct 5, 2021, Peresild, the director and their Russian cosmonaut guide floated inside to receive a welcome from seven other crew members, including those from Russia and the United States.

"We unloaded our filming equipment and were given a tour of the cabin, and shown essential items, such as masks and fire extinguishers. Although we felt a bit uneasy, we had to wake up at 6 am the next day due to the very intense shooting schedule," Peresild recalls.

The good news about space is that people need not worry about gaining weight in the gravity-free environment. Mentioning that an astronaut's regular caloric intake is around 3,000 calories each day, Peresild recalls she had a good appetite and found she tended to favor spicier foods while in space.

"The coffee in the American module is quite good, but the canned food in the Russian module is tastier," she says of the epicurean delights on offer.

Another lesson she quickly learned was how to adapt to the microgravity in space. As the film crew only consisted of two members, the actress had to do her own makeup, using adhesive hooks to keep cosmetic items in place and prevent them from floating away.

Looking out of the window of the Russian module offered her a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to witness a spectacular view, but it also posed



FILM GIVES STARS THE SPACE TO SHINE

Actress delivers a stellar performance in Russian movie shot aboard the ISS, Xu Fan reports.

Russian director Klim Shipenko pictured aboard the International Space Station in 2021 while shooting *The Challenge*, the first movie to be shot in space. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



From left: A poster for the movie. Actress Yulia Peresild meets with Chinese science popularizers in Beijing on March 12. She poses with *Dream of the Red Chamber*, a classic Chinese novel, given to her as a gift at a promotional event in Beijing on March 10.

danger. She recalls a moment when the director instructed her to remain near the window as the Earth was aligning closely with the sun.

"We could see a blue arc line at the edges of the sun and Earth. He exclaimed, 'Wow, it's incredibly beautiful. Stay right there. Don't move.' The entire sequence lasted

just 30 seconds. However, after that shot, I ended up with sunburn," she recounts.

Without the protection of the ozone layer in the stratosphere that

shields the Earth, it's easy to get overexposed to ultraviolet rays, according to Chen Zheng, an associate professor of physics at the Beijing Jiaotong University and an expert of

the *Tiangong Class*, China's first extraterrestrial lecture series.

Chen comments that the movie gives the audience an extremely realistic account of space travel, especially the scenes featuring Peresild as the surgeon entering the ISS with her hair floating upward.

"As a physics teacher, I am a bit obsessed with details," says Chen. "So, I always focus on the actress' hair while watching the movie. When she enters zero gravity, her hair stands upright and floats. This weightless feeling cannot be achieved on Earth by any physical means."

Du Liang, the Chinese producer of the film, tells China Daily that he had heard about the movie when it was still in the initial development phase.

"I had the chance to read the script before filming began. While it was a truly intriguing concept, I couldn't envision it coming to fruition due to the high costs and complexities associated with launching a manned spacecraft to send a film crew into space. Moreover, the crew of the ISS would have to allocate time to support the filming," Du explains.

Graduating from college in Russia after specializing in film and television, Du is well acquainted with the Russian film industry, noting that the country has produced acclaimed and commercially successful movies, such as the fantastic romance, *I Am Dragon* (2015), and the basketball-themed tale, *Going Vertical* (2017).

Du says that Shipenko has had a passion for space stories for years, recalling that the director previously helmed the 2017 movie *Salyut-7*, a nerve-wracking space movie adapted from the true story of two cosmonauts who fixed the damaged space station in 1985.

In 2020, Hollywood star Tom Cruise, alongside director Doug Liman, was reported to be planning to film in space with the aid of Elon Musk's SpaceX program. The plan has yet to be realized.

"Shortly after *The Challenge* wrapped, I heard that Cruise contacted Shipenko to inquire about the details of filmmaking in space, as he was very interested in the process," Du says.

When Du met the director during the Golden Rooster and Hundred Flowers Film Festival held in Xiamen, Fujian province, in November last year, the Chinese producer asked if the director had really seen the Great Wall from the ISS, as the depiction of spacemen observing the iconic Chinese fortification has been etched into the minds of generations of Chinese from their school textbooks.

"Shipenko replied 'yes, I saw the Great Wall from space. Several times in one day.' It made me very excited," he recalls.

According to the website of NASA, the space station makes 16 orbits of Earth, traveling through 16 sunrises and sunsets, in 24 hours.

With the movie garnering 8.0 points out of 10 on the major review aggregator Douban, Du estimates *The Challenge* may become an inspirational example, leading to a greater influx of Russian movies to Chinese mainland theaters.

"China has a vast film market. I hope that the movie's screening will attract a larger local audience and spark interest in Russian cinema, potentially paving the way for the import of more high-quality Russian films in the future," he says.

Contact the writer at xufan@chinadaily.com.cn

What's on



Etched into history

The Museum of Wu, in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, has mounted an exhibition celebrating the city's long tradition in stela engraving, where the fine technique involved renders dignity and grace to the carved characters and texts, as well as the rubbings made thereafter. A booming economic and cultural center since ancient times, Suzhou encouraged the practice of transpos-

ing the great works of intellectuals and artists onto stelae (usually slabs or pillars) and other stone surfaces, so that they would survive the ravages of time for people in the future to appreciate.

The current stela carving craft exhibition is the sixth in a series of that the Museum of Wu launched to introduce time-honored crafts and arts originating in Suzhou. Categories of stone engraving at the exhibition include those on rocks and cliffs, on gravestones, government announcements and on stelae on display at ancestral temples, among others. Suzhou has long been known for its quality stone, quarried from Taihu Lake, and the skill of its artisans. The show also displays rubbings of the stones to highlight the importance of this unique form of art in documenting history and preserving the essence of Chinese culture. The exhibition runs until May 5. 9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 9

Tantai Jie, Wuzhong district, Suzhou, Jiangsu province. 0512-6565-5999.

Rite where it belongs

The Evolution of Rites in the East, a grand exhibition to trace the history and cultures originating in Shandong province, sparked good reviews when it was held at the Tsinghua University Art Museum from October to early this year. It has now returned home, where it will be on display at the Shandong Museum in the provincial capital of Jinan. The exhibition brings together more than 400 artifacts from the collections of different cultural venues in the province, providing a panoramic view of the ancient cultures that thrived in the province and were integrated into wider Chinese civilization. Several items on show are classified as culturally significant. These include a red, animal-shaped



pottery kettle belonging to the Neolithic Dawenkou Culture, a bronze ax-blade from the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC), the hollow carvings of which form the face of an impressive beast, and a Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) crown — or nine-string *mian* — which was

excavated from the tomb of Zhu Tan, with the title of Prince of Lu. 9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 11899 Jingshi Lu, Jinan, Shandong province. 0531-8505-8201.

Wild imagination

Swiss artist Rebekka Steiger's exhibition now on at Tank Shanghai art center shows the influence of living in both the East and the West. A wild imagination, grounded in the experiences of traveling the world and different cultural perspectives, is evident. Her works blend the techniques of freedom and fluidity she learned from Chinese painting, while taking part in a residency program in the country years ago, to depict the relationship between nature and people, as well as the use of calligraphy brushwork to depict subjects in paintings. The title of the exhibition is taken from one of the paintings on show, *Octopus Mountain*, and is derived

from her experiences of traveling in Guilin, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, during which she found many mountains named because of their passing appearance to animals. It points to the angle of comparing Eastern and Western cultures in her work, which keeps widening her vision and enriching her mind. The exhibition runs through to June 2. 12 am-6 pm, Tuesdays to Fridays, 10 am-6 pm on Saturdays and Sundays. 2380 Longteng Avenue, Xuhui district, Shanghai. 021-6950-0005.



CHINA DAILY

LIFESHANGHAI

By YU RAN

On the yoga mat, in the soothing waters of a spa pool, sipping on a warm drink from a thermos filled with red dates and wolfberries, or enjoying the comforting warmth of an electric foot bath — these are just some of the unique ways the new generation of young people are embracing the pursuit of wellness.

As the pursuit of wellness becomes an essential pastime for many young people, a trend known as "New Chinese-style Wellness" has taken over social media platforms. Wellness, or *yangsheng* in Mandarin, is no longer a term exclusive to the middle-aged and elderly. Faced with intense competition in education and their careers, those born in the 1990s and 2000s have already embarked on a journey to safeguard their health.

The concept of "New Chinese-style Wellness" emphasizes the idea of dietary therapy, advocating for the consumption of fresh, natural ingredients, balanced meals and exercising moderation in the consumption of oily and spicy foods, essentially maintaining a light and nutritious diet. Additionally, it promotes mental well-being by incorporating traditional Chinese medicine theories to regulate emotions and achieve a balanced development of physical and mental health.

Furthermore, it advocates for light exercise, such as tai chi, to strengthen the body and achieve the goal of wellness and fitness.

Many young people are riding a trend. During a busy work day, they enjoy sipping herbal teas brewed in wellness pots, enhancing their well-being while tapping away at their keyboards.

Twenty-nine-year-old Tang Siyu, employed at an insurance company, is among those who have adopted a routine of carrying a large thermos flask into the office daily.

With a regular bedtime of around 11 pm and an early wake-up time of 6:20 am to walk her dog, Tang ensures she engages in physical exercise four to five times per week.

"Having a balanced and healthy diet has always been important to me. I grew up drinking health tonics following my mother's advice, and now I continue to prioritize my health based on my own preferences," says Tang, who traces her habits back to her college days, when she was greatly influenced by her mother, a nutritionist.

Reflecting on her health-conscious behavior, since the age of 17, Tang has prioritized early sleep, physical activity, and dietary control, avoiding fried foods, high-sodium products, and emphasizing a reduced sugar intake.

Different from her mother's approach to health, which involves seasonal herbal remedies for tonifying the liver in spring and treating winter ailments in summer, like many other young people, Tang enjoys drinking milk tea and indulging in meals with friends. However, she opts for sugar-free milk tea and avoids excessive food intake.

"I'm quite conscious about my diet, considering factors like calorie intake per meal. For instance, if I have a high-calorie lunch, I adjust my dinner accordingly," Tang elaborates.

The data from the Z Generation Nutrition Consumption Trend Report, published in 2022, also shows that young people are becoming the main drivers of health-related consumption. On average, each urban resident spends over 1,000 yuan (\$138) annually on health and wellness products. Among them, the 18 to 35 age group accounts for 83.7 percent.

"My daily health regimen mainly consists of taking vitamin supplements, protein powder and Ganoderma spore powder to boost immunity. I regularly consult with a TCM practitioner and undergo related treatments like massage therapy," says Tang, who spends approximately 1,000 to 2,000 yuan on healthcare and wellness every month.

In recent years, a new term has quietly emerged among young people — "punk wellness". Staying up late, applying the most expensive face masks, and using the most expensive eye creams; putting wolfberries in beer, or pairing ice cream with blood sugar-lowering pills. Overall, its subtle popularity reflects the attention and concerns that young people have about their own health conditions, albeit with a somewhat exaggerated sense of rectification.

However, there is no denying that the trend of "punk wellness" has swept in like a cool fashion label, igniting a wave of unique wellness habits among young people. For example, buying large quantities of health products to blend in with the

Wellness for younger tastes

China's urban youth are exploring unique ways to stay healthy within their fast-paced lives



“Our wellness practices are more tailored to fit our fast-paced lives. ... We opt for more modern approaches. I call it 'alcohol-soaked wolfberry wellness.'”

Chen Pinyu, project manager



Clockwise from top: Tang Siyu, 29, in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, enjoys sipping herbal teas at work. Tang is among those who have adopted a routine of carrying a large thermos flask into the office daily. Lately, 30-year-old Chen Pinyu from Shanghai working at a curatorial company is fond of brewing pineapple cinnamon tea with simple ingredients. One of Chen's favorite wellness products is a moxibustion pad for therapy. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



crowd, sharing knowledge and experience with peers, and strengthening a sense of belonging and identity.

According to data from Meituan Waimai, a major Chinese food delivery platform, since September 2022, the weekly search volume for "healthy milk tea" nationwide has doubled. Consumers aged between 20 and 30 account for over half of the searches, with young people in Shanghai leading the trend, ranking first in the country for using the search term.

"Modern young people have a different lifestyle from the older generation. Our wellness practices are more tailored to fit our fast-paced lives. Instead of traditional methods, like early bedtime and complex dietary supplements, we opt for more modern approaches. I call it 'alcohol-soaked wolfberry wellness,'" says Chen Pinyu, a 30-year-old project manager from Shanghai.

Growing up with exposure to TCM in her family, she naturally pays more attention to her lifestyle choices. For instance, she focuses on eating seasonal foods and avoids consuming too many raw or cold foods. Her initial goal is to maintain good health and prevent illness by adopting these practices.

"From the perspective of traditional Chinese medicine, I am considered to have a predominantly 'cold' constitution. So, my daily health regimen mainly focuses on 'dispelling coldness.' This includes activities such as foot soaking, moxibustion therapy, drinking ripe pu'er tea, consuming lamb soup, and enjoying ginger tea with brown sugar," says Chen.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, she stumbled upon a comforting beverage: mulled wine. "The warming spices in mulled wine, such as cinnamon, provide a 'warmth' that helps dispel coldness, while the addition of oranges boosts vitamin C intake," explains Chen, who's been brewing pineapple cinnamon tea with simple ingredients lately.

While studying in the university, Chen underwent regular acupuncture treatments at a medicine clinic to deal with some health issues. This habit continued when she started working, but shifted from acupuncture to massage.

Given the long hours facing a computer for work, she often experiences muscle discomfort in her shoulders and neck. Besides using a meridian massage device she purchased, she also gets regular professional massages at hospitals to alleviate these issues.

"Recently, I discovered a fantastic wellness product tailored for those who spend most of their time sitting. It's a moxibustion pad that allows me to sit, recline, or even lie face down while performing moxibustion therapy," says Chen, who also applies the meridian clearing method to reduce acne and dark circles.

Behind young people's exploration of new wellness practices lies a reflection of their consumption trends. According to the China Good Life Survey released by CCTV Finance, in 2023, health-related consumption ranked third with 31.04 percent in the list of consumption intentions among young people aged 18 to 35.

"As suboptimal health becomes increasingly prevalent among young people, there's a noticeable trend among younger demographics toward paying more attention to wellness and healthcare," says Du Heng, IP director of Zhenbu'er, a new consumer goods company founded in 2020 and dedicated to offering wellness solutions that are tailored to young people.

In 2023, Zhenbu'er launched two new products: the Chen'ai Mini Moxibustion and the Chen'ai Saflower Heating Pad, adding to the "light wellness" range. These offerings integrate TCM practices, expanding wellness solutions for the fast-paced lifestyles of young people.

The demand for health and wellness among modern individuals is significant and, as long as this demand persists, the interest in related TCM practices will continue to thrive.

"The growing interest of young people in TCM, and their pursuit of basic TCM knowledge, represents a positive continuation of Chinese cultural heritage. It also injects new vitality into TCM," says Zhang Yixin, a TCM practitioner in Shanghai.

However, Zhang also emphasizes that it is crucial to strike a balance and maintain moderation, as, when it comes to medical treatment, it's important to seek help from professional doctors.

Yu Ran is a freelancer based in Shanghai.

By ZHANG KUN

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Spring music festival dates announced

The 39th Shanghai Spring International Music Festival, the oldest music festival in China, will take place from Friday to April 14.

This festival, together with the annual China Shanghai International Arts Festival in November, is an important platform for communication between artistic institutions from home and abroad, as witnessed through the decades of development in the music and dance scenes of Shanghai, according to Xia Yujing, Party secretary of the Shanghai Federation of Art and Literary Circles, the organizer of the festival.

This year, the festival will feature 66 productions, 57 of which are concerts, with the other ones being dance shows.

The opening concert, taking place at Shanghai Symphony Hall on Friday, is a gala event that will showcase outstanding Chinese compositions in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

More than 100 pieces of orchestra will bring together around 300

musicians from several notable Shanghai institutions, including instrumentalists from the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and the Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra, and singers from the Shanghai Opera House, the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, and the children's chorus of CWI Children's Palace. It will be conducted by Yu Feng, head of the Central Conservatory of Music.

Pianist Kong Xiangdong will play *Ode to the Red Flag*, composed by Lyu Qiming, at the concert. The symphony piece was premiered by the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra at the Shanghai Spring International Festival in 1965. "The concert will help audiences to better understand the musical heritage of the city," says Zhou Ping, director of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra.

The closing production, presented at Shangyin Opera House on April 14, will be a joint production of *The Barber of Seville* by the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and



Left: A scene from the Shanghai Ballet production of *The White Haired Girl*. **Right:** A poster for the opening concert of the Shanghai Spring International Music Festival. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Como Opera House in Italy.

According to Liao Changyong, director of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, the plan for the collaboration was eventually realized five years after

it was proposed in 2019, and the production will feature vocal artists from both institutions, including award-winning artists from the annual singers' competition held by the school.

This year's festival will feature 24 international productions, more than ever before. As an integral part of the event, a mini festival will take place highlighting the musical

exchanges between China and France, in celebration of the China-France Year of Culture and Tourism in 2024. Xu Zhong, director of Shanghai Opera House, will conduct Hector Berlioz's Symphony *Romeo and Juliet*, a representative piece of French Romantic music.

Among the visiting foreign companies is the Royal Opera House Orchestra from the Palace of Versailles in France, which will make its Shanghai debut on April 7, at Shanghai Oriental Art Center.

Xin Lili, director of Shanghai Ballet, says that the company will introduce a group of young dancers at the festival, who will take the leading role of *The White Haired Girl*, which debuted in 1965 and was one of the first Chinese ballet productions.

"The production witnessed the early development of ballet in China," Xin says. "We have had many generations of artists performing it. If a dancer can take on the leading role in the *White Haired Girl*, they are very likely capable of playing any other character in a Chinese ballet production."

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CULTURE

Forward, forward, the soldier's responsibility is heavy, the women's enmity is deep." When the passionate melody sounds, the National Ballet of China's sixth generation of the heroine Wu Qionghua carries on the legacy of her predecessors with an exuberant and youthful performance of the ballet *Red Detachment of Women*.

Six decades after its premiere in 1964, the iconic ballet made a return to South China's Hainan province, the very place where its story unfolds. The 60th-anniversary celebration of this classic production by the National Ballet of China debuted in Haikou city on the evening of March 2.

The Hainan Provincial Song and Dance Theater pulsated with energy as a packed house bore witness to hundreds of voices uniting in the well-known theme, *The Song of the Detachment*. It took the performance to soaring heights, igniting waves of emotion.

Based on the film of the same name, the ballet consists of seven scenes. It begins with a rural woman, Wu Qionghua, who escapes a life of slavery under her cruel landlord Nan Batian, and joins a legendary all-female Red Army battalion, led by commander Hong Changqing on Hainan Island during the civil war in the early 1930s.

Through the trials of battle, the journey of transformation from a bitter rural slave to a steadfast revolutionary soldier, depicted in the ballet, paints a vivid and magnificent picture of the strong and unyielding revolutionary spirit of Chinese women, according to Han Chaoguang, chairman of the Hainan Performing Arts Group.

"The ballet, *Red Detachment of Women*, represents an extraordinary melding of Chinese and Western artistic traditions, seamlessly integrating the timeless techniques of classical ballet with the intricate tapestry of traditional Chinese culture and art. This trailblazing approach incorporates distinctive traditional Hainan Li ethnic dance movements into the elegant postures of ballet," said a ballet enthusiast surnamed Chi. "By embracing this innovative synthesis, the production vividly captures the dynamic customs and ethnic features of Hainan, paying homage to the island's rich cultural heritage in a captivating manner.

"This harmonious blending of diverse influences weaves a compelling narrative that transcends borders and celebrates the beauty of cultural diversity, offering a breathtaking showcase of artistic innovation and cross-cultural appreciation," he added.

Gao Fenfen, an entrepreneur working in Hainan, shared her experience after watching the show. "The performance will serve as a source of encouragement, inspiring women like me to continue embracing and upholding the revolutionary spirit and Red Culture," she said.

Pang Qijiang is a loyal fan of the ballet. Previously, as the head of the culture station in Yangjiang town in Qionghai city, the hometown of *Red Detachment of Women*, and a descendant of Pang Qionghua, the first commander of the real-life battalion upon which the story is based, he has devoted half of his life to studying this iconic ballet. After retiring, Pang Qijiang took it upon himself to systematically collect, organize, and publish information about *Red Detachment of Women*, producing several books on the subject.

His commitment goes beyond just research — Pang Qijiang has also made numerous visits to historical sites in search of friends and relatives of the original battalion. The touching, inspiring story has left a lasting impact on him, and he describes each viewing of the ballet as a profound educational experience.

The 72-year-old expressed his excitement about the ballet staging the first stop of its 60th-anniversary celebration tour in Haikou. "This show holds special significance, as it marks the premiere of the ballet in the place the story originated," Pang Qijiang said. He mentioned that since 2012, whenever the classic ballet is performed in China, the families and friends of the real battalion have made it a point to attend the show.

In recent years, Yangjiang town



Red detachment dances home

The National Ballet of China stages first leg of classic production's 60th anniversary tour in Hainan, **Chen Bowen** reports in Haikou.



has opened exhibition halls. Pang Qijiang, being deeply involved in preserving the history of the ballet, often explains the exhibits to visitors. He has also actively participated in various activities following the upgrading of the Red Detachment of Women Memorial Park.

Wang Lusheng, cousin of Wang Yunmei, a soldier in the battalion, emphasized the importance of passing on the spirit of the Red Detachment of Women to future generations, recognizing the profound impact it can have on descendants and young people.

"By bringing the stories of these brave women onto the stage, the ballet aims to honor the sacrifices of the older generation and ensure that the legacy of the real Red Detachment of Women lives on. Watching the performances of the ballerinas, witnessing the strength of the soldiers, and experiencing their unwavering determination and resilience on the battlefield, serves as a powerful reminder of their extraordinary journey," said Ma Shiju, granddaughter of Wang Yunmei.

The sixth-generation dancer to play the role of the heroine Wu is



Top: The heroine of the classic ballet *Red Detachment of Women*, Wu Qionghua (right, front), played by Qiu Yunting, joins a legendary all-female Red Army battalion. **Above left:** The role of Wu played by Qiu. **Above right:** Commander Hong Changqing, played by Sun Ruichen, meets and helps Wu. **Left:** A scene from the ballet. **Below left:** Dancers of the National Ballet of China perform during a visit to the Red Detachment of Women Memorial Park. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"This iconic production has effectively transformed into a cultural ambassador, proudly displaying and disseminating the essence of local culture."

WeChat account of Hainan Performing Arts Group

young ballerina Qiu Yunting. She described the production as the "family drama" of the National Ballet of China, emphasizing that its enduring appeal stems from the vivid portrayal of the women's unwavering faith, pioneering spirit, resilience, and heroic struggles. Qiu said that these spiritual values have deeply resonated with audiences, contributing to the work's lasting popularity and widespread influence.

Qiu also highlighted the significance of visiting the Red Detachment of Women Memorial Park and immersing herself in the historical images and sculptures related to the story. She said that this experience adds emotional depth to her performance, allowing her and her colleagues to fully embody the powerful narrative and convey its profound impact to the audience.

Feng Ying, a seasoned dancer and the director of the National Ballet of China, said that *Red Detachment of Women* remains in a state of constant evolution, with a new generation of dancers adding their own interpretations to the performance each year.

The national celebration tour of *Red Detachment of Women* is set to captivate audiences across more than 20 cities, including Beijing, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Qingdao, Shanghai, Nanjing, Suzhou, Hangzhou, Chengdu, and Taiyuan. With 60 performances planned, the tour promises to bring the timeless story to life to a diverse set of audiences across the country.

In addition to the performances, a series of enriching activities are also on the agenda, including special celebration performances, seminars, exhibitions, and the publication of a commemorative album and a collection of essays.

For six decades, *Red Detachment of Women* has left an important mark on audiences both at home and abroad, with more than 4,000 performances to its credit. The production gained recognition in the United States when it was performed for former President Richard Nixon during his historic visit to China in 1972. Its awe-inspiring plot, enchanting melodies, grandiose scenes, vibrant characters, and the unique cultural tapestry of Hainan island have mesmerized generations of spectators and garnered a multitude of accolades on the global stage. The production stands as a testament to the enduring power of artistic expression and has become an emblem of Chinese ballet art.

The significance of *Red Detachment of Women* extends far beyond its status as a dance drama. It has evolved into a powerful representation of Hainan, serving as a cultural symbol and a cherished period of memory. Its artistic excellence has propelled it to the peak of artistic achievement, and it has also become a prominent emblem of Chinese culture, showcasing the rich tapestry of traditions and values that define the nation, according to Han.

"This iconic production has effectively transformed into a cultural ambassador, proudly displaying and disseminating the essence of local culture. It exudes a strong vitality and a unique charm in the realm of cultural exchanges and mutual learning between China and the West," said an article on the group's public WeChat account.

Han remarked that this iconic performance kicked off its national tour from Hainan, marking a pivotal moment in harnessing the rich cultural heritage of the region and showcasing it to the world.

"By commencing the national tour from Hainan, we aim to harness the profound historical significance of *Red Detachment of Women* and carry forward the spirit of this iconic production. It serves as a powerful testament to the enduring legacy of Red Culture and the Qiongha revolutionary armed forces that grew on Hainan Island in the 1920s under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, symbolizing the resilience and tenacity of the people," he said.

"Through this momentous event, we aspire to celebrate and perpetuate the essence of *Red Detachment of Women*, thereby reinforcing its status as a cultural treasure and a source of inspiration for generations to come," Han added.

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