

Plant raided

Officials inspect Japanese factory linked to health supplement deaths

WORLD, PAGE 7



Local authorities called on to help matchmaking

CHINA, PAGE 5



Bigger presence

Go-getting companies tapping new sectors overseas for more growth

BUSINESS, PAGE 8

# CHINA DAILY

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VISITS OF VISION

## Railway puts Sino-Thai ties on fast track

President Xi's vision, visit bring tangible benefits to people of both countries

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok yangwanli@chinadaily.com.cn

A Fixing bullet train replica painted in Thailand's national colors, which was presented by President Xi Jinping during the 29th APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Bangkok in November 2022 and holds pride of place among state gifts at the Thai government house, is on its way to translating into reality.

The construction of the China-Thailand Railway, a flagship project under the Belt and Road cooperation framework based on the Fixing bullet train's advanced technology, has been accelerated over the past two years. It is Thailand's first standard-gauge high-speed railway project.

In April last year, a freight train carrying durians in 25 refrigerated containers arrived in South China's Guangdong province, completing its first heavily loaded return trip by rail through Thailand, Laos and China. The train took five days to reach Guangzhou, the provincial capital, from Map Ta Phut in Rayong, Thailand. The transportation time by train was at least a week faster than by ship.

Upon completion, the China-Thailand Railway will be connected to the China-Laos Railway, forming a railroad artery across the Indochina Peninsula and elevating infrastructure connectivity in Southeast Asia.

Pitiwat Angsuviriya, a mechanical engineering student from Thailand's Khon Kaen University who is currently participating in a study program at Southwest Jiaotong University in Sichuan province, said he found Xi's visit very inspiring.

"President Xi's visit to Thailand impresses me even today, given that the trip was made at a time when the whole world had just recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic. It's encouraging that leaders from the APEC member economies gathered in Thailand and joined efforts to

further common interests," he said. About two months after Xi's visit, China announced the resumption of group tour services that were suspended due to the pandemic, and Pitiwat was able to enroll for a one-year railway talent training program along with 18 other Thai students.

After finishing the training, they will return to Thailand and apply their knowledge to the development of their country's railway network.

"It's a good opportunity for me to study a high-speed train engineering course in China. Economic growth relies on connectivity and transportation. High-speed rail is therefore considered a very good option for the development of Southeast Asia's economy," Pitiwat said.

He added that the course will help him build a career and advance the high-speed railway network under the Belt and Road Initiative, which in turn will allow the regional economy to play a bigger role on the global stage.

Xi's visit to Thailand in 2022 was his first trip made to the country as Chinese president. The trip left a lasting impression on local residents who still remember the messages of friendship flashed on giant LED screens dotting the way to the hotel where Xi stayed.

"I clearly remember the screens along the road that his convoy took. They said 'China and Thailand are a family' in both Chinese and Thai languages," said Nut, a taxi driver in Bangkok. "Everywhere the convoy went, it was greeted with warmth and friendliness."

That China and Thailand are a family has been further illustrated after the two countries signed a mutual visa exemption agreement early this year. The policy is widely believed to act as an incentive for both tourism and people-to-people exchanges between the two nations.

See [Links](#), page 3



Workers sort durians on Sept 18 in Chumphon, Thailand. According to Thailand's Commerce Ministry, China was Thailand's largest export market for durians in 2023. WANG TENG / XINHUA

## Memorial ceremony



Ambassadors and other staff members of foreign diplomatic missions in Russia attend a flower laying ceremony on Saturday at a makeshift memorial in front of the Crocus City Hall on the western outskirts of Moscow, in memory of the victims of the March 22 terrorist attack at the concert hall. VIA GETTY IMAGES

## Manufacturing PMI expands in March

By OUYANG SHIJIA ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn

China's factory activity expanded in March after five consecutive months of contraction, an official survey revealed on Sunday, adding to a run of indicators that suggest the stabilization of the world's second-largest economy.

Experts said that signs of economic recovery emerged at the beginning of the year, with factory output and investment growth accelerating while deflationary pressures eased. This indicated a robust outlook for 2024 and laid a solid foundation for achieving the country's annual GDP growth target of around 5 percent.

Meanwhile, they said the broader economy is still facing pressures from shrinking demand and weakening expectations, adding that more policy easing measures are needed to boost domestic demand, especially expanding effective investment.

China's official purchasing managers index for the manufacturing sector rose to 50.8 in March from 49.1 in February, according to the

National Bureau of Statistics. The 50-point mark separates contraction from growth.

Zhao Qinghe, an NBS statistician, said the manufacturing PMI improved in March as accelerated factory activity resumed after the Spring Festival holiday. "The level of economic prosperity in China is rebounding," he added.

China's nonmanufacturing PMI, which incorporates subindexes for services sector activity and construction, also rose, coming in at 53 in March compared with February's 51.4.

The country's official composite PMI, which includes both manufacturing and nonmanufacturing activities, climbed to 52.7 in March from 50.9 in February, according to the NBS.

"The manufacturing PMI, along with the good nonmanufacturing PMI figures, suggests that China's economic activity is expanding at a faster pace while the momentum of domestic demand recovery is consolidating," said Zhou Maohua, a researcher at China Everbright Bank.

Zhou said the first quarter is

exhibiting a notable uptick in economic activity compared with the preceding quarter, given the rebound in both demand and supply coupled with a sustained recovery in confidence among households and businesses.

NBS data showed profits at industrial enterprises witnessed a 10.2 percent year-on-year jump in the first two months of the year, reversing a 2.3 percent decline in 2023.

Zhang Liqun, a researcher at the macroeconomic research department of the Development Research Center of the State Council, said China's economy is showing signs of stabilization.

However, challenges persist from shrinking demand and weakening expectations, thus the country needs to step up macroeconomic policy support and strengthen countercyclical adjustments to hit its annual growth target of around 5 percent this year, Zhang told China Daily on Sunday on the sidelines of a seminar organized by Renmin University of China's Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies in Beijing.

"Given the cloudy global economic outlook, boosting domestic demand should be among the key priorities for China's economic work this year. Government investment will be key for expanding domestic demand," he said.

A research report — China's "Compounding Interests": High-quality Development and Outlook for 2035 — was released during the seminar, which said that China's economic growth potential remains enormous despite the ongoing weak social expectations.

Looking ahead, the report said that by 2035, China's per capita disposable income is expected to double that in 2023, and the proportion of the country's middle-income group is expected to increase from one-third to nearly half of its population.

Zhu Guangyao, former vice-minister of finance, said that more efforts are needed to hit the goal of basically realizing socialist modernization by 2035.

He said during the seminar that the country needs to keep its annual nominal growth rate at over 4.7 percent to reach that goal, and the country should take more measures to narrow the artificial intelligence gap with the United States.

## NEW ONLINE ARCHIVE OF CASES A BOON FOR JUDICIAL OPENNESS

Key rulings better explain legal matters to public, provide guidance

By CAO YIN caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

If a person inflicts psychological control or long-term mental harm on others, can he or she be charged with abuse?

Under China's Criminal Law, offenders face conviction if they frequently physically or mentally



abuse family members by assaulting, insulting, confining, binding or leaving them out in the cold. Failing to offer a family member medical care or forcing them to do

excessive labor also constitutes mistreatment.

However, if this type of abuse takes place between non-family members such as romantic partners, can charges still be established? If so, what kind of punishment would the offender face?

In the past, answers to such questions would be learned directly

from law professors, lawyers and judges. But now, members of the public can get the information from <http://rmfyalk.court.gov.cn> — a newly established online archive for searching landmark and major civil, criminal and administrative cases.

See [Law](#), page 2

## HK's future as business center secure under 'one country, two systems'

A recent report in Western media that suggested Hong Kong was planning to ban some popular social media platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube, is another

Inside

futile attempt to mislead international opinion. Such comments are simply untrue, but they were made when Hong Kong's legislature was about to debate the since-enacted Safeguarding National Security Ordinance

WORLD WATCH By David Meyer and Jane Lee

under Article 23 of the Basic Law. The incident crystallizes the optic through which many Western media outlets report on Hong Kong. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that overseas businesses are often confused. It is also increasingly common for friends overseas to

inquire about safety and whether they should use "burner phones" during their visits to Hong Kong.

Contrary to these concerns, the consensus among business leaders based in Hong Kong is that the new ordinance will protect their businesses and provide stability for business operations.

Hong Kong's best days are ahead, as China has secured the city's status as the Asia-Pacific region's leading finance-corporate management center.

The "one country, two systems" governance framework guarantees Hong Kong's protection from external threats: under the "one country" principle, Hong Kong is an inalienable part of China, and the "two systems" gives Hong Kong a high degree of autonomy to govern itself. The Safeguarding National Security Ordinance was adopted in accordance with common law practices. The principles of fairness and justice guarantee human rights more than other similar jurisdictions, and Hong

Kong's Court of Final Appeal even consists of non-Chinese nationals, a practice not seen in other countries.

This governance framework, in which national leaders have repeatedly emphasized their vision for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, serves as the country's window to global capital, and ensures Hong Kong will not be "just another Chinese city". This is especially significant.

See [HK](#), page 3

INSIDE Yunnan a pioneer in sustainable development Global Views, page 13

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## PAGE TWO

## Law: Verdicts disclosed, privacy protected

From page 1

For example, the case of a man who was convicted and imprisoned for mentally abusing his ex-girlfriend has been included in the archive. It clarifies the definition of a family member for the crime of maltreatment under the Criminal Law, stating that those with a stable relationship or who have lived together for a long period in order to start a family can also be deemed family members.

The archive of cases, created by the Supreme People's Court, China's top court, was opened on Feb 27. It mainly covers hot legal issues, including mental abuse, cyber-bullying, telecom fraud, domestic violence, and justifiable defense.

Data released by the top court on March 9 showed that the archive included details of more than 3,800 cases and had been viewed over 3.27 million times, with 276,000 users from 82 countries and regions registered.

"Visitors can learn what laws were applied and why the courts arrived at their verdicts while reading about the cases on the archive, which will contribute to them using laws to protect themselves, enhance legal awareness and prevent disputes from beginning," said Yang Wanming, vice-president of the top court.

The archive was a new measure to unify verdict-rendering standards and optimize legal services, Yang said, adding that China's approach to ensuring judicial transparency had become more diverse.

At the end of last year, public concerns were raised that China Judgements Online, a website set up by the top court in 2013 to disclose rulings, could be closed after a decrease in the number of uploaded verdicts. This led to some netizens questioning a lack of transparency in the judiciary.

However, the top court stressed that the old website would continue to operate, and together with the new cases' archive would deepen the judicial openness.

**Responding to concerns**

While requiring judges nationwide to disclose verdicts on the new website, the top court is also selecting valuable and influential cases to place in the archive to respond to the public's concerns in a timely manner and also better educate them.

The archived cases are not only taken from courts across the country, but also provided by law firms, universities and even non-legal institutions, such as a middle school.

"(We're) aiming to expand the types of cases and enrich the sources," Yang said. "All of the cases should be reviewed by the top court and deemed to have reference value before going online," he added.

With the adoption, abolishment and modification of laws as well as the adjustment of judicial interpretations, cases uploaded to the archive would also be updated, so that visitors could access the latest and most accurate legal knowledge, said Zhou Jiahai, who heads the top court's research office.

Taking the maltreatment case as an example, Yu Haisong, deputy head of the office, said that it provided solutions to some new problems related to mental abuse.

"The case identified mental control as a kind of maltreatment," he said. "It also showed that those living together for a period, or starting a relationship for marriage, should be deemed family members," Yu said, adding that social development is leading to new circumstances that require strong protection of a victim's personal rights.

Cases of "justifiable defense" had also been widely searched for on the online archive. The legal term "justifiable defense" had been regarded as a "dormant clause" for some time in China due to challenges in interpretation and misconceptions.

After typing "justifiable defense" or "self-defense" into the archives, users can find 35 cases related to the issue.

"Information about these cases, with explanations on why the courts applied the provision, can help the public understand more about the term and urge judges to grasp the essence of the legal concept," Yu added.

**Quantity and quality**

At a meeting related to court work in January, Zhang Jun, president of the top court, said profound changes in the international



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

More valuable verdicts, such as those involving complex or forward-looking cases, should be made public, because they're conducive to legal theory research and enrich legal practices."

**Zhou Guangquan,**  
a law professor at Tsinghua University

and domestic environment as well as the rapid growth of big data technology, demanded that Chinese courts improve judicial transparency.

"The number of online judgements should be maintained on a considerable scale, and they need to cover various fields and case types," he said.

The number of verdicts disclosed on the China Judgements Online website dropped

from 19.2 million in 2020 to 5.11 million in 2023, raising public concerns about whether the website would be shut down.

In late December, the top court said that since July 2021, the website had been modified and upgraded due to some improper disclosures, such as online security risks, which had resulted in the decline in the number of uploaded rulings.

Zhang confirmed the modification had happened. At the meeting he required judges to attach greater importance to protecting personal information in the disclosure of rulings to ensure the lives and work of litigants and their families, business operations, and development of enterprises are not affected by judicial openness.

The requirement was raised after many litigants, along with a few legal professionals, questioned the improper disclosure of their case information. On one occasion Cheng Xiao, a law professor at Tsinghua University, said some people found it difficult to find new jobs after the verdicts in their labor disputes were disclosed online.

To meet the demand of both quantity and quality, Chinese courts have begun making changes to the way judicial transparency is promoted.

More than 216 million verdicts have been disclosed on China Judgements Online since the beginning of this year, up 111.6 percent year-on-year, according to the annual work report issued by the top court on March 8.

Of the rulings, 35,000 came from the top court and provincial-level courts, a 4.7-fold increase, the report said.

Before disclosing the verdicts on the website and uploading them to the archive, courts nationwide blurred out the personal data of individuals and information on departments to strengthen the protection of their privacy, the report said.

To further advance judicial openness and public oversight, the top court had been disclosing judicial data every three months since the beginning of last year, it added.

**Judicial research**

Some legal experts said that judicial openness is also essential to promote judicial research, as they called for ongoing efforts to optimize the website and archive.

"More valuable verdicts, such as those involving complex or forward-looking cases, should be made public, because they're conducive to legal theory research and enrich legal practices," said Zhou Guangquan, a law

professor at Tsinghua University.

Judicial transparency, along with high-quality and more diverse legal services, is expected to play a big role in helping the country improve its judicial credibility, he added.

Expressing strong support for judicial openness, he suggested courts collect, select and disclose more cases that have long-term significance and that can serve as guides for public behavior to improve the role of crime prevention.

Wang Yong, deputy procurator-general of Suzhou People's Procuratorate in Jiangsu province, praised the establishment of the new archive, saying it was a tool kit for those engaged in the judicial system.

The constant updating of cases in the archive had provided a steady stream of fresh material for legal research and contributed to the development of practice-oriented jurisprudence, he said.

Furthermore, unlike the large search for judgements on the website, the archive search is much easier as it "extracts the keywords and summarizes the core issues of cases, meaning that users can find the content they want more conveniently and accurately," he added.

## Lawmakers, political advisers champion greater transparency

By CAO YIN

A number of national lawmakers and political advisers have suggested the country promote judicial openness in the form of laws, as transparency is key to ensuring public confidence in the justice system.

Highlighting the importance of verdict disclosure, Tian Xuan, a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature, said that judicial openness is an effective way to strengthen people's belief in justice and to understand the work of legal authorities.

He emphasized that it is a must to advance

judicial transparency, and called for regulations that specify the disclosure of court rulings.

At the same time, "it's also necessary to classify the disclosed verdicts to ensure more people can participate in judicial openness," he added.

Hu Jianmiao, a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the nation's top political advisory body, backed the building up of the newly established archive of legal cases. He also called for optimizing China Judgements Online, a website set up in 2013 by the country's

top court for disclosing verdicts.

"With their own characteristics, the two platforms can complement each other," he said. Hu, who is also a professor at the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (National Academy of Governance), said the administrative cases disclosed online are a treasure trove for research of administrative laws.

Nie Xin, also a member of the 14th CPPCC National Committee, has been following the measures taken to promote judicial transparency. "It's a crucial part of governing the country by rule of law, as well as a require-

ment put forward by the central leadership," Nie said.

Disclosing judicial affairs — including verdicts, trials and enforcement of rulings — is to ensure justice is done, and it also encourages judges to improve the quality of case-handling by being subject to public scrutiny, he said.

Even though the China Judgements Online website's operations had faced some challenges that triggered public concerns on improper disclosure, the progress in judicial openness cannot be stopped, Nie said.

"Judicial transparency is not only a strong guarantee for the people to participate in judicial activities and implement whole-pro-

cess people's democracy, but it is also a good way to prevent corruption in the judicial system," he said.

The nation should ensure judicial openness through legislation, he said, adding, "It's essential to protect judicial data security by upgrading technology, rather than not making it public."

While supporting efforts to strengthen and deepen judicial transparency, Si Fuchun, an NPC deputy, also called for the courts to streamline case-handling, reduce the cost of litigation and provide high-quality legal services, to improve judicial efficiency and meet the public's demand.

## TOP NEWS

## HK: Networks are key to status of city as leading financial center

From page 1

Now national leaders are so confident about Hong Kong's future as China's window to global capital that the year 2047 has become just another year for the city, rather than the expiration date of the "50 years of no change" promise made in 1997. President Xi Jinping has frequently alluded to this.

One of the strongest reaffirmations came during the recent visit to Hong Kong of Xia Baolong, director of the Hong Kong and Macao Work Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council. In meetings with local and foreign business executives, various attendees agreed that Xia clearly articulated that the governance principle of "one country, two systems" is for the long term, perhaps even permanent.

This has monumental consequences for Hong Kong as the Asia-Pacific region's leading finance-corporate management center. China's authorities have reiterated that Hong Kong will be "permanently" open to the world as a global business center. International businesspeople will be welcomed as full participants in the sophisticated interpersonal business networks that define the city as a hub of global capital.

Commentators, critics and academics continually fail to recognize that Hong Kong's status as the leading financial center of the Asia-Pacific region rests firmly on the networks of its financiers and their firms, on the support of sectors of sophisticated lawyers and strategic consultant accountants, and on the nonfinancial senior global and regional managers. Their network behavior makes Hong Kong the hub of Asia-Pacific networks.

Within Hong Kong, financiers, lawyers, consulting accountants and other nonfinancial senior decision-makers engage in intense network relations. These operate in face-to-face strategic exchanges of knowledge and business discussions. Each actor brings to these meetings the expertise and knowledge that they have built within their firms. Based on their business activities, each of these

actors has external network relations with other financiers, clients and government officials within Asia and globally.

Senior financiers have stated that the new ordinance would have no negative impact on their businesses, with their only fear being that businesspeople outside Hong Kong would misinterpret the safety of the city and, perhaps, be reluctant to do business in Hong Kong.

Global businesses would normally place their senior management for the Asia-Pacific region in Hong Kong if they expect to be major players in Asia's economic growth during the 21st century. When measured based on purchasing power parity, China is the world's largest economy. Its growth over the coming decades at 3 to 5 percent will far surpass that of the United States and the European Union. China is the technology innovation and manufacturing powerhouse of the global economy and owns the intellectual capital for future advanced manufacturing.

China's global enterprises increasingly shift their senior managers to Hong Kong. The consequences are immense because of the scale of the Chinese economy and of its businesses. These executives join the existing sophisticated business networks of Hong Kong. This larger network group will make the pivotal decisions about capital exchange within Asia and the rest of the global economy. Senior executives based at other Asia-Pacific centers such as Singapore, Tokyo or Sydney will be outside Asia's most critical business networks.

The people of Hong Kong face a dynamic future as residents of the greatest business center of the Asia-Pacific region. Young people have enormous opportunities to participate in the city's future growth as China's window to global capital.

*David Meyer is a senior lecturer in management at Olin Business School at Washington University in St. Louis and professor emeritus of sociology and urban studies at Brown University. Jane Lee is president of the Our Hong Kong Foundation. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## Vying for victory



The Oxford and Cambridge rowing teams compete on Saturday during the 169th Men's Gemini Boat Race 2024 on the Thames River in London, the United Kingdom. JOE GIDDENS / PA VIA AP

## Links: Visa-free policy, durian trade boost Sino-Thai cooperation

From page 1

The Association of Thai Travel Agents estimates that the visa-free policy will help maintain more than 20,000 visits per day by Chinese tourists, which will help Thailand meet the target of welcoming 40 million foreign tourists this year, generating around 2.3 trillion baht (\$63.22 billion) in revenue.

Sisdivachr Cheewaratanaporn, president of the association, said the visa exemption is expected to boost Thai tourist visits to China by 18 to 20 percent. "Diversified Chinese cultural activities in summer and winter, such as the Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival, are a big draw for Thai people," he added.

In his opening remarks during the 29th APEC Economic Leaders'

Meeting, Xi emphasized that countries in the Asia-Pacific region should stay committed to openness and inclusiveness, build an Asia-Pacific community with a shared future, and strive for an Asia-Pacific region that is peaceful and stable as well as clean and beautiful, bringing about common prosperity through mutual help and care.

History has proved time and again that only openness, inclusiveness and win-win cooperation can pave the right way forward for humanity, Xi said.

Pinit Jarusombat, president of the Thai-Chinese Cultural Relationship Council, said the mutual visa exemption measure is a concrete action to practice China's commitment to openness.

"Thailand and China are as close



## Holy gathering

Workers rebuilding the damaged Umayyad Mosque in Aleppo, Syria, and their families break their Ramadan fast with an iftar meal on Saturday. The feast was organized by the Syria Trust for Development and other charities. XINHUA

## More US-China exchanges urged

Business leader calls for better facilitation of trade, investment

By ZHOU JIN in Boao, Hainan  
zhoujin@chinadaily.com.cn

Businesses need certainty and China and the United States should work toward granting businesses such certainty, said Stephen Orlins, president of the National Committee on US-China Relations, advocating a more precise definition of national security in order to facilitate an increase in exports and investment between the world's two largest economies.

Both governments need to hold discussions on what the definition of national security is, and after they reach an agreement on that definition, trade and investment can be advanced, he told China Daily, adding that he hopes to see an increase in bilateral investment.

Orlins, who started his career helping US companies invest in China, said, "Trade is like dating ... investment is like marriage, you got to make it work, and it creates people-to-people bonds, which are so important for US-China relations."

He added, "And what I found over

(the course of) my career is when you invest, you build that relationship."

Orlins, who has been serving as president of the National Committee on US-China Relations since 2005, has rich experience in promoting China-US exchanges. He was a member of the legal team that helped establish diplomatic relations between Washington and Beijing in 1979.

Orlins and other representatives from the US' business, strategic and academic communities met with President Xi Jinping in Beijing on Wednesday.

"He (Xi) urged us to rethink US-China relations. He said that he hopes the warmth of our exchanges injects positive feeling into US-China relations, so we can make progress," Orlins said.

Orlins posted a comment about their meeting on the social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, saying that it made a compelling case for cooperation between the US and China. "We were all deeply



Stephen Orlins

impressed and recommitted to building a cooperative US-China relationship that benefits the peoples of both countries," he wrote.

Speaking to China Daily, Orlins said the message the meeting sent out was that China's economy is resilient, and it still contributes 30 percent of global GDP growth. "The Chinese economy is going through a transition, but it will emerge even stronger with a higher quality kind of growth."

Foreign investors should come and stay in China, Orlins said, adding that they should also be optimistic because he believes the Chinese government will do what it can to improve the environment for foreign investment.

Speaking on the overall US-China bilateral relationship, Orlins said he believes the ties are trending in a better direction, and there is room for further improvement. He said he is ultimately hoping for "a constructive relationship that benefits the peoples on both sides."

## Trilateral meeting expected to bolster regional stability

By ZHOU JIN in Boao, Hainan

A trilateral meeting among the leaders of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea is expected to be held in the near future to discuss joint efforts in tackling various challenges and normalizing trilateral cooperation, said Lee Hee-sup, secretary-general of the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat.

Issues such as geopolitical tension, conflicts, disruption of industrial and supply chains, and peace and stability in Northeast Asia have highlighted the importance and urgency of cooperation among the three neighbors, Lee told China Daily on Wednesday, on the sidelines of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2024 in Boao, Hainan province.

"No country can handle all these challenges alone. Solidarity is needed, so the three countries and the TCS need to facilitate trilateral cooperation as soon as possible," he said, adding that the three governments are already preparing to hold the meeting.

Lee said that topics such as economic recovery, digital transition, supply chains, green growth, public health and the Northeast Asia situation are expected to be on the agenda of the meeting.

In 2008, the leaders of the three countries met for the first time outside the ASEAN Plus Three framework — the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, China, Japan and the ROK — which launched the mechanism of the trilateral leaders' meeting.

The three leaders have met seven times since then, with their last meeting being in 2019 in Chengdu, Sichuan province.

In November, the foreign ministers of the three countries met for the first time in four years in Busan, ROK, with the delay mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as fluctuations in bilateral relations, Lee said.

During the meeting, the foreign ministers agreed to hold a leaders' meeting at the earliest convenient time.



Lee Hee-sup

Lee said that the resumption of meetings among the leaders and ministers of China, Japan and the ROK signals the resumption and normalization of cooperation among the three countries.

The issue of regional security is a very sensitive topic for the three countries, but they have had experience in discussing the Korean Peninsula and the Northeast Asia situations in the past, he said.

High tension on the peninsula is not helping any of the countries, Lee said, calling for close trilateral cooperation to maintain peace and stability in the region.

He emphasized that trilateral cooperation will not only be meaningful for China, Japan and the ROK, but also benefit the rest of Asia and the world.

Statistics show that the three countries account for about 24 percent of global GDP and over 80 percent of the GDP of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

In the face of rapidly changing global dynamics, adjustments and improvements must be made, and East Asian nations, including China, Japan and the ROK, need to elevate the RCEP to its "envisioned level", Lee said.

He highlighted the need for more youth communication and grassroots exchanges in promoting future relations among the three countries.

Asked about the decline in mutual favorability among the peoples of the three countries in recent years and the rise in negative sentiments online, Lee attributed such misunderstandings and misconceptions partly to structural changes in bilateral relations and partly to differences in culture and historical perspective.

Mainstream media and social media platforms may have played a role in amplifying these sentiments, he said. "Young people are main players in the future of the three countries. ... They will be the solid foundation for trilateral cooperation."

promised that China will provide support for the implementation of the Bangkok Goals on Bio-Circular-Green Economy.

Wichai said that Chinese electric vehicle brands are now very popular among Thai people, especially the young generation. "With China's support, Thailand is accelerating its progress toward the country's green development goal, and aims to become Southeast Asia's EV hub and logistics center," he said.

As Xi noted that APEC economies have jointly sown the seed of the Putrajaya Vision of an open, dynamic, resilient and peaceful Asia-Pacific community by 2040, it is time to cultivate, nurture and foster the blossoming flower of common development in the region, Wichai said.

"China is taking the lead in joining hands with the Asia-Pacific community, aiming for common development of the whole region," he added.

another like passengers in the same boat, and steadily move toward an Asia-Pacific community with a shared future. China always practices what it advocates," he said.

Wichai said that Thailand has been supporting the China-proposed BRI and has benefited a lot from China's investment.

Moreover, China's openness in organizing several big trade fairs, ever since the country optimized COVID-19 control measures last year, has provided great opportunities to other developing countries in speeding up their own economic recovery, he added.

During his visit to Bangkok in 2022, Xi also called for efforts to drive green and low-carbon development and ensure a clean and beautiful Asia-Pacific region. He

as brothers and share a lot in common, especially in terms of culture. The visa policy will boost exchanges among the general public and further deepen understanding between people," he said.

As China and Thailand continue to strengthen infrastructure connectivity and further boost people-to-people exchanges, bilateral trade and cooperation in other fields have also entered the fast lane.

Last year, the trade volume between the two countries reached \$126.3 billion, according to the Chinese embassy in Thailand. China is Thailand's largest trading partner, accounting for 22 percent of its total foreign trade.

Thai durian, one of Thailand's most popular fruits, is currently a hit among Chinese families. Durian

exports to China surged 81.7 percent to a record 90 billion baht last year, according to the Thai Department of Foreign Trade.

Shipments to China accounted for 70 percent of Thailand's total durian exports in 2023, and the number is expected to grow this year, thanks to the improved transportation.

Wichai Kinchong Choi, senior vice-president of Kasikornbank, one of Thailand's leading banks, said that logistics is among the major issues for Thailand, a country that makes more than 60 percent of its GDP from exports, especially international trade in agricultural products.

"President Xi stressed that countries should follow the spirit of the Asia-Pacific family, look after one

# CHINA

## Eco-friendly burial

Family members cast flower petals into the sea after scattering the ashes of their loved ones in Bohai Bay, Tianjin, on Sunday. During the event, jointly organized by the civil affairs departments of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei province, the ashes of 35 individuals were scattered on the sea. Promoted as an eco-friendly burial method and subsidized by public funds, such events have received widespread recognition.

YI HAIFEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



## Business social credit regulations revised

By YANG ZEKUN  
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China unveiled revised regulations on Friday aimed at strengthening its credit-based enterprise regulatory system, establishing a business social credit restoration mechanism and streamlining the exit process for inactive businesses.

The amendments follow a recent decision by the State Council, China's Cabinet, to update eight administrative regulations, including interim regulations on the disclosure of information regarding companies' practices, and abolish 13 others. The updates aim to address evolving development needs and improve regulatory practices.

Guo Qiwen, an official with the Ministry of Justice's Second Bureau of Legislation, said the revisions prioritized social credit within the regulatory framework, targeting prominent issues in information disclosure and credit oversight across various sectors.

"These changes will further regulate information disclosure practices and cultivate a market environment built on honesty and trust," Guo said.

The revised regulations promote the creation of a business social credit restoration system. They support enterprises' efforts to rebuild their creditworthiness and encourage government departments to recognize such efforts. Businesses will be given incentives to proactively rectify misconduct, mitigate negative consequences and apply for the legal removal of negative records.

To facilitate the removal of inactive "zombie enterprises" from the market, the regulations stipulate that businesses listed on the abnormal business operations registry for two consecutive years without rectification and with incorrect contact information will have their licenses revoked.

Additionally, the regulations strengthen penalties for information disclosure violations, clearly defining legal consequences for companies that conceal or falsify information in public disclosures.

Liu Min, head of the credit supervision and administration department at the State Adminis-

“These changes will further regulate information disclosure practices and cultivate a market environment built on honesty and trust.”

Guo Qiwen, official with the Ministry of Justice

tration for Market Regulation, highlighted the agency's ongoing efforts to promote a business social credit-based regulatory system. The system prioritizes information collection and disclosure as its foundation, while utilizing credit constraints and penalties to incentivize compliance.

She cited last year's nationwide campaign to improve social credit through commitments. The initiative resulted in over 24 million businesses obtaining licenses or restoring their credit.

The administration also collaborated with the National Development and Reform Commission to refine the credit restoration mechanism. The partnership enabled over 22 million businesses to regain their creditworthiness and remove restrictions on activities such as bidding, investment and financing, as well as the ability to receive honorary titles.

Liu also highlighted advances in the streamlining of annual reporting for companies and the establishment of coordinated supervision with 18 central government departments through the sharing of business-related social credit information. The collaboration aims to improve regulatory efficiency.

She said efforts to combat dishonest behavior have been intensified, with social credit-based punishments imposed on violators. Information regarding such violations is promptly published online on the National Enterprise Credit Information Disclosure System, which receives over 131 million visits a day.

# KMT's Ma visiting mainland

Former chairman's second visit further promotes cross-Strait youth exchanges

By ZHANG YI  
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Ma Ying-jeou, the former chairman of Taiwan's main opposition party, Kuomintang, will begin his second visit to the Chinese mainland on Monday, accompanied by a group of young people from Taiwan.

Analysts from both sides of the Taiwan Strait said the visit will promote youth exchanges and foster peaceful development.

Ma's 11-day itinerary includes participating in the Qingming Festival Memorial Ceremony for the Yellow Emperor, who is regarded as the nation's ancestor, in Shaanxi province, an event that analysts say carries special significance.

The Yellow Emperor holds deep emotional significance for Chinese people around the world, and reverence for ancestors is a traditional Chinese virtue, said Li Peng, head of the Graduate Institute for Taiwan Studies at Xiamen University.

Whether it was his return to Hunan province last year to pay respects to his ancestors at his grandfather's tomb, or his participation in honoring the Yellow

Emperor this year, Ma has demonstrated strong and fervent feelings for the Chinese nation, Li said.

His actions also demonstrate that compatriots on both sides of the Strait belong to the Chinese nation, tracing their roots back to the Yellow Emperor, he added, sharply contrasting with the separatist "Taiwan independence" forces on the island.

Last year, Ma, 73, visited the mainland around the time of the Qingming Festival, also known as Tomb Sweeping Day. He led 28 Taiwan students to visit Nanjing in Jiangsu province, Wuhan in Hubei province, Changsha in Hunan, Chongqing, Shanghai and other places over 12 days.

After the trip, the Ma Ying-jeou Foundation invited students and teachers from five mainland universities to visit Taiwan, allowing young mainlanders to gain a deeper understanding of Taiwan and thereby enhancing mutual friendship between young people.

Hsiao Hsu-tsen, director of the Ma Ying-jeou Foundation, said the reciprocal visits demonstrated the effectiveness and importance of youth exchanges across the Strait,

which could increase friendship between young people and lessen the likelihood of conflict.

Li said that through setting an example with his actions, Ma hopes to inspire more young Taiwan people to regularly participate in cross-Strait exchanges. Only through communication and interaction can a more authentic and comprehensive understanding of the mainland be gained, he said.

Li added that it is through such exchanges that one can genuinely perceive the goodwill and sincerity of the mainland in promoting peaceful and integrated development across the Strait.

After Ma's second visit to the mainland was announced, Taiwan society expressed its support, believing it will help ease tension in cross-Strait relations, reflecting the island's mainstream support for cross-Strait exchanges and peaceful development.

KMT "legislator" Lai Shyh-bao said that tense cross-Strait relations meant that someone needed to engage in communications with the mainland, and Ma's visit would help reduce mutual hostility, Taiwan media reported.

Lai also urged the island's Democratic Progressive Party authorities to encourage goodwill

exchanges between both sides, saying that the DPP cannot engage in dialogue with the mainland and should not hinder others from doing so.

A commentary published on the website of the Taiwan-based China Times said that to ensure peace between both sides of the Strait, it is most important they show goodwill toward each other.

Given the current tense cross-Strait situation and the upcoming inauguration of Lai Ching-te of the DPP as Taiwan "president", as long as Ma's visit helps both sides dispel hostility, the DPP authorities should welcome it, it said.

Chen Binhua, spokesman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, said compatriots on both sides of the Strait are one family and should naturally have more frequent interactions.

Based on the political foundation of upholding the 1992 Consensus and opposing "Taiwan independence", the mainland welcomes political parties, groups and individuals from Taiwan to frequently visit the mainland for exchanges, jointly promoting the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations, safeguarding the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait, and benefiting compatriots on both sides, he said.

# Landlocked Xinjiang cashes in on aquatic products

By CUI JIA in Beijing  
and MAO WEIHUA in Urumqi

The aquatic products industry in Northwest China's landlocked Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region is continuing to boom this year on the back of increased demand.

Last week, 10 metric tons of crab larvae were put in Nanping Reservoir in Moyu county on the edge of the Taklimakan Desert — the world's second-largest shifting

desert. The reservoir is built to hold snowmelt water from the Kunlun Mountains. It's ideal to grow freshwater crabs, said Abudulrezak Memeturson, manager of Hotan Kehui Ecoagriculture Development Company that breeds the crabs.

"The water temperature has now become suitable for young crabs to grow," Abudulrezak said. "More than 98 percent can survive here, so we expect to harvest about 40 tons of crab in the autumn."

"And, more importantly, crabs raised in snowmelt water with traces of saline and alkali taste particularly good."

Moyu, in southern Xinjiang's Hotan prefecture, now has 123 freshwater aquaculture ponds that can produce up to 3,800 tons of aquatic products a year, according to the county government.

Seafood from Xinjiang gained public favor last autumn after Japan's dumping of water contaminated

with radioactivity sparked intense concerns about seafood safety and the state of the marine environment.

Xinjiang boasts long hours of sunlight, vast deserts and rugged mountains, with an extremely dry climate. That would appear to make it an unsuitable location for seafood production due to the massive amount of water required. However, the region is also home to multiple rivers, lakes, reservoirs and ponds, where the aquatic prod-

ucts industry can thrive.

To simulate an ocean environment and breed seafood in Xinjiang, farmers and technicians have adjusted the local saline-alkali water to be similar to natural seawater.

By September, people will be able to enjoy seafood such as grouper and oysters grown at a sea-farm farm that transforms salt lake water into artificial seawater in the southern Xinjiang city of Artux, said Cai Huanhua, who is in charge of the operations of the farm.

The farm is about 2 kilometers from a salt lake. Microelements and probiotics are added to the water

from the salt lake to turn it into artificial seawater suitable for breeding aquatic products, Cai said.

"We can offer people the taste of the sea from places so far from the real sea," Cai said.

The farm is expected to produce 130 tons of seafood this year and generate more than 17 million yuan (\$2.35 million) in revenue, Cai added. "We want to encourage more local people to get involved in seafood farming so they can make more money at their doorsteps."

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## CHINA

# Matchmaking a solution for young singles

Decrease in marriage registrations in recent years leads to family tensions

By LI LEI  
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A city of 1.3 million people in Anhui province has responded to calls from residents by pledging to emulate larger cities by creating a matchmaking corner at a local park to foster a conducive environment for young people to meet and date.

A comment left by a netizen recently garnered attention from the government of Tongling, where the number of newly married couples has been declining in recent years. "Other cities have matchmaking corners in their parks, but ours does not have one yet," the netizen wrote.

In order to make it easier for young people to meet potential partners, the netizen asked if authorities would create such a corner at Cuihu Park.

In a written response, the government said it would, adding that it is communicating with authorities involved to create a "good external environment" for meetings between young people who are ready to marry.

The government said the continuous decrease in local marriage registrations in recent years had created strife in families, a tacit reference to the parental pressure placed on children to date and marry, which in some cases leads to strained relationships.

"Therefore, establishing a corner to expand channels for young people to make friends is very necessary," it said.

Matchmaking corners — with amenities such as seating and shelters to facilitate conversations — are often found in parks or similar locations in first-tier cities, where experts believe heavy work pressure and the hefty cost of living have dragged down marriage rates, despite single people being urged by family members to tie the knot and have babies.

The corners are also embraced by aging parents who hang out at the sites with posters containing personal data about their adult children, including their incomes and contact information, to help them find a suitable partner.

In China, parents play a significant role in their children's marital decisions, including in arranging meetings and vetting potential partners.

The Tongling city government described the corners as a Chinese tradition spurred by parents' desire for their children to be happy, though some internet users say such sites are being developed in vain amid a growing generational divide in attitudes toward love and marriage.

The local government said the corners first popped up in Beijing in 2004 and have been emulated by other cities such as Shanghai, Chongqing and Guangzhou, Guangdong province.

They have been popular alternatives for young people seeking to meet potential mates in areas outside the workplace and without relying on friends and family to introduce them to others.

More efforts have been urged to create more matchmaking corners across the country amid concerns about falling marriage and fertility rates, with some such requests receiving official endorsement.

For example, netizens in Beijing recently implored authorities to create a matchmaking corner in Tongzhou district so that older parents don't have to travel long distances to such places in the city center.

The district government later replied that it had relayed the netizens' concerns to relevant authorities for future policymaking.

Netizens from places such as the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, as well as the provinces of Shaanxi and Shanxi, have also voiced their support for such corners.

In December, authorities in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang, said that apart from designating spaces at local parks as matchmaking corners, they will also organize events on special occasions such as the Qixi Festival, known as Chinese Valentine's Day.

Meng, an accountant in Beijing who asked to be identified only by her surname, met her husband five years ago at college. She hailed the corners as an additional avenue for young people to meet, especially white-collar workers like her who have limited opportunities to meet people outside the workplace.

However, the 30-year-old added that people should not be too optimistic about the corners' effectiveness, because the posters put up by parents usually simplify individuals to a few tangible metrics such as height and income level and downplay crucial factors such as personality.

"Besides, many such corners are flooded by posters of single women, and those of men are very few," she said.

New marriage registrations began falling nationwide after peaking at 13.47 million in 2013, according to official figures. The number dipped below 10 million in 2019 and started decreasing by about 1 million each year, reaching just 6.83 million in 2022.

Last year, 768 million couples registered marriages in China, the first uptick in nine years.

## Soybean strainers



Young people from Hong Kong use a piece of cloth to filter residue from soybean milk as they learn about traditional agricultural life in Gaotan village, Jiangxi province, on Saturday. The group visited the village as part of an exchange activity held to strengthen communication and mutual understanding between Hong Kong and Chinese mainland youth. LIU LIXIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## Beijing upgrades website to ease foreigners' lives

By CHEN BOWEN  
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An updated version of a website that provides services for foreigners in Beijing has been unveiled amid efforts by the capital to help them work, study, live and travel in the city.

The upgraded version of the International Web Portal of Beijing focuses on enhancing the website to make it a hub for international exchanges in Beijing, offering information, public services and consultation and communication channels.

Available since Thursday, the website can be viewed in nine languages: English, Korean, Japanese, German, French, Russian, Spanish, Arabic and Portuguese.

Beijing is committed to creating a welcoming and supportive environment for foreigners, Xia Linmao, the

capital's executive vice-mayor, told a news conference late last month.

Under the theme "Highlighting Beijing's charm, vitality and opportunities while seamlessly integrating Beijing's services", the website offers a variety of convenient urban services related to payments, transportation, education, lifestyle issues and tourism for foreigners.

It is designed for scenario-based integrated services, enabling users to benefit from more digital services with their passport information, according to the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Beijing Municipal Committee.

Based on thematic areas such as investing, working, living, studying, traveling and consuming, the website features two series of instructive videos entitled "How Beijing" and "Service Guide for Foreigners in Beijing", providing more than 300

guidelines and online reservation channels for over 50 services, including accommodation registration and visa application.

The "Events Calendar" section of the website offers firsthand information about the city's exhibitions, performances, sports events, consumption options, tourist activities and more.

Another section, "My Story in Beijing", shares foreigners' tales of entrepreneurship and personal experiences working, living, studying and traveling in the city.

The website also includes a multifunctional "Policy Toolkit" to discuss policies that are of general concern to foreign-funded enterprises such as investment access, financial support, industrial support and tax preferences.

Alexandre Guery, who has lived in Beijing for two years, said he really

likes the upgraded version of the website.

"Several years ago, before I departed from Paris, networking with the local community was difficult, especially since I was not fluent in Chinese," he said. "But now, with the novel website and its WeChat account, it easily connects foreigners with more opportunities with the local government and enterprises."

Beijing is also ramping up the construction of international schools and hospitals, and optimizing services for expatriates such as medical insurance settlements and commercial insurance.

"In the future, we'll make greater efforts to solve issues that foreigners are concerned about, such as payment methods, including improving the convenience of cash, overseas bank cards and electronic payments," Xia said.

## Second phase of neutron source project underway

By LIANG SHUANG  
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China began construction of the second phase of a major science infrastructure project on Saturday in Dongguan, Guangdong province, hoping to use a "super microscope" to achieve more breakthroughs in sectors such as the aerospace and superconductive materials industries.

A ceremony was held to mark the commencement of the second phase of the China Spallation Neutron Source in Dongguan's Songshan Lake Science City, where 11 neutron spectrometers and their operating terminals will be built over the course of nearly six years, said Wang Sheng, deputy head of the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of High Energy Physics.

A spallation neutron source generates a massive amount of high-

energy neutrons — a key particle inside the nucleus of an atom — and uses them as "probes" to study the microscopic structure of substances and materials.

According to the CAS, since the first phase of the CSNS project was put into operation in 2018, the facility has received applications for use from 6,000 researchers from home and abroad and has operated for more than 5,000 hours each year, helping conclude more than 1,500 science projects, 100 of which were from outside the Chinese mainland.

Among them is the domestic development of boron neutron capture therapy, which is used to treat certain types of cancer. A medical device was developed from experiences gained using the CSNS, and Dongguan People's Hospital will conduct clinical trials using the device this year,

the CSNS operators said.

Other points of progress include the simulation of neutron irradiation in the upper atmosphere to enhance aerospace materials' resistance to cosmic rays, as well as the study of lithium ions to improve the performance of car batteries.

"It is precisely the abundant scientific achievements and users' strong needs that pushed the second phase of the CSNS to be launched quickly," said Wang, who is also the director of the second phase.

Including the ones available in the first phase, the CSNS will have 20 neutron spectrometers upon completion of the upgrade.

"Every one will be a 'microscope' that will be used in different fields and industries," Wang said.

In addition to the new spectrometers, the project will also feature China's first — and the world's fifth

— muon source, which can help detect essential elements like carbon and oxygen in samples without compromising their structure, Bao Yu, a researcher at the physics institute, said in November, when plans to develop the muon source were included in the preliminary facility design of the new phase of the CSNS.

The new phase will also see the beam power of the source's core accelerator — a key metric of the facility — upgraded from 100 kilowatts to 500 kW so that it will generate more neutrons in a set period of time, Wang said, adding that it will also enable the device to measure smaller samples and capture quicker movements with higher resolution.

"As an upgrade project, we will make sure that the existing neutron source won't be significantly affected during the construction of the new phase," Wang said.

### Briefly

#### Coal mine accident leaves 2 dead in Hebei

Two people trapped in a coal mine accident in Hebei province have been confirmed dead, the coal mine company said Saturday. A shaft roof collapsed at 4:42 am on Friday at a mine run by Jizhong Energy Resources Co in the city of Xingtai, leaving two people trapped, according to a statement issued on the company's website. The two were confirmed dead on Saturday. The cause of the accident is being investigated.

#### Number of UAVs exceeds 1.26 million

The number of unmanned aerial vehicles in China increased 32 percent year-on-year to exceed 1.26

million by the end of last year, data from the Civil Aviation Administration of China shows. UAVs, or drones, flew more than 23 million hours last year, according to the CAAC. The administration has approved the establishment of 17 civil unmanned aviation test zones and three test bases, covering cities, islands and other areas.

#### Horned toad species found in Guangdong

Chinese researchers have discovered a new horned toad species, which has been named *Boulenophrys elongata* sp. nov., in the Lianhua Mountains of Guangdong province. The research findings were published in a recent edition of the international academic journal *Asian Herpetological Research*. The new species was

discovered in mountains surrounded by well-preserved subtropical evergreen broadleaf forests. The small toad, which features elongated limbs, differs significantly from known species living in the same area.

#### Writer Chi Pang-yuan, 100, dies in Taiwan

Chi Pang-yuan, a noted scholar and writer, died on Friday in Taiwan at age 100, according to local media reports. Chi was born in 1924 in Northeast China, left her hometown in 1930 shortly before the Japanese invasion, and drifted across the country due to the ongoing war. In 1947, she moved to Taiwan. She was well known on both sides of the Taiwan Strait for her masterful autobiography *The Great*

*Flowing River*. The 250,000-character book, published in 2009, recounted her youth on the Chinese mainland and her adulthood in Taiwan, giving a personal account of the history of modern China, particularly during the Japanese invasion.

#### House fire kills 4, injures 1 in Fujian

Four people were killed and one injured after a house caught fire in Xiamen, Fujian province, early on Saturday, according to the local fire rescue team. The fire broke out at 4:55 am in Houxi township, Jimbei district, and was extinguished by 5:42 am. An investigation into the cause of the fire is underway.

XINHUA



Parents review the resumes of their adult children in an effort to find suitable partners for them at a matchmaking corner inside Zhongshan Park in Beijing on April 16. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## WORLD

## Aid delivery descends into chaos in Gaza

WHO renews hospital warning as fresh truce negotiations bring hope to enclave

GAZA STRIP — An aid delivery in Gaza descended into chaos on Saturday with shots fired after almost six months of bombardment left hundreds of thousands in desperate need.

A Red Crescent paramedic at a nearby hospital said five people were killed and dozens injured by gunfire and a stampede during a rare aid distribution in north Gaza.

Witnesses told Agence France-Presse that shots were fired both by Gazans overseeing the aid delivery and Israeli troops nearby, and panicked lorry drivers drove quickly away, hitting people trying to get the food. The Israeli military said it had "no record of the incident described".

Aid deliveries have become increasingly fraught as the needs of Gazans increase.

Foreign powers have ramped up airdrops of aid but several people have been killed by falling crates, stampedes or drowned trying to retrieve packages from the Mediterranean.

Two charities have organized aid deliveries by sea from Cyprus, with their second mission in a little more than two weeks setting sail on Saturday.

The second shipment of about 875 metric tons of food aid for Gaza residents left port early on Saturday afternoon, the semistate Cyprus News Agency reported.

The food, mostly flour, rice and sugar, was loaded onto three vessels and one platform that was already outside the port and were heading to Gaza, it said.

Israel's siege, sparked by a deadly militant attack on Oct 7, brings nightly airstrikes and in recent days major operations around several hospitals, which it says are used by Palestinian militant groups, a claim the Hamas authorities deny.

The World Health Organization, or WHO, warned that Gaza had just 10 "minimally functioning" hospitals for its more than two million people, with its chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus saying about 9,000 patients urgently needed treatment abroad.

UN agencies have warned repeatedly that northern Gaza is on the verge of famine and have called it a human-made crisis because aid lorries are backed up on the Egypt-Gaza border awaiting long checks by

Israeli officials. Israel has denied responsibility.

The top UN court has ordered Israel to allow in aid, and the UN Security Council has adopted a resolution demanding an "immediate cease-fire", but neither has affected the situation on the ground.

The Egyptian news outlet Al-Qahera reported that talks aimed at brokering a truce between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip would resume in Cairo on Sunday, days after Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gave the green light for fresh negotiations.

Egypt, Qatar and the United States have mediated previous rounds of negotiations, but a workable agreement has remained elusive.

The mediators had hoped to secure a cease-fire before the start of Ramadan, but progress stalled and the Muslim holy month is more than half over.

Hamas' attack on Oct 7, which triggered the conflict, resulted in about 1,160 deaths in Israel.

Israel's retaliatory campaign against Hamas has killed at least 32,782 people, the health ministry in Gaza says.

Hamas seized about 250 hostages. Of those, Israel says it believes 130 remain in Gaza, including 33 presumed dead.

## Domestic pressure

Netanyahu is under domestic pressure, facing regular demonstrations over his failure to bring home all the captives.

During a rally in Tel Aviv on Saturday, Shira Elbag, whose daughter Liri, 19, was among those seized, urged Israelis to demand a change of focus from Netanyahu. "After 176 days, the excuses are over," she said.

A central plank of the talks in Qatar has been negotiating the release of the hostages alongside a truce and access to humanitarian aid.

The US is Israel's chief military backer, but tension has been mounting.

Washington has urged Netanyahu to abandon his plan for a full ground invasion of Rafah, the southern Gaza city to which most of the population has fled.

The Wall Street Journal reported, citing unnamed officials, that Washington had nonetheless approved billions of dollars of bombs and fighter jets for Israel in recent days.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Slippery ground



An aerial view reveals protective tarps attempting to thwart continued landslides below three cliffside homes in Southern California, where a landslide occurred in early February as winter storms brought more heavy rain to the region on Saturday. ALLEN J. SCHABEN VIA GETTY IMAGES

## China-India meetings positive: Experts

By APARAJIT CHAKRABORTY

in New Delhi

For China Daily

Frequent diplomatic and military meetings between China and India show both sides' will to resolve border disputes mutually, analysts said after the latest border consultation meeting in Beijing held last week.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry and India's Ministry of External Affairs separately issued a statement on the 29th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs, or WMCC.

Both sides positively evaluated the progress made in the management and control of the situation in the China-India border area, and had a candid and in-depth exchange of views on the ideas of

work for the next stage, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said.

The meeting was co-chaired by Hong Liang, director-general of the Department of Boundary and Ocean Affairs of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, and Gourangal Das, joint secretary of the East Asia Division in India's Ministry of External Affairs.

With frequent meetings by both sides, it can be inferred that both are determined to resolve border disputes mutually and want to avoid any escalation in the future, said Haans Freddy, a professor in the Department of Political Science at Madras Christian College in Chennai, India.

The two sides agreed to focus on the relevant issues on the ground along the border, reach a solution acceptable to both sides as soon as

possible, and promote the transition of the border situation into a normalized phase of control and management, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said.

New Delhi said in its readout that the two sides had an in-depth exchange of views.

The last session of the WMCC took place in November last year. In February, two countries held their 21st round of Corps Commander level meeting.

Both sides felt the urgency to resolve all outstanding border issues without prolonging discussions, said R.S. Vasani, a retired Indian navy commodore who is now the director of the Chennai Centre for China Studies, a think tank.

It will take time to resolve the border disputes, but both sides

should continue such talks, said Shankar Roy Chowdhury, a former Chief of Army Staff of the Indian Army.

China's trade with India in the first two months of 2024 rose 15.8 percent year-on-year, making it one of the fastest growth rates among China's trading partners, according to data from the China General Administration of Customs.

Over the past year, China-India relations have shown a positive momentum of improvement, Ma Jia, charge d'affaires at the Chinese embassy in New Delhi said at a New Year carnival on Feb 6.

"We hope the window for communications gets bigger, the platform of practical cooperation becomes larger, (and) the bridge for people-to-people exchanges will be rebuilt," Ma said at the event.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

## Act of gratitude repaid 85 years later with \$5m

By BELINDA ROBINSON

in New York

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A Chinese American family in California is donating \$5 million to black college students at San Diego State University in a touching act of gratitude 85 years after they rented and later bought a home from an African American couple amid racially restrictive housing laws of the time.

The Dong family found themselves unable to rent a house in 1939 until Gus and Emma Thompson in Coronado said that they could rent one of their properties.

Now as Lloyd Dong Jr, 81, his brother Ron, 86, and Ron's wife, Janice Dong, prepare to sell those same properties, they want to help a new generation of young people.

Lloyd Dong said: "My brother and sister-in-law decided that they wanted to give some money to San Diego State, and I decided, well, I could do it as a charitable remainder trust. My brother has no kids, and I have no kids, so we just thought it would be a good program to give to people who are in need."

Ron and Janice Dong, both

retired teachers, said they believe in the power of education to propel lives in the right direction.

That is why, after being reminded of their family's link to the Thompsons by a local historian in 2022, the couple, with Lloyd Jr, a retired police officer, decided to donate their money to San Diego State University's Black Resource Center.

The Dongs are also pushing for the Black Resource Center to be renamed after the Thompsons.

Tonika Green, San Diego State's associate vice-president for campus community affairs, said: "The Dong family will change lives with this gift."

Lloyd Dong added: "People need mentors. The black study program will give these students a program to look up to and also help them to be able to go through school."

The family's properties in Coronado include the Thompsons' original home, along with a livery stable, which had rooms built above it that the Dongs turned into an apartment complex in 1957.

Both properties are estimated to be worth \$7 million to \$8 million. Lloyd and Ron Dong will donate their cash once the home and other property are sold, they said.

The Dongs arrived in California in the late 19th century. Lloyd Dong Sr and his wife Margaret were born in the US to immigrant parents from China. They had four children.

Lloyd Dong Sr worked as a farmer in the Central Valley in 1939 before becoming a gardener in Coronado.

## Facing racism

His children said their father worked six days a week, and on the seventh day he made sure that they attended school, developed their careers and invested in real estate. He wanted to move to Coronado because of work but faced racism.

More than 80 years ago Coronado was a resort with plush hotels and white sandy beaches for the rich that hugged the San Diego Peninsula.

US housing practices often enforced segregation by making it very difficult for minorities or immigrants to rent or buy a home.

The housing covenants or deeds specifically prohibited people based on race, religion and ethnicity. Real estate developers put details into contracts to keep areas populated by white people only. In 1882 the US Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, restricting immigration

into the US. It was repealed in 1943.

In Coronado, the only place that black people, immigrants or minorities could stay in the late 1800s was on the upper level of Gus Thompson's livery stable, which had rooms for rent.

Thompson, originally from Kentucky, was born into slavery between 1859 and 1862, but years later he took charge of his life by investing in property and becoming a local business owner.

After he arrived in California he worked at the Hotel Coronado, which opened in 1888. From 1895 to 1901, records show, he built his own house and livery stable before the city's racial housing covenants went into effect, making his properties exempt from the restrictions.

In 1955, when the Dongs bought the Coronado home and the livery stable from Emma Thompson, they became the first Chinese American family to buy real estate in Coronado, Kevin Ashley, a local historian, told NBC News. Over the years the Dong brothers moved out of the house but stayed in California to manage the properties. As they reached their 80s the upkeep became more difficult, which led to their decision to sell.



A cargo ship (right), and a ship loaded with food destined for Gaza prepare to set sail outside a Cypriot port on Saturday. PETROS KARADJIAS / AP

## Food waste fueling climate change, report finds

By OTIATO OPALI in Nairobi, Kenya  
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Food waste across the globe continues to fuel climate change, nature loss and pollution while hurting the global economy, a report by the United Nations has revealed.

The UNEP Food Waste Index Report 2024, which was launched last week, said it is important for countries to connect the fight against hunger and the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss.

The report, whose findings revealed that the toll of food loss on

the global economy is estimated at roughly \$1 trillion, reiterated that reducing food waste is an opportunity to reduce costs and tackle some of the biggest environmental and social issues of our time: climate change and food insecurity.

While making opening remarks at the webinar that launched the report, Dechen Tsering, acting director of the climate change division at the UNEP, said policy instruments such as tax rebates, waste collection fees and subsidies could be used to incentivize changes in business practices and consumer behavior.

In addition, better data on the

cost of food waste and the environmental, economic, and social benefits of limiting food waste could help influence investors and consumers.

Inger Andersen, executive director of UNEP, said unnecessary waste is causing substantial costs to the climate and nature in addition to being a major development issue.

According to the report, as of 2022, only 21 countries had included food loss and waste reduction in their national climate plans, including China, Namibia, Sierra Leone, Cabo Verde and the United Arab Emirates.

Meanwhile, the number of people who are food insecure and in urgent

need of humanitarian assistance in the Greater Horn of Africa rose to 74 million at the end of February, according to another report released on Friday by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and other agencies.

The international agencies said that the 2023 El Nino rains contributed to the rise in the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in the region. With wetter-than-normal conditions forecast over most parts of the region, specifically in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and Tanzania, during the 2024 March-May rainfall season, the situation may not improve.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

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## WORLD

# Green goods at affordable price hailed

Accusations by US treasury secretary against China meet with strong rebuttal

By YIFAN XU in Washington  
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The provision of large volumes of green products by China at an affordable price has drawn praise from global experts.

This comes close on the heels of US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen saying in a speech last week that China threatened to destabilize global supply chains that were developing around industries such as solar, electric vehicles and lithium-ion batteries.

Sourabh Gupta, a senior fellow at the Institute for China-American Studies in Washington, said the large-volume green products China was providing more cheaply than others "will go a long way to facing down the climate challenge, especially as these products go mainstream in developing countries where the vast body of humanity lives".

"Even more impressive than the provision of these large-volume, low-price green products is the Chinese government's resolve to stand behind and support the creation of markets at scale for these products, such that many renewables and green products are cost-competitive today or likely to be cost-competitive soon with the more emissions-heavy products that dominate the marketplace currently."

At the Suniva solar cell factory in Norcross, Georgia, Yellen said she planned to raise the issue of overcapacity with her Chinese counterparts. She will visit China as the US Treasury Secretary for the second time in the coming weeks, the South China Morning Post has reported.

Yellen has her reasons for leveling the allegations against China regarding overcapacity and dumping in foreign markets, Gupta said. "China is moving away from that overinvestment model, but the level of domestic savings remains excessively high. As such, there are understandable fears that these savings (and domestic underconsumption) will macroeconomically manifest themselves in the form of domestic overproduction dumped overseas in export markets."

"Of course, balanced against this argument is the fact that China enjoys real comparative as well as competitive advantages in many of the product groups which it is now being accused of dumping," Gupta said, pointing out that China's lead in EVs and the battery sector is the result of innovation and highly competitive capabilities.

The Chinese government was wise, via its industrial policy planning, to be an early mover to incubate these industries of the future

at scale, he said. "Yellen's statements and the Joe Biden administration's approach involve double standards and protectionism. There is also more complexity."

Anti-dumping and countervailing duties have long been a US tool of choice for countering trade practices said to be unfair or injurious, and these trade remedy enforcement tools will once again be unleashed on China-originating or transshipped imports, Gupta said. The US has already found additional ways to exclude Chinese goods from its marketplace, he said, whether via the import route or the foreign direct investment route, drawing on its "foreign entity of concern" rules contained in the CHIPS Act, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

## Dispute settlement

"These rules will be enforced aggressively. That said, the latter two pieces of legislation do contain exemption pockets to enable qualifying China-originating components or licensed items to enter the US marketplace, particularly where alternatives to Chinese content in these green products and industries of the future do not exist. But by and large, the US goal is to minimize the scope of such content and, over the longer run, eliminate or desensitize these supply chains of China-originating content."

China initiated dispute settlement proceedings against the US at the World Trade Organization last week to contest "discriminatory subsidies" to EV industries under the US Inflation Reduction Act, saying they resulted in the exclusion of goods from China and other WTO members. China's move is a smart one, Gupta said.

US subsidies for EVs clearly violate WTO rules, Gupta said, and it is only a matter of time before a panel in Geneva finds them to violate US multilateral trade commitments.

"Of course, the US will block the panel's finding from being validated by the WTO's appellate body, which Washington has effectively killed, and thereby prevent the fulfillment of all legal procedures toward finding the US' EV subsidies to be illegal. That said, a WTO panel's initial finding of noncompliance will carry significant political weight."

China could transparently show that Beijing, not Washington, is the victim of noncompliant trade and investment measures and back its political narrative with a third-party legal finding of impeccable authority, the WTO panel's legal finding, he said.



Employees of Kobayashi Pharmaceutical bow after government health officials inspected the plant in Osaka, Japan, on Saturday over deaths linked to the company's health supplements. ASSOCIATED PRESS

## Japan's pharma plant faces inspections

TOKYO — Japanese government health officials on Sunday inspected a factory producing health supplements linked to at least five deaths and the hospitalization of more than 100 others, one day after the authorities investigated another plant that manufactured the product.

A team of 17 health officials from the central and prefectural governments raided a plant operated by the Kobayashi Pharmaceutical Co's subsidiary in Kinokawa, in the western Japanese prefecture of Wakayama, under the food sanitation act. NHK public television showed the officials walking into the factory.

The Wakayama plant took over the production of the supplements after Kobayashi Pharmaceutical closed another plant in nearby Osaka, which authorities searched on Saturday, NHK said.

Kobayashi Pharmaceutical spokesperson Yuko Tomiyama told reporters that the company is fully cooperating in the investigation.

The company says little is known about the exact cause of the sicknesses, which include kidney failure.

The supplements being investigated all used *benikoji*, a kind of red mold, including Kobayashi Pharmaceuticals' pink pills called Benikoji Cholestole Help, which were billed as helping lower cholesterol levels.

The Osaka-based Kobayashi

Pharmaceutical said about a million packages were sold over the past three fiscal years. It also sold *benikoji* to other manufacturers, and some products have been exported. The supplements could be bought at drugstores without a prescription from a doctor.

Reports of health problems surfaced in 2023, although *benikoji* has been used in various products for years.

The recall came on March 22, two months after the company had received official medical reports about the problem. Company president Akihiro Kobayashi has apologized for not having acted sooner.

On Friday, the company said five people had died and 114 people were being treated in hospitals after using the products.

## Review ordered

Japan's health ministry says the supplements could be responsible for the deaths and illnesses, and warned that the number of those affected could grow. The government has ordered a review of the approval system in response to the supplement-related illnesses.

Some analysts blame recent deregulation initiatives, which simplified and sped up approval for health products to spur economic growth.

An unintended component called "puberulic acid," derived from blue mold, has been detected in the company's product, according to the health ministry and the company.

The substance is a potent antibacterial and antimalarial agent that can be toxic, but the extent to which its ingestion may pose health risks or cause kidney damage remains unclear, according to the ministry.

The company introduced Cholestole Help in February 2021, selling about 1 million packages by the end of February this year.

Widening health problems have intensified criticism of Kobayashi Pharmaceutical's sluggish response, as it took the company about two months to announce the voluntary recalls after receiving reports on health damage.

The voluntary recall of products containing Kobayashi Pharmaceutical's *benikoji* as a food ingredient has now expanded nationwide, affecting various products, including sake, an alcoholic fermented rice beverage, confectionery, bread and miso, a paste that is used as seasoning and as a flavor enhancer.

Earlier reports said the company had supplied the rice fermented with red yeast to 52 manufacturers.

AGENCIES—XINHUA



## Fatal crash

A car carrying 11 children hit a stationary dump truck on the Delhi-Meerut Expressway near Ghaziabad, India, on Saturday. The car driver and a child were killed, while 10 children were injured. The condition of some of the children was said to be critical.

SAKIB ALI VIA GETTY IMAGES

## Terror plot in Dagestan thwarted, Russia says

MOSCOW — Russia foiled a terror plot in a special operation in its Dagestan Republic, arresting three suspects, the National Anti-Terrorism Committee said on Sunday.

Earlier in the day, the committee said special forces blocked the alleged terrorists in several apartments in residential areas of the cities of Makhachkala and Kaspiysk.

The suspects were planning to "commit a number of terrorist crimes", it said in a statement.

Automatic weapons, ammunition and a ready-to-use improvised explosive device were discovered where the suspects were detained, the committee said.

"There are no casualties among the civilian population or losses among the personnel of the law enforcement forces," it said. "The necessary operational search activities and investigative actions continue."

The move came as foreign diplomats in Russia laid flowers on Saturday at the site of last week's attack on a suburban Moscow concert hall that killed at least 144 people.

Those in attendance included ambassadors from the United States, EU countries, Africa and Latin America. The Russian state news agency RIA Novosti said the "around 130 diplomatic missions" taking part included representatives of "unfriendly states".

## Paying tribute

Since the attack, thousands of people have brought bunches of flowers, wreaths and other tokens such as teddy bears, creating a makeshift memorial at the Crocus City Hall.

The Russian state news agency Tass reported on Saturday that the number of people wounded in the attack was 551, quoting figures from the Moscow regional department of the Russian Emergency Situations Ministry. Previous figures have been much lower, and it did not explain the discrepancy.

The death toll rose to 144 on Friday when a severely injured victim died in a hospital, according to Russian Health Minister Mikhail Murashko.

Russia's Investigative Committee said on Saturday that 134 of the dead had been identified. "Genetic tests are being carried out for other, as yet unidentified, victims," the committee said in a statement on messaging app Telegram.

An affiliate of the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack.

The Kremlin has said Ukraine and the West had a role, something Kyiv has denied.

Twelve people were arrested following the concert hall attack.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Briefly

### UNITED STATES

#### AT&T reports breach of data, resets passcodes

AT&T said it has begun notifying millions of customers about the theft of personal data recently discovered online. The telecommunications company said on Saturday that a data set found on the "dark web" contains information such as social security numbers of about 7.6 million current account holders and 65.4 million former account holders. The company said it had reset the passcodes of current users and would be communicating with account holders whose sensitive personal information was compromised. It is not known if the data "originated from AT&T or one of its vendors", the company said.

### THE NETHERLANDS

#### 4 hostages freed in Dutch town, 1 held

A hostage situation in the central Dutch town of Ede on Saturday has ended after four hostages were freed and a suspect was arrested,

the police said. Ede's Mayor Rene Verhulst told a news conference that the victims were physically unharmed, but "still completely distraught." The police said the suspect had previously been convicted of threatening behavior in 2023. They have started investigating the motive, but have so far excluded any terrorism angle, they said.

### EUROPE

#### Romania and Bulgaria join Schengen zone

Romania and Bulgaria partially joined Europe's ID-check-free travel zone on Sunday, marking a new step in the two countries' integration with the European Union. After years of negotiations to join the Schengen Area, there is now free access for travelers arriving by air or sea from both countries. However, land border checks will remain in place due to opposition primarily from Austria, which has long blocked their application over illegal migration concerns.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Ukrainian thermal power plant destroyed in attack

KYIV — The Zmiivska Thermal Power Plant in Ukraine's eastern Kharkiv region was destroyed in a Russian missile attack, the UN news agency said on Saturday, citing the Ukrainian power-generating company Centrenergy.

The missile strike on March 22 destroyed all the plant's units and damaged auxiliary equipment, Centrenergy said in a report.

Workers are still clearing the rubble at the site and there is no access to most of the plant's equipment.

On March 22, Russia fired 88 missiles and 63 Shahed combat drones at Ukraine, which Ukrainian authorities described as the largest strike on the country's energy infrastructure to date, the report said.

The Zmiivska plant, which had a capacity of 2,200 megawatts, is the largest power-generating facility in eastern Ukraine, local media reported. The Russian Ministry of Defense said on March 22 in a statement that the Russian military launched massive missile and drone attacks on energy and military facilities in Ukraine that day, and "all goals of the massive strike have been achieved." Meanwhile, Russian President

Vladimir Putin has signed a decree setting out the routine spring conscription campaign, calling up 150,000 citizens for statutory military service, a document posted on the Kremlin's website showed on Sunday.

All men in Russia are required to complete a yearlong military service, or equivalent training during higher education, from the age of 18.

In July, Russia's lower house of parliament voted to raise the maximum age at which men can be conscripted to 30 from 27. The new legislation came into effect on Jan 1, 2024.

In September, Putin signed an order calling up 130,000 people for the autumn campaign and last spring Russia planned to conscript 147,000.

Kyiv has warned its stocks of munitions are running low, urging in particular Washington to end a political standoff that has frozen a new \$60 billion aid package.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in an interview published on Friday that if Ukraine does not get promised US military aid blocked by disputes in Congress, its forces will have to retreat "in small steps". France's defense minister said



Volunteers and students clear the rubble of destroyed buildings in Kyiv on Saturday. EFREM LUKATSKY / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Paris would deliver "hundreds" of armored personnel carriers and anti-aircraft missiles as part of a new aid package to Ukraine.

"To hold such as an extensive front line, the Ukrainian army needs, for example, our VAB vehicles: it's absolutely essential for troop mobility," Sebastien Lecornu told La Tribune newspaper in an interview published on Saturday. France is currently phasing out its

VAB fleet — some of them more than 40 years old — with new Griffon armored vehicles, but Lecornu said the older models were "still operational".

France will also supply more Aster 30 anti-aircraft missiles for SAMP/T launchers, similar to the US-supplied Patriot air defense systems, Agence France-Presse reported.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

## BUSINESS

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## Serving high-end products to the whole world

Go-getting domestic firms tap new sectors abroad for growth, take on competitors



By ZHONG NAN  
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For decades, Chinese companies have distinguished themselves abroad by undertaking large-scale construction and energy projects. Now, however, as many parts of the world enter a new phase of development, they are tweaking their strategies to better align with the evolving environment. Their focus is on generating revenue through higher-value business ventures that are more suited to the changing scene.

For instance, just as multinational automotive manufacturers such as General Motors Co from the United States and Stellantis NV from the Netherlands recently revealed plans to upgrade their production facilities in Brazil and launch a hybrid vehicle in that country later this year, Chinese automaker BYD initiated the construction of its new manufacturing facilities in the Brazilian state of Bahia in early March.

BYD's Brazil unit will produce electric and hybrid vehicles, electric buses and trucks, and battery products for both local and global markets.

According to an announcement from the local government, BYD's automobile manufacturing plant is anticipated to begin operations between late this year and early 2025. The initial production capacity is set at 150,000 electric and hybrid vehicles per year, with potential to expand to 300,000 units in the future.

Recognizing the need to directly compete with both domestic and international competitors in foreign markets, Great Wall Motor Co Ltd, another Chinese automaker, started upgrading its production lines at its factory in the Brazilian state of Sao Paulo last year. The company plans to start manufacturing electric vehicles later this year.

Even though ports, bridges, railway lines, mining and energy-related facilities continue to bear testimony to Chinese firms' capabil-

ities, a growing number of Chinese companies are now expanding their ventures into high-tech manufacturing, innovation-driven businesses, clean energy, logistics, cross-border e-commerce and service sectors abroad, said Lyu Yue, a professor of the Academy of China Open Economy Studies, part of the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing.

China's nonfinancial outbound direct investment grew by nearly 17 percent year-on-year to 916.99 billion yuan (\$127.37 billion) in 2023, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

Nonfinancial ODI in countries and regions participating in the Belt and Road Initiative came in at 224.09 billion yuan last year, soaring more than 28 percent year-on-year.

China's ongoing efforts to expand its institutional opening-up and seal high-standard economic and free trade deals, coupled with the rapid growth of its tech-intensive green product industries, are expected to drive its companies to strategically invest in new plants, service and innovation facilities in overseas markets, said Zhao Ping, dean of the Beijing-based Academy of China Council for the Promotion of International Trade.

"The ongoing restructuring of the global supply chain presents opportunities for Chinese companies to align their strengths with evolving market demands. Chinese firms are demonstrating strong competitiveness in manufacturing sectors like new energy vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and photovoltaic products, resulting in greater acceptance of their involvement by numerous countries," said Zhao. She predicted that China's ODI will grow steadily this year.

Despite challenges like global economic uncertainties, geopolitical tensions and evolving international economic and trade regulations, "go-global" will continue to be a key growth strategy of corporate China, said Eddy Chan, senior vice-presi-



Top: Visitors try out Huawei products during a new product release in Barcelona, Spain. XINHUA  
Above: Employees work on the TV production line of TCL in Brazil. WANG TIANCONG / XINHUA

dent of FedEx Express and president of FedEx China.

"Many Chinese companies are increasingly focusing their investments and resources on manufacturing operations in Southeast Asia. This shift has resulted in a growing demand for customized services to ensure the smooth operation of their supply chains within the region," said Chan.

The US courier service provider announced in mid-March that it had completed significant upgrades to its gateway facility in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. The facility now boasts an intelligent management system called e-warehouse.

Chinese companies' dynamic investment approach has made significant global advances in areas like trade in services, new foreign trade formats and digital and green growth in recent years.

Trade in services refers to purchase and sale of services. According to the World Trade Organization's definition, trade in services covers 12 major sectors. These include commerce, communication, construction and related engineering, finance, entertain-

ment, culture, sports, tourism, education and environment.

"These moves have helped drive economies and job markets in many countries, especially those in Southeast Asia, South America, the Middle East and Europe," said Johnny Chou, chairman and CEO of BEST Inc. The Hangzhou, Zhejiang province-based logistics services provider opened its largest sorting center by facility size in Southeast Asia in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in January.

EVE Energy Co Ltd, a battery manufacturer based in Huizhou, Guangdong province, is another example. The Chinese company is constructing a battery plant in Debrecen, Hungary, to supply batteries to BMW Group's Debrecen factory. With an investment of 1 billion euros (\$1.08 billion), the Chinese company will help generate over 1,000 new jobs for the local community.

Liu Jincheng, the company's chairman, said the factory is scheduled to be completed and put into operation in 2026.

"In terms of internationalization trends, Chinese battery companies

have advantages in both materials and equipment. We are able to serve global customers with an entire industrial chain," he said.

With advantageous geographical location and mature industrial infrastructure, Hungary remains a top destination for Chinese investment in Central and East Europe, covering a range of areas, including manufacturing, chemicals, finance, telecommunications, automobiles and logistics, according to information released by the economic and commercial office of the Chinese Embassy in Budapest.

As Chinese technology has advanced rapidly, "Made in China" and "globalization" have emerged as the defining features of the Chinese business culture, said Lin Meng, director of the Modern Supply Chain Research Institute at the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

Amid greater efforts by many Middle Eastern countries to utilize the digital economy for sustainable growth, Terminus Group, a Beijing-based artificial intelligence services provider, launched its international headquarters in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, in late February, to capture a larger market share in the region.

The new headquarters will facilitate Terminus' projects and business expansion initiatives in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman and other countries in the region. It will also support the group's operations in Singapore and Australia, as well as many countries participating in the BRI.

The Chinese company will also set up an AI laboratory in the new facility, focusing on cutting-edge exploration in the field of AI and the development of targeted solutions for the international market.

Victor Ai, CEO of Terminus Group, said that as many Middle Eastern countries strive to advance in eco-friendly energy, manufacturing and smart city initiatives, the

company aims to fully capitalize on its AIoT (artificial intelligence of things) strengths to engage in related projects in these markets.

According to a report published by UBS Group AG, a Switzerland-based multinational investment bank, the size of the digital economy in the Middle East is projected to grow from \$180 billion in 2022 to \$780 billion by 2030, with an average compound annual growth rate of 20 percent. This will make it one of the fastest-growing regions in the global digital economy over the coming years.

Chinese companies, especially those from the private sector, are embarking on a new phase of global expansion, with China's technology and brands making significant inroads overseas and exploring new opportunities for growth, said Lu Feng, a professor of economics at Peking University's National School of Development.

Guo Tingting, vice-minister of commerce, said China's cooperation with other countries will continue to expand, particularly in the green economy, digital economy and blue economy, in the coming years.

The trend of China's outbound investment growth will likely continue this year. China saw its nonfinancial ODI surge 10 percent year-on-year to 149.64 billion yuan in the first two months, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

To create more favorable conditions for boosting China's foreign trade, attracting foreign investment and enhancing Chinese companies' global competitive power, the ministry said in late March that the country will use a variety of channels to engage in multilevel communication and exchanges with all relevant parties. That is also expected to quicken China's accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, a multilateral free trade agreement with high-standard economic and trade rules.

## Expanding supply chains the Chinese way

## REPORTER'S LOG

By Zhong Nan

One midnight recently, the Pingxiang land port in China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region in South China was bustling with activity. Kilometer-long lines of trucks, heavily pregnant with raw materials, intermediate goods, parts and accessories, awaited entry into Vietnam.

The goods, bound for plants of both Chinese and global companies in Vietnamese provinces such as Nam Dinh, Bac Ninh and Binh

Duong, originated from suppliers in the Pearl River Delta region of South China.

At their respective destinations, the products will be sorted, allocated and assembled in various workshops. The finished products, like household appliances and smartphones, equipped with various types of charging plugs, will be shipped worldwide, including China, Spain, Egypt, Qatar, South Africa and Argentina.

This is a prime example of how Chinese companies are expanding their supply chains and market presence in Southeast Asia. Since 2018, numerous Chinese firms have been making inroads into countries within the region to establish a foothold. Some are seeking to lower their labor and export costs, while

others are drawn by favorable local tax policies.

Driven by changes in the international trade environment and industrial development trends, a number of Chinese companies have flocked to Southeast Asia to invest and set up factories. Many of them have found that development in Southeast Asia is still in a relatively early stage.

Whether it is due to a saturated domestic market in China that is facing fierce competition and where successful, mature business models are the order of the day or due to the challenges smaller businesses face in securing a foothold in China, Southeast Asia presents an enticing opportunity for lucrative returns. This is further enhanced by the region's vast market size, immense consumption

potential, geographical proximity and the strong government support from member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Owners of several factories in Southeast Asia have told me that countries like Vietnam provide not only tariff benefits for imports and exports but also the advantages of low labor costs and limited industry competition. In such countries, worker wages are only one-third to half of those in China, which helps keep labor costs down.

They further said that due to Vietnam's modest level of industrialization, the influx of Chinese companies into the country makes it difficult for competitors to encroach on their market share, creating a relatively comfortable environment for business survival.

Considering the resource endowments and industrial structure, the economic complementarity between China and ASEAN member countries outweighs their competition, offering considerable growth opportunities.

After years of development, China's foreign trade structure with ASEAN countries has shifted from resource-based products to mainly electromechanical products and high-tech products, indicating that the trade complementarity between the two sides is continuously strengthening and the trade structure is constantly optimizing.

ASEAN remained China's largest trade partner in the first two months of 2024, while China's trade with ASEAN countries rose 8.1 percent year-on-year to 993.24 billion yuan (\$137.39 billion), accounting for 15 percent of China's total foreign trade value, statistics from the General Administration

of Customs showed.

The main reasons for these developments are the transformation and upgrade of China's industrial structure, along with the tangible growth opportunities brought by the Belt and Road Initiative, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor and the China-Laos Railway.

By establishing industrial cooperation parks in Thailand and Malaysia in recent years, China has also bolstered collaboration in the vertical division of labor within the industrial chain with Southeast Asian countries.

These initiatives will enable collaboration with Southeast Asian countries in the middle and lower tiers of the industrial chain, thereby increasing the added value of their products and improving the integration capacity of industrial chains.

## BUSINESS



Visitors gather at the booth of Carestream Health Inc during a medical equipment exhibition in Shanghai in 2023. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Carestream raising localization to gain larger market share

Move to boost innovation, production in high-end medical devices sector

By ZHONG NAN  
zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

US-based medical equipment manufacturer Carestream Health Inc plans to localize the production of a variety of items in China this year to secure a larger market share, a senior executive said.

The initiative aims to bolster the company's domestic innovation and manufacturing capabilities in high-end medical devices, particularly in the general radiology category.

Liu Jie, president for China of Carestream Health, said the company will base its operations on clinical practice, integrate global resources, and leverage China's research and development strengths. This approach will enable the launch of a new product pipeline this year, further solidifying the company's position in the Chinese market.

Carestream Health will continue to deepen its "Second Kitchen" strategy in China, promote the accessibility of high-quality medical care, and bring more value to health management, prevention and treatment of serious diseases.

Launched in 2018, the "Second Kitchen" project is designed to provide cost-effective products to emerging markets of nearly 6

billion people worldwide.

As China has been actively promoting the expansion and equitable distribution of high-quality medical resources to address regional disparities in healthcare access, Liu said the demand for imaging services in this market continues to grow, and so does the need for advanced imaging equipment in medical institutions. This has raised the bar for technological innovation in imaging equipment.

"Under such circumstances, we are committed to actively exploring paths of innovation and localization tailored to the Chinese context. By integrating advanced technologies, it is effective to optimize patient outcomes and advance the development of precision medicine in China," he added.

Since entering the Chinese mainland market and establishing a presence in Shanghai in 1993, Carestream Health has invested more than \$1 billion in the country. It currently runs one innovation center, two plants and 16 offices in cities including Shanghai and Xiamen, Fujian province, across China.

Liu said that China is not only a market for selling products for the New York-based company, but also an important source of inno-

vation and a key engine of future growth.

To enhance the country's appeal to foreign investors, China will remove restrictions on foreign participation in the manufacturing sector and continue to increase openness in sectors such as telecommunications and healthcare, according to an action plan released by the General Office of the State Council, China's Cabinet, in mid-March.

To foster a more open, fair and competitive environment for multinational corporations, the government has said that efforts will be made 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.

Due to a series of policies and initiatives aimed at expanding domestic demand and boosting confidence, Liu said that overall market demand in China will continue to expand, and the country's advantage as a super-large market remains obvious. The basic trend of China's economic recovery and long-term improvement has not changed, and China remains a key engine of global economic growth.

The executive said he believes the government's emphasis on cultivating new quality productive forces will help China establish a beachhead in strategic emerging indus-

tries. These forces, characterized by digitalization and intelligence, are becoming increasingly prevalent across various sectors and are crucial for the nation's high-quality economic development and its path to modernization.

"In the healthcare industry, the medical equipment sector in China requires support from all sectors in digital innovation to foster a thriving healthcare innovation ecosystem," he said.

Carestream Health, he added, is committed to exploring innovation paradigms tailored to China by integrating global resources and local innovation capabilities, thereby advancing smart manufacturing in the country.

Wang Xiaohong, a researcher specializing in cross-border investment at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges in Beijing, said China's extensive manufacturing clusters, strategic location in the Asia-Pacific region, and multiple free trade agreements with various countries will continue to offer advantages for multinational corporations seeking to leverage growth opportunities.

Moving forward, China's comprehensive efforts to maintain stable economic growth are crucial in continuing to attract global capital, and enhancing the country's appeal as a favored investment destination, Wang added.

## China's investor friendly measures uplift biz climate

BEIJING — China has announced a new set of measures aimed at enhancing the appeal and effective utilization of foreign investment, as part of the country's efforts to harness and share its huge market potential.

An action plan comprising 24 specific pro-foreign investment measures was unveiled in March by the State Council, China's Cabinet, with targeted measures to expand market access, enhance appeal for foreign investment, foster a level-playing field, facilitate the flow of innovation factors, as well as better align domestic rules with high-standard international economic and trade rules.

The country will reasonably shorten its negative list for foreign investment, and launch pilot programs to relax foreign entry thresholds in scientific and technological innovation, according to the action plan.

China will also expand access for foreign financial institutions to the banking and insurance sector and increase the scope of their participation in the domestic bond market.

Last year, the State Council also introduced a raft of measures to optimize the investment environment for overseas firms. A recent evaluation of the measures showed that over 60 percent of the policies have been implemented, or achieved notable progress, with more than 90 percent of the surveyed foreign firms giving positive reviews.

The launch of the new policy package to attract foreign investment came after foreign direct investment in the Chinese mainland in actual use dropped 8 percent year-on-year in yuan terms in 2023.

Wu Hao, secretary-general of the National Development and Reform Commission, China's top economic regulator, said fluctuations in cross-border investment are natural.

Wu said that China still enjoys significant advantages and broad space for attracting foreign investment.

"China is a super-large market with the greatest growth potential in the world, and will continue to unleash huge demand in advanced manufacturing, new urbanization and consumption upgrading," Wu said.

Official data showed that in January, 4,588 new foreign-invested firms were established across the country, up 74.4 percent year-on-year.

"The Chinese market is too huge to be missed, and we are always upbeat on the vitality of China's development," said Henry Tan, vice-chairman and CEO of Luen Thai Group.

The Chinese business of global

“In the long term, the substantial market capacity, demand for high-end heavy-duty truck products, and technological innovation will provide us with enduring market opportunities.”

Holger Scherr, president and CEO of Beijing Foton Daimler Automotive Co Ltd

sportswear brand Skechers, run by Luen Thai Group, saw double-digit sales growth in 2023, with its retail outlets exceeding 3,500 across the country.

"We will continue to up our investment in China this year," Tan said. Skechers plans to open 550 new outlets in China this year.

Holger Scherr, president and CEO of Beijing Foton Daimler Automotive Co Ltd, and head of the Mercedes-Benz business unit, said the company remains optimistic about China's growth despite global economic uncertainties.

"In the long term, the substantial market capacity, demand for high-end heavy-duty truck products, and technological innovation will provide us with enduring market opportunities," he said.

According to Fan Yuelong, director in charge of brand and marketing at Deloitte China, abundant opportunities remain for foreign firms to capitalize on in China due to the uneven regional development.

The central and western regions and northeast of China enjoy an improved development environment with abundant resources, a broad market and sufficient talent, said Hua Zhong, director of the NDRC's foreign capital and overseas investment department.

China has started revising the industry catalog of sectors encouraging foreign investment, and the revision of the sub-catalog for the central and western regions will increase support for basic manufacturing, applicable technologies and consumption related to people's livelihood in light of local conditions, according to Hua.

"We welcome global multinational companies to pay more attention to these regions and expand their business presence there," Hua said.

XINHUA

*Gentleness, Beauty,  
Strength and Resilience:  
Empowering Women,  
Inspiring Change*

## BUSINESSINSIGHT

## China on track for sustained growth

## EAGLE EYE

By Li Xuesong,  
Zhang Huihui, Li Ying  
and Luo Chaoyang

China's development is supported by a range of favorable conditions that outweigh unfavorable factors. The country's economic recovery is on an upward trajectory, and the long-term trend of high-quality development remains intact.

With strategic opportunities arising from the new technological revolution, a robust industrial foundation, a vast market and comprehensive support across various factors, China is well-positioned for sustained progress and economic growth.

An analysis of the trends of labor, capital, and total factor productivity — key determinants of economic output — from a production function perspective reveals that China has the potential to achieve a sustained economic growth rate of around 4.5 percent until 2035.

In the coming years, China has the potential to leverage its population advantage, continuously improve the quality of its workforce and optimize labor allocation, with a focus on shifting toward the quality rather than the sheer quantity of its population.

China has a sizable working-age population, providing a rich pool of labor resources for economic growth. Despite experiencing a decline in population growth since 2022, China's total population remains among the largest in the world.

This vast population not only offers abundant labor resources but also generates substantial consumer demand, creating a massive market advantage and providing extensive development opportunities and multiple possibilities for economic growth.

In 2023, China's working-age population reached about 860 million people, surpassing the combined total of the United States, Europe and Japan. Not only does China boast a massive working-age population, but it also maintains a stable and increasing number of young workers. Additionally, the country's labor participation rate is at a relatively high level on a global scale.

Despite the accelerating trend of population aging in China, the proportion of younger seniors remains relatively high. Proactive measures, such as delaying retirement, have been employed or discussed to address the challenges posed by population aging and enhance the labor force participation rate among the younger senior population.

## Silver economy

Furthermore, the emergence of the silver economy, driven by an aging population, has a broad scope and a long industrial chain. It is poised to provide numerous opportunities for the development of new business formats and models, potentially becoming a new growth driver of the economy.

Meanwhile, China's labor force is experiencing sustained improvements in health and education levels.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has widened health disparities across the world, with some countries experiencing a decline in key health indicators, the health of China's population has shown sustained improvement. The health conditions of Chinese residents have progressed consistently, with the average life expectancy approaching levels seen in developed countries.

In 2023, the population with higher education reached over 250 million, accounting for 17.7 percent of the total population. The average duration of education for the working-age population has steadily increased to 11.05 years.

The ongoing process of new urbanization in China is leading to a sustained optimization of labor force distribution, creating immense potential for improving the efficiency of labor resource allocation.

In 2023, China's urbanization rate reached 66.16 percent in terms of permanent urban population, indicating a noticeable gap compared with the approximately 80 percent level seen in developed countries. As the rural population migrates to urban areas and individuals from economically underdeveloped regions move to more prosperous areas, the spatial distribution of the labor force will improve significantly.

As the process of rural-to-urban migration continues in China, it is effectively unlocking the consumption and public investment potential of the migrant population. This, in turn, enhances the efficiency of labor resource allocation and fully taps into the economic potential of the rural labor force.

China's current phase of rapid development in new industrialization, informatization, urbanization and agricultural modernization presents massive potential for capital formation and economic growth.

Opportunities in green transformation, "new infrastructure" construction, urban renewal, and addressing deficiencies in people's livelihoods contribute to the creation of a favorable investment environment and the realization of China's potential economic growth rate.

By capitalizing on these opportunities, China can foster sustainable and inclusive development, bringing prosperity to its people and contributing to global economic progress.

## Clean energy

The demand for clean energy production and supporting facilities, driven by the green transformation of energy, presents significant growth potential for investment.

The expansion of wind and solar power generation capacity, along with the development of distributed solar photovoltaics, ultra-high voltage electricity transmission, electrochemical energy storage, hydrogen storage and smart grid technologies, will contribute to the growth of the clean energy sector and pave the way for a sustainable and low-carbon future.

The rapid development of the digital economy is giving rise to new infrastructure



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

demands, creating growth potential for capital formation. In the first half of 2023, investment in new infrastructure construction in China increased by 16.2 percent compared with the previous year, surpassing the growth rate of traditional infrastructure construction investments.

Furthermore, according to estimates from research institutions, China's activities in new infrastructure construction will continue to expand in the future, with its share in overall infrastructure investment gradually rising to around 15 percent to 20 percent. This indicates that new infrastructure construction will provide significant growth potential for fixed capital.

Urban renewal initiatives in China, including the transformation of urban villages, the construction of underground urban infrastructure networks and the promotion of urbanization centered around counties, present significant opportunities for capital formation.

The scale of the urban village transformation, with over 1.3 billion square meters awaiting renovation, drives substantial investments annually. Additionally, the renovation of over 100,000 kilometers of underground pipelines each year further contributes to investment opportunities.

In the foreseeable future, these urban renewal demands will effectively stimulate production activities in upstream and downstream industries, significantly supporting economic growth.

The expanding demands in livelihood sectors, such as education and elderly care, are driving the transformation and upgrade of the service sector in China and attracting more investments in various areas. The implementation of policy measures to promote the opening-up of the services sector will drive potential economic growth rates.

As China transitions into a high-quality development phase, the elevation of total factor productivity becomes increasingly important. By deepening reforms, expanding openness and encouraging innovation, the government aims to invigorate market entities, boost productivity and unlock the potential for economic growth.

Against the backdrop of China's significant advantages in data resources, a high labor force population, and the accelerated growth of high-level talent, the development of data infrastructure, reforms in higher education and measures to facilitate labor and talent mobility will be advanced to optimize resource allocation, improve productivity and enhance total factor productivity.

China is currently facing challenges such as production overcapacity in certain sectors and limitations on traditional sector investments. To address these issues, the country is accelerating the transformation toward a service-oriented government, optimizing the structure of fiscal expenditures, and increasing subsidies to residents' incomes. These measures are aimed at enhancing consumer purchasing power and achieving a balance between supply and demand.

China recognizes the enormous potential of expanding the services sector to stimulate market vitality. To achieve this goal, the country has been continuously opening up the services sector through the establishment of free trade zones and pilot cities.

However, compared with developed economies, China's current level of openness in sectors such as finance, telecommunications, education and healthcare remains relatively low.

China should take measures to promote the implementation of a negative list management system, relax market access and

accelerate high-standard institutional opening-up.

These initiatives are aimed at attracting more private and foreign capital into the services sector. The goal is to stimulate market vitality, promote the upgrade and transformation of the services sector, and enhance overall productivity.

China's dedication to implementing an innovation-based development strategy has resulted in a continuous enhancement of its national comprehensive innovation capabilities and cultivation of new quality productive forces.

In 2023, China ranked 12th globally in terms of overall innovation capabilities, positioning itself as a global leader in various cutting-edge industries such as high-speed rail, solar photovoltaics and unmanned aerial vehicles.

China has outlined its future plans to deepen reforms in the science, technology, and education sectors, aiming to enhance the country's innovation system, strengthen national strategic technological capabilities and foster deep integration between academia, industry and research institutions.

These measures are designed to achieve synergistic development among education, technology and talent, effectively translating scientific and technological innovations into new quality productive forces. The objective is to drive technological progress, cultivate new formats and nurture new drivers of economic growth.

*Li Xuesong is the director of the Institute of Quantitative and Technological Economics, which is part of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Zhang Huihui, Li Ying and Luo Chaoyang are researchers at the institute. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## Despite trade hurdles, nation still outperforming expectations

## MAIN STREET

By Wang Xiaosong

Despite increased uncertainty in the external environment, China's foreign trade continued to show strong resilience in 2023, with total imports and exports reaching 41.76 trillion yuan (\$5.81 trillion), up 0.2 percent year-on-year. In order to further promote the recovery of both the world and China's economy, this year the country should ramp up efforts to strengthen its endogenous driving forces for foreign trade.

## Foreign trade

Since the beginning of last year, multiple negative factors have been interfering with China's foreign trade. The fragmentation of global industrial chains and logistics, which was mainly caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, has continued to increase. Meanwhile, the protracted Russia-Ukraine crisis has caused frequent fluctuations in global commodities prices. In addition, the United States and many other developed countries have sought to "decouple" from China in terms of trade and science, so as to hinder the country's development.

Instead of being dragged down by such an unfavorable scenario, China has found its way out and made foreign trade recover stably in 2023. The country's total imports

and exports reached 9.69 trillion yuan in the first quarter and exceeded 10 trillion yuan in all three following quarters. December alone witnessed 3.81 trillion yuan in two-way trade value.

China's foreign trade operators, mostly private enterprises, are full of vigor and vitality as some 556,000 private enterprises contributed 22.36 trillion yuan to foreign trade, up 6.3 percent year-on-year and accounting for 53.5 percent of the country's total trade value.

Meanwhile, China has striven to deepen cooperation with all its trading partners since last year. Its imports and exports with countries and regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative amounted to 19.47 trillion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 2.8 percent. Total foreign trade volume with Latin America and Africa expanded by 6.8 percent and 7.1 percent, respectively, to 3.44 trillion yuan and 1.98 trillion yuan. The country's trade with the European Union and the US gradually picked up in the fourth quarter.

In addition, the country has accelerated technological development and thereby enhanced the competitiveness of its featured products, continuously injecting fresh impetus into foreign trade. Some 1.06 trillion yuan in "new three" products — photovoltaics, lithium-ion batteries and new energy vehicles — were exported from China, up 29.9 percent year-on-year. The export growth of ships and household appliances reached 35.4 percent and 9.9 percent, respectively.

Although China still witnessed a slight decline in its imports last year, the country's domestic demand has gradually recovered

and imports of bulk commodities, especially everyday goods, are expanding in an orderly manner. Total imports of energy, metal ores and grains increased by 15.3 percent.

## Opening-up

The stable and sustainable growth in China's foreign trade last year was mainly due to its high-standard opening-up, especially high-standard institutional opening-up.

The country continued to accelerate the construction of pilot free trade zones last year, expanding their total number to 22. In addition, in accordance with international standards, the State Council — China's Cabinet — issued a document in June to further promote institutional opening-up among FTZs.

Imports and exports in FTZs reached 7.67 trillion yuan, up 2.7 percent year-on-year. Since their establishment, FTZs have so far made 278 institutional innovation achievements, which cover a wide range of sectors including investment facilitation, trade facilitation and financial innovation and liberalization.

Meanwhile, China is well poised to bolster the healthy development of emerging industries and innovative business models concerning foreign trade. The country's cross-border e-commerce imports and exports grew by 15.6 percent to 2.38 trillion yuan last year. There has also been a significant surge in other emerging industries, such as comprehensive foreign trade services, offshore trading and overseas warehouses.

Relevant government agencies have carried out comprehensive reforms targeting the regulation of emerging industries, based

on their different development trends and characteristics. A series of efficient and high-quality services have been provided to support such industries' development as well.

High-level free trade agreements have also contributed to China's foreign trade by lowering trade barriers and providing more development opportunities for foreign trade enterprises. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement, for example, helps reduce costs for regional trade and strengthen connections among industrial and supply chains. China's imports and exports with the other 14 signatory economies had already reached 12.6 trillion yuan by the end of last year.

## Driving forces

To consolidate last year's achievements and take them to the next level, China must continue to strengthen endogenous driving forces for foreign trade, with further efforts in four major areas.

First, China needs to empower the high-quality development of foreign trade through digitalization. It should promote the application of digital technologies in the whole process of foreign trade, as well as in relevant emerging industries. Traditional foreign trade enterprises can add new sales channels and expand their brand awareness after digital transformation. Large enterprises will be able to build their own digital platforms. When it comes to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, comprehensive digital solutions will be provided by third parties.

Second, the country needs to optimize

the development environment for emerging industries concerning foreign trade. On the one hand, China should adopt a regulatory approach appropriate to these industries and provide them with high-quality financial services. On the other hand, it must strengthen international cooperation and exchanges related to intellectual property rights protection and cross-border logistics. Finally, a complete early warning system should be put in place to effectively deal with unreasonable trade restrictions.

Third, high-standard institutional opening-up should be further promoted across the country. Governments at all levels must spare no effort to upgrade FTZs and continue to remain aligned with high-level international economic and trade rules such as the CPTPP and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement.

Fourth, the security of both industrial and supply chains should be fully ensured. To cope with "decoupling" by some Western countries, China should further bolster technological innovation and thereby construct a modern industrial system, which will not only contribute to the stability of global value chains, but also consolidate the development gains from economic globalization.

*This op-ed is a translation of an article first published in China Economic Times. The writer is a professor at the School of Economics, Renmin University of China. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## US making all areas no-go zones for cooperation is in no parties' interests

If the San Francisco meeting between the leaders of China and the United States last November showcased their shared interest in stabilizing bilateral ties, what has happened thereafter reveals how Beijing and Washington's visions of a stable relationship do not mesh together.

Beijing is working hard to convey messages of constructive reengagement, in the apparent belief that the relationship remains repairable.

In a high-profile gesture to reassure foreign investors about Chinese policy orientations, the Chinese government held three consecutive meetings last week — the China Development Forum, Invest China, and the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference. Beijing refuted the claim that China's economy has "peaked", and clarified Beijing's continuous commitment to reform and opening-up.

Throughout the events, Beijing delivered the message that it wants a constructive relationship with Washington where both sides "follow economic and market rules"; "expand and deepen mutually beneficial business cooperation" and "respect each other's development rights".

But Washington has clearly divergent thoughts on what constitutes constructive engagement. Washington perceives the competition with Beijing as strategic and structural. As the Joe Biden administration has explicitly stated, it wants cooperation only in areas where they believe it can advance US interests. They call for Beijing to collaborate on climate change, for instance, but are doing everything possible to frustrate the latter's progress in green technology.

The 166-page document the US government released on Friday featuring detailed and revised rules aimed at blocking China's access to advanced chips and chipmaking equipment was only the latest move in a very long game the US is intent on playing. The rules, which take effect on Thursday, go so far as to prohibit shipments to China of laptops containing advanced chips.

In the meantime, the US Department of Commerce is reportedly compiling a roster of Chinese chip factories "of concern" that are to be denied access to US technology and equipment. The recent leaps and bounds in semiconductor and AI technologies, driven and led by Nvidia and other leading US companies, have obviously fueled Washington's sense of urgency to prevent corresponding Chinese advances.

Beijing has protested at the move, with a Foreign Ministry spokesman accusing Washington of severely violating market economic rules, sabotaging international trade rules and undermining the stability of the global production chains. But his appeal for Washington to "immediately correct the mistake" and stop illicit unilateral sanctions and "long-arm jurisdiction" will more likely than not fall on deaf ears, as have previous urgings to that effect. Because, as should now be obvious to everyone, under the "national security" heuristic, blocking Chinese technological progress has become a bipartisan consensus and new political correctness in present-day Washington. Not to mention that, in a presidential election year such as this, both the Democratic and Republican candidates will compete to demonstrate a tougher China policy.

But while putting on a show for its domestic audience, Washington should not get so carried away that it fouls its own nest by blocking all avenues for cooperation.

## HK still in Washington's crosshair

The so-called 2024 Hong Kong Policy Act Report released by the State Department of the United States on Friday is the latest testimony to the extent to which the US government is willing to call white black regarding Hong Kong affairs.

The series of actions the US has taken regarding Hong Kong, including passing Hong Kong-related bills and carrying out baseless sanctions on the city and related individuals, expose the US government's disrespect to international laws, and constitute grave infringements on China's sovereignty, territorial integrity and core interests.

The affairs of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region are China's internal affairs that no foreign country has any legal ground to interfere with. The claim to be protecting Hong Kong's "freedom" and "human rights" is only a disguise for the US to cover up the true purpose of its interventions. The US has never stopped seeking to take advantage of the loopholes in the law and electoral and educational regulations to develop its own proxies in the SAR and help them infiltrate into the legislative, administrative and educational systems of the city turning it into a bridgehead to facilitate the US' China-containment strategy.

However, the social chaos that the US has orchestrated in 2019 in the SAR, a climax of the US underhand actions for that purpose, proved only to be a disaster for the freedom and human rights conditions of local residents. The orchestrated turmoil served to awaken the Hong Kong people to the ulterior motives of the US when it comes to their hometown, prompting them to take concrete actions to plug the aforementioned loopholes so as to better safeguard the peace and stability of the city.

These actions, be it the making and enforcement of the law on safeguarding national security in the SAR or the reform of Hong Kong's electoral, administrative and educational systems, achieved instant results, thanks to the strong support of the Hong Kong people and the central authorities. The introduction of the national security law has effectively deterred the US proxies from sabotaging public order in the SAR. The reforms that center on implementing the principle of "only patriots govern Hong Kong" have made it theoretically impossible for the US-controlled puppets to infiltrate into the SAR's legislative bodies, government departments and schools at various levels.

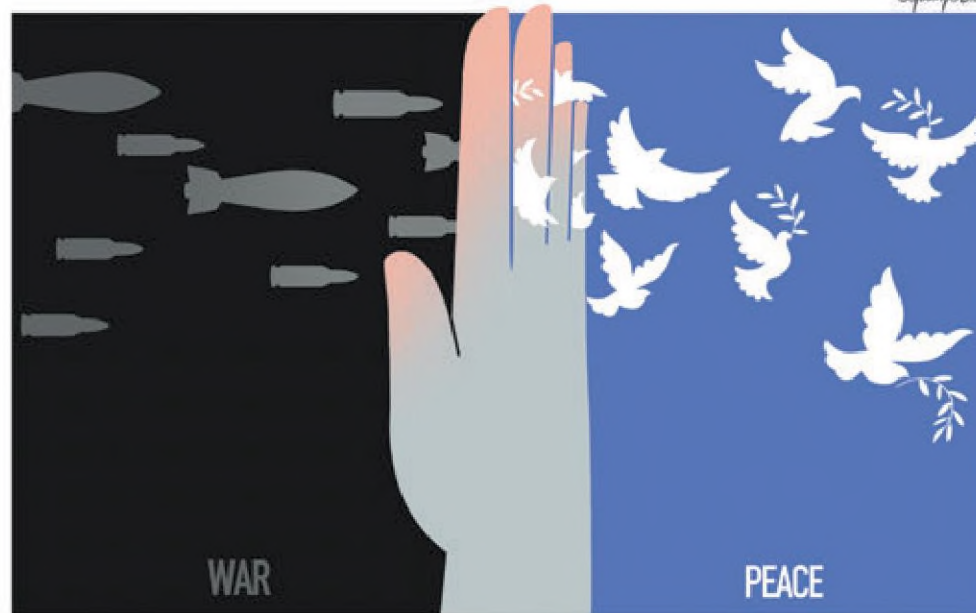
That explains why the 2024 Hong Kong Policy Act Report points a blaming finger at the law and these reforms, exposing the fact that the US' interest related to Hong Kong goes against that of the Hong Kong people. The report highlights that the US government's attention on Hong Kong is purely motivated by what it hopes to achieve by meddling in Hong Kong's affairs, which is nothing but a "color revolution". The report therefore serves to reinforce the necessity of the moves by the central and Hong Kong authorities.

Take the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance that just came into force last month for example. The ordinance balances the maintenance of national security with the protection of rights, freedoms and economic development. It draws on the legislative experience of other countries, respects and protects human rights, and clearly defines the criteria of crimes. It effectively protects normal business activities and foreign institutions from becoming embroiled in the US' schemes.

The US' double standard is evident in the report's criticism of Hong Kong using "national security" as a broad and vague basis to undermine the rule of law and protected rights and freedoms, while the US' own national security system can only be described as giving the authorities a free hand to do as they please, with a large number of laws that are applied extraterritorially.

Despite the smearing and sanctions of the US, as the report itself indicates, an estimated 84,000 US citizens lived in Hong Kong last year. The number has "rebounded to approximately the same number" as before the COVID-19 pandemic. That shows the SAR has not lost its appeal to US citizens and businesses.

Li Min



## Opinion Line

## Reform and opening-up indispensable in pursuit of high-quality development

The year 2024 marks a crucial year for comprehensively deepening reform. Facing the unfavorable factors restricting high-quality development, and the bottlenecks and obstacles hindering economic recovery, the nation must further deepen reform and form a new type of production relations that are compatible with the development of new quality productive forces.

Only by doing so can the nation continuously stimulate its market vitality, enhance its endogenous driving forces, release its demand potential, and continuously inject strong momentum to accelerate its modernization.

Focusing on stimulating the vitality of various business entities, China has listed some key tasks including deepening the reform of State-owned enterprises, increas-

ing the proportion of loans to private enterprises and eliminating local protectionism and market segmentation.

Focusing on accelerating the construction of a unified national market, the nation has clearly raised measures that focus on promoting the unification of institutional rules in areas such as property rights protection, market access, fair competition and social credit. The country is specifically addressing the "tough nuts" affecting people's well-being such as income distribution, social security, healthcare and elderly care.

The more China develops, the more it needs to expand its high-level opening-up. Although economic globalization is currently encountering setbacks, with "decoupling" and "de-risking" hindering the global economic recovery and geopolitical

risks rising, the overall trends of peace and development have not changed, and people's common aspiration for a better life has not changed.

Facing the temporary "headwinds" and "setbacks" to globalization, the nation must make full use of its own advantages, enhance the linkages between domestic and international markets and resources, and improve the quality and level of trade and investment cooperation.

China needs to steadily expand institutional opening-up in areas such as rules, regulations, management and standards, deeply implement cooperation, actively participate in global economic governance and promote the deeper integration of opening-up and reform.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

## Closure of obstetric departments no small matter

Obstetric services are basic medical services that are related to the safety and health of mother and baby, and are related to the happiness of thousands of households. Obstetric services should not only be considered in economic terms, but also from the human aspect. It is essential for pregnant and postpartum women to have a sufficient number of delivery beds. Therefore, the news that some hospitals nationwide have stopped obstetric delivery services has attracted public attention.

The National Health Commission issued a notice on Friday emphasizing that counties (cities, districts) with a population of more than 300,000 should have at least two public medical institutions capable of providing obstetric services, while those with a population of less than 300,000 should have at least one. Areas with a sparse population and inconvenient transportation should ensure that relevant grassroots medical and health institutions are capable of providing midwife services.

The reasons for the closure of obstetric departments in hospitals are quite complex, of which the most direct one may be the declining birth rate. According to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics, the number of newborns in 2023 was 9.02 million, a decrease of 540,000 from 2022.

Besides the decline in the birth rate, the difficulties facing obstetric departments should also be recognized. The outpatient and inpatient fees for obstetrics are relatively low, yet the operating costs and risks for hospitals are rather high: obstetric departments must have maternity wards and operating rooms open 24 hours a day, while obstetric doctors, neonatologists, anesthesiologists, midwives, and other personnel must take turns to be on call at any time. Any problems during delivery may also lead to medical disputes, which might affect the income and career development of those involved, leading to the loss of staff.

As emphasized by the NHC, public medical institutions planning to close their

obstetric departments should widely solicit opinions from pregnant women who have established health records, and seek written opinions from local township governments and county-level health administration departments, to effectively safeguard the rights and interests of those requiring obstetric services. Obstetric departments that do not have enough demand can be closed, but the closures should be based on reasonable adjustments that effectively meet the needs of pregnant women.

With the decline in demand for delivery services, it is an opportunity to improve the quality of obstetric diagnosis, treatment, and services, and help pregnant women have a more comfortable childbirth experience.

Scientific decision-making and cautious handling are required to ensure the accessibility of midwife services. In particular, public medical institutions should bear the responsibility of providing basic obstetric services.

— THE PAPER.CN

## What They Say

## Carbon accounting needs to be brought up to scratch

The world's first "carbon tariff", namely the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, has already begun its pilot operation and is scheduled to be officially implemented in 2026. The United States, Canada and Japan are also considering establishing similar carbon border adjustment mechanisms.

China's carbon footprint accounting system for products is still in its infancy and faces significant challenges in addressing the CBAM.

Enterprises have a low level of awareness regarding carbon footprint accounting. The government is relatively lenient in reviewing enterprises' environmental information disclosure. Enterprises often tend to choose simple and inexpensive carbon footprint

accounting rather than building their own complete and accurate data accounting system.

The country lacks a comprehensive and internationally aligned standard system for carbon footprint accounting. There is a lack of unified database systems at both the national and industry levels. If enterprises want to conduct carbon footprint management, they can only rely on foreign carbon footprint data platforms or software for calculations.

China needs to build a carbon footprint accounting system, which requires cooperation from the national government, industries and enterprises. The government should establish a unified and standardized carbon footprint accounting and certification system, and the specific content should at least include a complete product list, clear accounting measurement methods, high-standard data quality monitoring and traceability requirements. Industry authorities and associations

need to further expand the general rules for calculating carbon emissions from products based on the characteristics of each industry and promote the research and publication of detailed rules for calculating carbon emissions from key and representative products in their respective industries. Relevant enterprises should actively conduct carbon footprint accounting based on their own production and operation practices.

Further, the government needs to actively promote the mutual recognition of carbon footprint accounting standards with international standards, especially to promote the mutual recognition of carbon footprint accounting standards and certification results with major economies such as the EU and the US. It should also explore and improve product certification systems that are more aligned with the new situation and rules of international trade.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

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## COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Coordinated Development

**Editor's note:** Over the past 10 years, China has made great efforts to promote the coordinated development of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei. Three experts share their views on the significance of Jing-Jin-Ji regional coordinated development with China Daily.

Dan Steinbock

## Coordinated development a tough balancing act

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Jing-Jin-Ji (Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei) coordinated development plan and the seventh anniversary of the establishment of the Xiong'an New Area, or the "city of the future", in Hebei province.

In early 2014, the Chinese top leader urged Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei province to explore a sustainable development path, leveraging respective complementary strengths, which would yield mutual benefits.

The Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, with a population of 110 million, is the largest urban agglomeration and economic region in North China. The mega-region is pivotal to North China's development, just as the Yangtze River Delta region is to East China's development and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area is to South China's development.

Beijing and Tianjin have advanced manufacturing capacity and strong tertiary sectors, whereas Hebei is less developed, as evidenced by its per capita income relative to Beijing (40 percent) and Tianjin (64 percent). But while Beijing has significant innovation capability, Hebei offers relatively low-cost land and labor, which makes the strengths of the two places complementary.

Also, the new plan aims to foster the growth of world-class industrial clusters in the mega-region, prioritizing electric vehicles, biopharmaceuticals, hydrogen energy, industrial internet, high-end industrial machinery and robotics.

In the past decade, the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region's investment has increased by 2.1 times. Although the synergies have increased at the county level, much potential remains to be tapped in regional synergies.

As for Xiong'an, the investment in the development of the "city of the



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

future" will again exceed \$28 billion this year. Over the past seven years, Xiong'an has emerged as a high-level modernization showcase, with cutting-edge technologies such as 5G, big data, artificial intelligence and autonomous driving applied in the city.

How has the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region fared in the past decade? The region's GDP reached about 10.4 trillion yuan (about \$1.44 trillion) in 2023, representing a 1.9-fold increase from 2013 at current prices. It now has more than 11,000 kilometers of railways, up 30 percent in a decade, and nearly 11,000 km of highways, an increase of more than 40 percent from 2013.

A more comprehensive assessment builds on the development index and indicators, such as innovation, coordination, green development, openness and shared development.

Much remains to be achieved, however. In addition to equity, other challenges include difficulties in the

mega-region's coordinated environmental governance, the development of green and digital economies, and institutional mechanisms for coordinated development. Still, the early signs are promising, highlighting untapped potential.

Over a decade ago, I used to lecture at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies on national, regional and urban competitiveness, relative to international experiences. For years, I cooperated with Harvard's Michael Porter, whose *Competitive Advantage of Nations* (1990) shifted international interest toward regional and urban clusters.

I recorded efforts to steer regional differentiation even in innovation-driven small economies, including Finland's Wireless Valley, Israel's Silicon Wadi and Ireland's Dublin tech hub. In the reports for the European Union, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Nordic Council, I used to examine

regional competitiveness in all major advanced and emerging economies, from the United States to China, as well as regional high-tech clusters and megacities. At the India, China and America Institute, I saw how India sought to follow in China's footsteps.

What worried me most in New York City was the dire state of urban slums, such as Harlem and the Bronx. Worse, the devastated Rust Belt from New York through the Midwest, once the thriving hub of manufacturing, had become synonymous with regions facing industrial decline, due to its abandoned, rusty factories. To a few, it meant fabulous profits; to many ordinary Americans, it was a depressive nightmare.

But the more I spent time in China, the more I felt that Chinese development, together with the BRICS, was shaking the old "rules of the game", which in the past had been monopolized by the West.

In New York City, I saw successive city administrations trying to boost competitiveness, yet each US metropolitan area and state fought primarily for its own interest. In Europe, there is greater willingness at coordination, but the fragmented continent constrains integrated regional development.

Shunning coordinated regional development in the US has contributed to cutthroat competition. The net effect has been the "race to the bottom"; excessive deindustrialization and blind offshoring, which have hollowed out US industries, unleashing a host of employment, social and environmental challenges. Related political challenges include protectionism, populism and "America First" xenophobia.

Industrialization and urbanization have left most advanced economies unbalanced.

As evidenced by the experiment of Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei coordinated development, China seeks to move toward balanced and sustainable development.

What makes China's regional strategies unique is the top-down effort to catalyze bottom-up initiatives, even though disparities in resources and development between different regions remain.

*The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

An Shuwei

## A new phase in cluster development

In the 10 years since the implementation of the plan for the coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, significant progress has been made in key areas including relieving Beijing of the functions non-essential to its role as China's capital, building an integrated transportation network and improving coordinated ecological governance. But the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region still faces challenges such as insufficient and unbalanced development, sluggish growth, and a continuous decline in Hebei province's economic status.

To address these issues, the plan aims to build a world-class city cluster, based on the "central city-metropolitan area-city cluster" model. The metropolitan area plays the role of a bridge between the central city and the city cluster, making the construction of modern metropolitan areas crucial for promoting coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.

Currently, the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region consists of two mega-cities, Beijing and Tianjin. The metropolitan areas around these cities overlap, but the spatial distance between Beijing, Tianjin and the central-southern areas of Hebei exceeds 300 kilometers. This geographical distance prevents Beijing and Tianjin from having a significant radiating effect on the central-southern areas of Hebei.

Therefore, by leveraging the economic power of 3 million residents in the developed area of Shijiazhuang, capital of Hebei province, in 2019, the authorities decided to build the city's modern metropolitan area in an effort to drive the development of the central-southern areas of Hebei and build a world-class city cluster.

The formation and effectiveness of metropolitan areas depend on three factors: the radiating capacity of core cities, the receptivity of areas outside core cities, and the smooth flow of elements between core cities and peripheral areas. Therefore, the construction of the three metropolitan areas in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region should focus on three aspects:

First, efforts should be made to enhance the radiating capacity of core areas of cities. Beijing should leverage its advantages in technology, talents and international exchanges to develop productive service industries and

headquarters economy, forming an industrial structure dominated by a modern service economy and building an international consumption center.

Tianjin, on its part, should develop headquarters economy, boost the concentration of productive service functions as the center city of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, develop advanced manufacturing, promote the transformation and upgrading of advanced manufacturing, and foster the deep integration of the service and manufacturing industries.

And Shijiazhuang should optimize its industrial structure, boost its economic strength, expand its economic scale and gradually fuel the growth of surrounding cities such as Xingtai, Hengshui and Handan.

Second, there is a need to improve the receptivity of areas outside the core areas of cities. Areas outside the cities' core in Beijing, Tianjin and Shijiazhuang should focus on developing key or leading industries, accelerating industrial transformation and upgrading, leveraging the effect of economies of scale, and strengthening the links of the industrial chain with the core areas of cities.

Major cities and the Tianjin metropolitan area, in addition to receiving non-capital functions, should focus on improving the key links of advanced manufacturing, developing industrial clusters with regional characteristics and advantages, building an industrial structure dominated by advanced manufacturing and high-tech industries, and gradually narrowing the industrial development gap with Beijing and Tianjin.

As a surrounding area of Shijiazhuang, Handan should use its existing industrial foundation of steel, coal, building materials and equipment manufacturing to become an important energy, raw material and equipment manufacturing base in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.

And while Xingtai should utilize its strong foundation of heavy chemical industry to develop new energy vehicles, new energy materials, high-end equipment manufacturing and other industries, Hengshui should exploit its strength as a transportation hub to transform into a strong industrial city and a Beijing-Tianjin technology transformation and industrial transfer base.

Third, measures need to be taken to remove tangible and intangible barriers and smoothen the flow of factors between the core and peripheral areas of cities. And the construction of metropolitan areas should optimize the transportation and communication networks of high-speed railways, expressways, airlines and pipelines, strengthen the connection between different transportation modes and the interconnection of nodal cities, and form a radiation layout of road networks centered on the metropolitan areas of cities.

There is also a need to break the regional divisions and industry monopolies, lift market barriers, abandon regulations and practices that hinder unified market and fair competition, expedite the integration of labor markets, promote the integration of technology markets and financial services, standardize market access norms, and set standard market rules.

By cultivating the metropolitan areas of Beijing, Tianjin and Shijiazhuang, the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region can promote high-quality coordinated development.

*The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

Pei Guifen

## Universities' shift to Xiong'an serves dual purpose

In February, the 10th anniversary conference for the coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region announced that four universities — Beijing Jiaotong University, Beijing University of Science and Technology, Beijing Forestry University and China University of Geosciences (Beijing) — have started work on their campuses in Xiong'an New Area. As per the Ministry of Education's plan, 15 Beijing universities are expected to build campuses in Xiong'an.

The announcement sparked a debate, with many in academia saying the relocation of the 15 universities' campuses is a strategic move to ease the population pressure on Beijing and balance the uneven distribution of educational resources in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. But some media outlets argue that the plan is not to relocate the universities per se to Xiong'an but to set up their new or additional campuses there, raising doubts whether the plan will ease the population pressure on Beijing and address the problem of uneven distribution of educational resources.

To fully comprehend the issue, we have to understand why the top leader announced the establishment of Xiong'an in 2017. Xiong'an is a crucial component of China's policy for coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, and serves a dual purpose: relieving Beijing of non-capital functions and curing the ills associated with large cities while nurturing a regional growth pole to promote high-quality development.

The first part of the goal, officials say, can be achieved by shifting Bei-

jing's higher education institutions, corporate headquarters, financial institutions, research institutes, medical institutions, public agencies, and among others, to Xiong'an. To realize the second part of the goal, an innovative ecosystem has to be built in Xiong'an so it can accommodate these institutions and foster an environment conducive to innovation.

In fact, with many developed countries trying to regain their competitive edge, which they have been losing since the beginning of economic globalization in the 1990s, building an innovation-oriented ecosystem has become a big challenge for governments across the world.

Therefore, relocating the universities to Xiong'an will not only alleviate the population pressure on Beijing but also, and more importantly, allow the new city to leverage the universities' key role of connectors in building an innovation-oriented ecosystem and promoting high-quality development.

First, the concentration of higher education institutions in the capital makes their relocation to Xiong'an a scientific decision. Beijing is home to more than 90 universities, including 34 universities included in the "doubled world-class project" that account for nearly a quarter of the national total. These universities are concentrated in Haidian, Chaoyang and Changping districts of Beijing, with the three districts collectively accounting for 60 percent of the universities in the capital and hosting most of the universities directly affiliated with the Ministry of Education. As such, the establishment of branch campuses of the 15 universities in



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Xiong'an will certainly reduce the population pressure on the central urban areas of Beijing.

Second, the establishment of universities branch campuses in Xiong'an will help build an innovation-oriented ecosystem there. Successful innovation-oriented ecosystems require a connector, usually a cluster of universities or research institutes, large enterprises, local governments and/or other institutions. Studies show such ecosystems, thanks to the information technology revolution, have helped transform the United States' "rust belts" into "smart belts".

The European Union's "European University Initiative", too, is aimed at establishing "industry-university-research-innovation" alliances centered on universities.

Furthermore, the initial focus of Xiong'an's absorption was on central enterprises' headquarters, because 69 of the top 98 central enterprises' headquarters are located in the capital. But the Ministry of Education's policy of "one university, two campuses, coordinated development" promotes the building of new campuses of universities in Xiong'an to align with the industrial and technological development needs of the new city as well as the rest of the country, leveraging the universities' role as

connectors to create new types of research and development institutions and facilitate the formation and development of an innovation-oriented ecosystem.

And third, the construction of new types of R&D institutions will have a demonstrative effect on the development of Xiong'an. Such institutions can overcome the horizontal barriers between universities, research institutions, local governments, enterprises, clients and service institutions. Many Chinese provinces have accumulated a wealth of experience in the construction of new types of university R&D institutions. The Research Institute of Tsinghua, Pearl River Delta, jointly established by the Guangdong provincial government and Tsinghua University, is a case in point.

The four universities that have started building campuses in Xiong'an have formed the Xiong'an University Collaborative Innovation Alliance. With the increase in the number of universities shifting operations to Xiong'an, the innovation alliance will expand, giving birth to physical R&D institutions. As an innovation-promoting consortium, it will inspire researchers and potential innovators to share resources, obtain mutual benefit, and promote common development.

The establishment of new types of university R&D institutions will not only prompt more central enterprises to relocate their headquarters to Xiong'an but also encourage market-oriented relocation of non-capital functions to the new city.

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## GLOBAL VIEWS

PATRICK NUS

## Putting diversity to work

Yunnan pioneers an inspiring path toward sustainable development

Yunnan province, a jewel nestled in Southwest China, is a place I have called home since 2013. My journey to this unique part of the world began when I was posted to Beijing as the ambassador of Belgium. It was in 2010 that I decided to retire in Yunnan, captivated by its unparalleled beauty and diversity. This



decision stemmed from a profound appreciation for a region that, to me, represents the essence of diversity within China and across the globe. Most people outside China hold the misconception that the country is homogeneous. However, this couldn't be further from the truth. Among China's many provinces, Yunnan, which covers an area of approximately 394,100 square kilometers, stands out as a beacon of diversity. France spans 551,700 sq km, and in many ways, I consider France and Yunnan to bear similar significance to their respective regions; as both are champions of diversity.

Traveling through Yunnan, one experiences a dramatic shift in landscapes and climates. The south boasts elephants, tropical weather, and the Lancang River. Venture north, and you find yourself amid the Tibetan highlands. The province's terrain varies wildly in between, from lush valleys to towering mountains, placing Yunnan at the pinnacle of global biodiversity. This natural diversity is mirrored by the human mosaic that inhabits the region. Yunnan is home to 25 ethnic groups, most of which speak their own languages. The Yunnan language differs from standard Mandarin to a point that Beijing visitors barely understand what is said. This Yunnan language is reflected in a mosaic of local languages across the province. Minority ethnic groups make up 33.12 percent of Yunnan's population,

and they all have their distinct languages. Yunnan is a vibrant tapestry of cultures, languages and traditions. The Yi people, constituting 11 percent of the population, are among the largest of these well-protected minority groups.

I am a Belgian French speaker, and we are very close to France and its unique culture. Yunnan and France share not only a similarity in terms of their diverse landscapes but also in population dynamics. With Yunnan hosting slightly more than 47 million inhabitants and France around 68.5 million, both regions have a relatively low density of approximately 120 residents per sq km. Both have a lot of empty spaces too. These parallels draw me closer to Yunnan. Yunnan also reminds me of Africa, where I was born. But this is the topic for another time.

France and Yunnan also have a special history which stems back to the French colonization of Indochina. This is part of China's colonial history. The railway from Hanoi to Kunming built by the French heralded the destiny of Kunming as the gateway to China for Southeast Asia.

The province's success in attracting tourists can be directly attribut-



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

ed to its diverse attractions. From cultural tourism resources and ecological conservation efforts to its rich historical heritage and its myriad ethnic customs, Yunnan is a magnet for those seeking a deeper understanding of China's multifaceted identity. But the importance of Yunnan extends beyond tourism; it plays a crucial role in ecological conservation. This was evident when Kunming, Yunnan's capital, hosted the first part of the two-stage 15th installment of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15) in October 2021. The whole conference underscored China's leadership, and particularly Yunnan's exemplary role, in wildlife protection and biodiversity regeneration.

However, the task of balancing economic development with ecological preservation remains daunting. For over a decade, I have dedicated myself to promoting regenerative agriculture in Yunnan, striving to harmonize human activity with nature's rhythms. Local authorities, aligned with the central government's "green mountain and blue water policy," have been supportive, yet the path forward requires innovative thinking

and collective efforts.

As we face the mounting pressures of climate change and biodiversity loss, Yunnan's rich natural and human resources position it as a leader in sustainable development. It is a laboratory not just for China but for the world, demonstrating how diverse, cosmopolitan approaches can pave the way toward a more sustainable future.

I have seen firsthand the potential that collaborative, innovative efforts can unlock. Yunnan's journey is a testament to the power of diversity, not just as a characteristic of its landscape and people, but as a principle guiding its path forward.

As we look to the future, let us turn Yunnan into an inspiration for knowledge and practices aiming at preventing the self-caused extinction of our species. There is a trend going on indeed. We see young people coming from big cities to settle down in Yunnan looking for a sounder and more sustainable lifestyle. They are powerful allies in the green rural rejuvenation that is happily unfolding under the enlightened leadership of the central government.

Let us embrace the richness of our diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and skills to address the environmental challenges ahead. Together, in a spirit of cooperation and innovation, we can foster a world where ecological conservation and human prosperity go hand in hand. Yunnan's story is far from complete, but it offers a pointer to environmentally friendly development for a sustainable, diverse and inclusive tomorrow.

The author is a former Belgian ambassador to China and honorary ambassador of Belgium, co-founder and chief inspiring officer of Kabissa and LaoZhuandi International Permaculture Community in Yunnan. 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.

ZHOU TAIDONG

## Beneficial radiation

Yunnan is an important gateway for China's opening-up to South and Southeast Asia

Over the years, Yunnan province has made full use of its location advantage to improve its level of openness and international cooperation.

Yunnan has promulgated a series of policies to accelerate its construction as a center with radiation effects for South and Southeast Asia. It has set up a dozen bilateral cooperation mechanisms with countries in the region, and has more than 100 pairs of international sister cities, including 49 pairs of sister cities in South and Southeast Asian countries. It has held seven China-South Asia Expo and 13 meetings of the joint working group for the northern provinces of Laos and Yunnan province. It has also actively taken part in the construction of the Lancang-Mekong cooperation mechanism, and pushed forward the Great Mekong Subregion Cooperation and the Lancang-Mekong River Shipping Cooperation Mechanism.

The China-Laos Railway was put into operation at the end of 2021, connecting China's railway network with the Central Line of the Pan-Asian Railway and building a convenient and efficient cross-border logistics channel. The China-Vietnam, China-Laos and China-Myanmar expressways are all connected within the province, and the overseas section of the China-Laos Expressway, the Vientiane-Vangvieng section has been completed and opened to traffic, providing a solid channel for the coordinated development of China and Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and other countries. Yunnan's air routes basically cover the capitals and key tourist cities of countries in the region. Additionally, the China-Myanmar oil and gas pipelines are operational, and regional trade of electricity with Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar is being conducted

through integrated power grids. This comprehensive infrastructure connectivity reinforces Yunnan's role as a vital player in regional trade and cooperation.

As of 2022, Yunnan had established five national-level economic and technological development zones, two comprehensive bonded zones, four national-level border (cross-border) economic cooperation zones, and two national-level key development and opening-up pilot zones. The China (Yunnan) Free Trade Pilot Zone, three cross-border e-commerce comprehensive pilot zones, and a comprehensive open platform system have now been basically established. From 2012 to 2022, Yunnan's total foreign trade volume increased from 132.59 billion yuan (\$18.35 billion) to 334.23 billion yuan, an increase of one and a half times, with an average annual growth rate of 9.7 percent. Besides, Yunnan is one of the two provinces in the country to carry out comprehensive border financial reform and its cross-border renminbi settlement has been rapidly increasing since 2010. Banking institutions in Yunnan have gradually established border financial cooperation service centers and regional functional headquarters.

Relying on the advantages of being connected by mountains and rivers and being culturally similar, Yunnan is economically integrated with South and Southeast Asia. It continues to strengthen cooperation in education, culture, tourism and health. A number of special education cooperation projects, such as the Sino-Indian Yoga College of Yunnan University and the Bangkok Business School of Yunnan University of Finance and Economics, have been implemented. A series of cross-border ethnic cultural festivals such as the China-Myanmar Pauphaw Carnival were successfully held to further build Yunnan's international tourism brand. Public welfare medical activities have provided free cataract restoration surgeries and congeni-

tal heart disease screening has been conducted for children. Ruili city also established a cross-border medical emergency mechanism to facilitate the entry of people from northern Myanmar and other places for emergency medical treatment.

Yunnan's transformation from a peripheral locale to the forefront of China's opening-up has been an inspiring journey. With its strategic geographical location, efficient ports and comprehensive infrastructure connectivity, Yunnan has become a beacon of economic cooperation between China and South and Southeast Asian nations. Nevertheless, Yunnan still faces major challenges such as inadequate international corridors, weak industrial foundation, insufficient policy support and increasing external risks, which restrict Yunnan from further deepening open cooperation with the neighboring region. Going forward, Yunnan should accord priorities to the following.

First, it should speed up the construction of major international corridors. Special attention should be given to transport, logistics, energy and digital connection with its southern neighbors so Yunnan can play a role as a gateway to the vast market of South and Southeast Asian nations. The good momentum of the operation of the China-Laos Railway should be maintained and connectivity in norms and standards with the China Railway Express should be promoted so as to accelerate the improvement of passenger and cargo transportation capabilities. The China-Myanmar and China-Vietnam railways and expressways, as well as the development of China-Myanmar land-water intermodal transport corridors, should be advanced to create multi-dimensional international corridors. Yunnan can also build Kunming into a hub city for international trains and create an international comprehensive transportation gateway



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

hub. Logistics hubs and logistics industrial parks in cities such as Kunming, Hekou, Mohan and Ruili should be further strengthened, and further efforts should be made in effectively improving the customs clearance capabilities of border ports.

Second, Yunnan should accelerate regional cooperation in industrial capacity. Industry is the essential driving force for opening up and development. Yunnan should put more efforts into promoting industrial transformation and upgrading and enhancing its industrial radiation capabilities. As a province with more than 20 dry ports near the China-Laos, China-Vietnam and China-Myanmar border sections, as well as a dozen airports that operate the most Chinese air routes to South and Southeast Asian destinations, Yunnan can make full use of the opportuni-

ty of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement and further explore the role of ports. New business formats such as "internet + border trade" should be encouraged. The advantages of the province's photovoltaic and other green energy industries and cross-border medical industry should be cultivated as new growth points for cooperation. The province can also explore cooperation with other countries in the region in development of mineral resources and construction of agricultural demonstration parks.

Third, Yunnan should increase policy support and guarantees. A multi-pronged approach should be taken to promote Yunnan to better integrate into the region, including strengthened support in customs clearance, investment and financing. Pilot programs can be carried out in Ruili and Mengla to establish

development and opening-up zones to facilitate personnel exchanges, free trade and cross-border renminbi financing. Different financing channels including international and national development banks and development assistance should be explored to meet the financing needs of key projects. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation should be strengthened in information exchange, mutual recognition of supervision, inspection and quarantine, certification and accreditation, standard measurement and statistical information, among others.

The author is vice-president of the Center for International Knowledge on Development. 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.

## LIFE



Chen Jihong (first from left) and his troupe deliver a string lion performance in Xingxian village, Huotong town, Ningde, Fujian province, in August. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# High hopes for lion dance of the air

Young performers slowly master intricate skills required to keep the 'creature' entertaining for the audience, **Yang Feiyue** and **Hu Meidong** report.

Give fishermen a thread, and they can tie it to a hook to catch fish, but give it to someone from Huotong town and they can make a lion fly. Indeed, many children growing up in the town in Ningde city, Fujian province, might be under the early impression that lions can actually fly, as they are exposed to the popular local folk art of the string lion dance at a tender age.

From a distance, numerous bamboo lions with colorful manes were visible high above a small wooden stage in Xingxian village in mid-March, each seeming to have a life of their own. Closer up, it was possible to see that they were linked by what looked like countless long strings that were being manipulated by a team of youngsters behind the stage.

The youngsters exerted themselves during the show, sometimes using their weight to haul on the strings, and other times jumping up and down to manipulate the threads, which resembled a neural network, to make the lions pull off stunts, ranging from crouching and waking up, to leaping, chasing left and right, and fighting for a ball.

Applause broke out from the crowd as the lions came to rest, and a group of young boys stepped out from behind the curtain.

"This is my happiest moment, getting recognition from the audience," says Chen Jihong, 24, who leads the team of around 30 members aged between 13 and 24.

Like other children in the region, Chen was first fascinated by the dance as a child when his mother took him to watch a lantern show on *erque'er*, the second day of the second lunar month, which is also known as *longtaidou*, or Dragon Head Raising Day. He recalls how the crowd suddenly became excited and roared for the string lions to come out. Curious, he eagerly pushed through the crowd to get a closer view as the lifelike beasts came into sight.

Huang Zhenqiao, a senior inheritor of the tradition that was named a national intangible cultural heritage in 2006, says that the string lion dance dates back about 1,300 years and is one of the most charming shows at the local lantern fair on that day.

The finale is the unity of man and lion performance, during which the lions bow to the audience to express their gratitude to the people, and to bless their wishes for good weather for farming, he adds.

Thanks to the creativity of folk artists across the ages, the dance has become more sophisticated



Clockwise from top: Chen speaks at a launch ceremony for a documentary featuring their string lion dance experiences in Ningde, Fujian. Chen paints a lion for the show at an ancestral hall in Xingxian village. His team tests strings before a performance at the village. PHOTOS BY CHU ZIQIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

and increasingly popular.

Chen founded his own troupe in 2014 out of his passion for the tradition that is deeply rooted in his hometown and consulted his elders to learn how to make the lions.

The first step is to fashion one out of the local Moso bamboo. "The bamboo has to be those grown in the south or just north of the mountains, because it tends to be more robust from receiving stronger sunlight," Chen says. "The bamboo nodes should be a little longer, so they are less likely to crack open when chopped, and you should always choose mature bamboo with red spots on its surface," he adds.

The bamboo is split and its skin is separated and baked over fire.

"Paper is pasted onto the bamboo and paint is applied," Chen says, adding that the other steps include assembling the mane and painting the decorations.

"It takes at least a month to make a lion," he says.

As the string lion dance was passed strictly down along family lines, it was difficult for Chen's team to find a trainer.

"We watched performances in the town and videos of string lion shows, learning as we watched, and gradually mastered the skills," Chen says.

During the dance, the performers cannot see the lions on the stage and have to rely entirely on the rhythm of the drums and gongs to control their movements.

A string lion weighs at least 10 kilograms, and a large one can weigh more than 20 kg. It takes skill and coordination to make it jump and dance using the strings, a task that is a significant test of physical strength and teamwork and requires extensive practice. "The most difficult part is working in unison," Chen says.

Each element, from controlling the heads, bodies and tails of lions and the embroidered ball they chase, to drumming and beating the gongs, has its own designated

performers, who all work to make everything come together.

"For example, take the lion biting the ball, one of the classic movements. If the lion bites it at the last minute, it signifies happiness, but if it fails, the audience will be disappointed," Chen explains.

The troupe practices in a small area in front of an old temple in the village.

"We give performances every day, and if we have time, we'll also gather to practice," he says, adding that he gets a bit angry if he sees younger members slacking off during training.

"They sometimes forget to put the ball in, or pull the tail too high, so I'm forced to show them over and again how the movements should go," he says, adding that it is important they take his suggestions to heart, respect the lion dance, and work things out with one another during the performance.

Under his influence, Chen's teammates are becoming more serious about performances.

One of them, Chen Chao, says he has come to view the dance as a cherished career. "The pain of injury from practice is temporary, but the joy of mastering the skills lasts a long time," he says.

Song Jiacheng has been with the troupe for four years. The 14-year-old says he is deeply moved by consistent work of other older members, and has come to appreciate the beauty of the show.

As their skills have improved, the troupe has received more opportunities to perform. Their commitment has also won them the support of the elderly craftsmen in the village, who have helped them with woodwork, while others have helped raise funds.

"The string lion dance is not just a hobby now, but also a passion to carry on traditional intangible cultural heritage," Chen Jihong says.

When they have trouble getting the funds to take performances on the road, Chen Jihong takes odd jobs, such as peddling handmade glutinous rice balls, to make ends meet. He considers this a test the troupe has to pass before it is able to really make a go of the art.

"We just have to make do, and see what happens," he says. "I dig into my own pocket if I have to, because if we don't, things will eventually fall apart."

Recently, their story has been turned into a documentary.

Liu Shenghui, the documentary's producer, says that it hasn't been easy for the troupe to persist for more than a decade. "Through this filming experience, this group of youngsters truly touched us," Liu says.

Despite the lack of funding, and the general feeling among many people that art is not a serious pursuit, the team members have continued to fight for what they love.

Zhang Shuxi, the documentary director, says the troupe's perseverance is worth learning from.

Chen Jihong says he's grateful that he and his troupe have been featured in a documentary and that they will work harder to bring the art to a bigger stage.

So far, they have explored ways of integrating the dance into learning tours of the village and are working on building a website and a WeChat account to promote it.

"The organic integration of contemporary trends with traditional culture is the greatest advantage our generation has in inheriting intangible cultural heritage," Chen Jihong says.

Yang Jie contributed to this story.

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## American steps into history on ancient road system

CHENGDU — Hope Justman, an 81-year-old American, has just completed her 24th trip along the *shudao*, an ancient road system in Sichuan province that dates back over two millennia.

"I'm a hiker by accident, because the only way to see it is to hike it," she says.

Running for around 1,000 kilometers, the *shudao* (the roads of the Shu state) winds through rugged mountains and crosses tumultuous streams, connecting present-day Sichuan province with the northern Guanzhong Plain, which was once the heartland of ancient China.

Justman's connection to the ancient road system dates back to her college days. As part of a course on Chinese literature and art, she visited an exhibition in Boston, where the painting, *Emperor Ming-huang's Journey to Sichuan*, captured her attention.

Huge mountains, verdant trees, mountain streams and winding plank roads gave the painting depth and beauty, and a certain sense of mystery. "I was particularly intrigued by the plank road skirting sheer mountain peaks in the background," she says, adding that when she found out that the road actually existed, she knew she had to come to China to find it.



Hope Justman plants a sapling in the Cuiyunlang section along the *shudao*, an ancient road system, in Sichuan province. XINHUA

In 1997, after reading almost every English travel book, she finally found the *shudao* with the help of local guides. "It was old, dignified and beautiful, just like in the painting," Justman says.

Since then, she has made a pilgrimage to the *shudao*, most years, and has hiked more than 400 km of it so far.

In addition to sharing her photos of the ancient road network with friends and family in Philadelphia, Justman also created a website and has written a book about it. In 2015, a friend shot a documentary about the *shudao* and uploaded it to YouTube, earning the attention of like-minded people, some of whom asked to join the American on her walks.

Last month, she took some of those friends to the Cuiyunlang section of the *shudao*, which is in Jian'ge county in Guangyuan city. It is lined by ancient cypress trees with an average age of 1,050 years, the oldest tree being approximately 2,300 years old.

Presently, the Cuiyunlang section is home to 7,803 ancient trees, 7,778 of which are cypresses. It is the most extensive and populous group of ancient trees lining a man-made pathway in China.

"I could have been walking in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), so I kind of feel that I traveled back in time, and that was the great appeal to me. Ancient people passed by those trees, and I'm passing the same ones. It's really amazing," Justman says.

Something else that amazes her is that the tradition of planting and protecting cypress has been passed down from generation to generation. From ancient to modern times, the Chinese have kept records of the protection of ancient trees. Today, each has a QR code, which can be scanned to find out how it is growing and its age.

In 2015, Justman planted a sapling in the Cuiyunlang section. This year, she and her friends planted two more, and have promised to meet again there next year.

"Most of me belongs to the United States. But the cypress trees I planted make me feel that a part of me still remains in this ancient place, and I'm so glad," she says.

XINHUA

## LIFE

# Audiences fall for arresting whodunit

Thought-provoking murder mystery tackles societal preconceptions about marriage and traditional gender roles, **Xu Fan** reports.

Despite having just disembarked from an 11-hour flight on a rainy March night, French director Justine Triet proceeded directly to the Peking University Centennial Memorial Hall.

Upon appearing on the stage, she was greeted with enthusiastic applause from the audience, who had just watched her acclaimed directorial effort, *Anatomy of a Fall*.

The film, which opened across Chinese mainland theaters on Friday, has won 280 awards and nominations worldwide, with the highest accolades being the Palme d'Or for best film at the 76th Cannes Film Festival, and the Oscar for Best Original Screenplay at the 96th Academy Awards.

Co-written by Triet and her partner, Arthur Harari, this suspense-filled movie delves into the life of Sandra, a German novelist residing with her husband, Samuel, a French teacher and writer, and their 11-year-old son, Daniel, in their isolated chalet in the French Alps.

One day, a graduate student arrives to interview Sandra, but the session is quickly terminated when Samuel, who seems jealous and unhappy about the interview, starts playing excessively loud music. A short time later, as their young son returns home after walking his dog, he discovers his father lying lifeless and covered in blood on the snowy ground outside the house.

Sandra finds herself accused of murdering her husband, spurred by several suspicious pieces of evidence and a recording of a heated argument the day before Samuel's death. A year later, during the trial, the couple's marriage is scrutinized, exposing harsh and intimate truths.

For many Chinese fans, the appeal of the movie, which has already obtained a high score of 8.6 points out of 10 on the popular review aggregator Douban, lies in its ability to provoke in-depth discussion about gender inequality and stereotypes toward women, according to Beijing-based film critic Yuan Yun'er.

During the couple's argument, Samuel criticizes Sandra for not fulfilling her responsibilities as a mother and wife, which he believes has left him trapped, educating and spending all his time with Daniel, forcing him to set aside his own dream of becoming a writer. Sandra angrily argues that his difficulties in time management and writing efficiency breed insecurity, prompting him to unjustly point fingers at her.

Dai Jinhua, a film scholar and professor at Peking University, describes the reversal of traditional roles for women and men, as demonstrated in the argument, as a very poignant point.

"As a feminist, I find it thought-provoking when a man assumes a family role traditionally performed by a woman. For a long time, women have been conditioned to take on household responsibilities, accept the norm of prioritizing their husband's career over their own, and experience guilt and self-recrimination when any misfortune befalls the family," she says.

"I believe the movie expresses

this so realistically, accurately, restrainedly, and delicately because it is told through the perspective of a female director," Dai adds.

Along with Dong Qiang, the dean of the French Department at Peking University, Dai attended a post-screening session with Triet to discuss the movie at the university on March 24.

Admitting the significance of her being a female creator, Triet explains that the film centers on a female writer, exploring how she views and understands the world. She hopes that this film will encourage more female viewers not to passively accept certain conventions of society, but to think and redefine their attitudes toward life.

As a mother of two children, the 45-year-old director explains that the story was inspired by her curiosity to explore how her daughter, who was 10 years old at the time, would perceive family dynamics and the complexities of life.

The female protagonist, Sandra, is portrayed by German actress Sandra Huller, while the husband, Samuel, is portrayed by French actor Samuel Theis.

Triet explains that there were different reasons why the characters are named after the actors.

While watching Huller in the German movie *Toni Erdmann*, a comedy about a practical joker father and his hardworking daughter, Triet was captivated by Huller's natural and realistic acting skills and had a strong wish to collaborate with her.

So, the director took a sort of strategic approach by using the actress' name for her character, believing it might increase the chances of convincing Huller to join the cast.

"Sometimes the actors and actresses might exaggerate the suspense a bit in genre movies, but Huller shows no such sign of that in her performance. She adopts an almost documentary-like approach to portray her character," says Triet.

For Theis, the name happened to be a coincidence. Triet chose him after auditioning 40 actors, and the most suitable candidate just happened to have the same name as the character.

A pivotal scene in the movie features local police officers dropping a dummy — the same height and weight as Samuel — from the chalet's attic window while investigating the details of his death. For the female director, the inspiration for the falling man came from the animated opening sequence of the American period drama, *Mad Men*, in which a man is seen falling from a skyscraper.

There is a Chinese connection too. Despite the recent Beijing trip being Triet's first time in China, she is familiar with Chinese food, and one scene near the end of the film features the female protagonist dining with her attorney and several friends in a Chinese restaurant.

The movie has garnered widespread attention online, propelling it to the second slot in the national box-office charts of new movies on Friday, behind Hollywood CGI monster-fest *Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire*.

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Clockwise from left: A scene from *Anatomy of a Fall* shows the protagonist, a German novelist suspected of killing her husband, with her lawyer; the movie's poster; a courtroom scene featuring the prosecutor (front) of the case; French director Justine Triet (center) attends a post-screening talk with Peking University professors Dai Jinhua (second right) and Dong Qiang (right) on March 24; another scene shows the protagonist hugging her son following the discovery of her husband's body.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



"Sometimes the actors and actresses might exaggerate the suspense a bit in genre movies, but (Sandra) Huller shows no such sign of that in her performance."

Justine Triet, French director



## Couple collaborate to popularize contemporary art songs

By CHEN NAN  
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When collaborative pianist Zhang Jialin is researching early modern Chinese art songs, he found a number of pieces that are rarely performed today.

One of them was *Da Jiang Dong Qu*, or "The Great River Goes East," which was composed by songwriter Qing Zhu (1893-1959) during his studies in Germany in 1920, and is based on the poem, *Memories of the Past at Red Cliff*, by ancient literati and artist Su Shi of the Song Dynasty (960-1279).

"*The Great River Goes East* is considered a masterpiece of Qing Zhu, and one of the first contemporary Chinese art songs. The songwriter cleverly combined Western composition techniques with Chinese classical poetry, allowing the poem to once again exude new brilliance through the music," says Zhang, a professor of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, adding that Chinese art songs are greatly

connected to ancient and contemporary Chinese poems.

"Students at music schools are very familiar with Chinese art songs, because they sing them in their classes. However, for the audience, Chinese art songs are not as popular and are rarely heard in concert halls," he says. "They have great value and deserve to be heard by more people."

Zhang's passion for Chinese art songs and his wish to popularize these "hidden treasures" has led him to team up with his wife, soprano Gan Lulu, and stage concerts.

On Saturday, the couple will perform a concert at Tianjin's Anglican Art Centre, an old building formerly known as the Anglican Church, which was built in 1903 by British Sinologist and architect Arthur Christopher Moule.

Besides songs written by Qing Zhu, whose real name was Liao Shangguo, the couple will also sing songs written by Ellinor Valesby (1894-1969), a German harpist and composer, who came to China in



Collaborative pianist Zhang Jialin and soprano Gan Lulu perform Chinese art songs by Qing Zhu, Ellinor Valesby and Huang Zi at The Temple, in Beijing on March 1. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

1926 with her then husband Qing Zhu.

"Despite their short marriage, Valesby, who could not read or write Chinese, wrote nearly 20 art

songs for Chinese classical poetry, which aroused widespread discussion in Chinese music and cultural circles at that time," says Zhang. The couple will perform songs

co-written by Qing Zhu and Valesby, including *Song of Zhang Sheng*, the lyrics of which are based on the classic *Romance of the Western Chamber*, by Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) playwright Wang Shifu, and *Thoughts on a Tranquil Night*, composed by Valesby and with lyrics based on Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet Li Bai's poem of the same title.

Gan notes that the couple already held a concert introducing these Chinese art songs in Beijing on March 1 at The Temple, a space for live music located inside the capital's 600-year-old Songzhu Temple.

"When we staged the concert, the audience gave us warm feedback, though some of them might have been hearing the songs for the first time. They read the lyrics while listening to the music. It was a treasured vocal art journey," says Gan, who is teaching vocal music in Beijing. They have also performed Chinese

art songs at Peking University and the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing.

Gan adds that as a music student, she was intrigued by Chinese art songs since childhood, just like her husband, whose parents are both musicians.

"It's quite challenging for me to sing Chinese art songs because they are combined with Chinese poems. Unlike singing in an opera, in which I use my voice to portray a character, I have to try to deliver the beauty of those poems," says Gan.

Besides celebrating the profound contribution to Chinese art songs by both Qing Zhu and Valesby, the concert will also feature pieces written by the patriotic composer and music educator Huang Zi (1904-1938), including *The Whisper of the West Wind*, *Missing Home-lands* and *Spring Nostalgia*. To allow the audience to gain a full understanding, Zhang will introduce each song during the concert in Tianjin.

## CULTURE

## Finding China

Three young European men find their way to deep, sincere appreciation of Chinese culture, **Zheng Wanyin** reports in London.



If more people could understand this (TCM) wisdom, I believe the world would become more peaceful."

Joel Mikael Walker,  
TCM student from Germany



Left: Joel Mikael Walker from Germany practices Chinese kung fu. Above: Max Burns and Shaun Gibson, both from the UK, have enjoyed their stay in China. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## German student embraces traditional medicine

Locals who frequent a traditional Chinese medicine hospital in Zhengzhou, in Central China's Henan province, are often surprised when they are treated by a German practitioner specializing in acupuncture.

Joel Mikael Walker, who hails from Dresden in eastern Germany, went to Henan province in 2015, when he was 20, because it is widely considered to be an important center for medical practice, education, and research for traditional Chinese medicine, or TCM.

The province boasts numerous renowned TCM hospitals, practitioners, and schools, as well as fertile land and a favorable climate for the production of herbs used in TCM.

Following a year of intensive Chinese language study, he enrolled in the Henan University of Chinese Medicine, one of the earliest of its kind in China, and after an eight-year study journey, Walker, as a master's student nearing graduation, has developed into a proficient practitioner.

"He excels in techniques such as pulse diagnosis, acupuncture, and cupping therapy. He is fully capable of practicing independently," Yu Dongdong, Walker's mentor and an associate professor at the university, was cited in media reports.

Having fully adopted the lifestyle in Henan, Walker has not just involved himself in TCM but has also delved into the culture of the region, which has made him an online sensation on Chinese social media platforms.

Walker, who is also known by his Chinese and screen name Wuming, is now an influencer with more than 1 million followers. He speaks fluent Henan dialect in front of the camera and is dedicated to promoting TCM and popularizing local customs and practices.

"Without seeing his face, you wouldn't be able to tell that he's a foreigner speaking," read a comment on his video.

His expertise in TCM also fascinates Chinese netizens and he often uses ancient Chinese medical texts that have been treated as doctrinal sources to explain the philosophy behind the treatments.

One such book is *Huangdi Neijing*, or *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon*, which was compiled more than 2,000 years ago and crafted in classical Chinese, a form of written Chinese that is roughly comparable to the use of Latin in post-Roman Europe.

Many native Chinese speakers find classical Chinese difficult to understand but Walker can decipher quotes in the book.



Above from left: Joel Mikael Walker enjoys Chinese tea in a tea house in Zhengzhou, the capital city of Central China's Henan province in 2023. Walker practices Chinese calligraphy at home in Zhengzhou. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Other Chinese classics, such as *I Ching (Book of Changes)*, *Zhuangzi*, *Lunyu*, and more, which have long been foundational texts in Chinese philosophy, are also on Walker's reading list.

The 29-year-old takes pleasure in absorbing ancient wisdom because he finds many ideas deeply intertwined with TCM practices.

"For example, one fundamental worldview of TCM highlights the unity of nature and humanity, which informs the holistic approach of TCM," he says. "This means the human body and the external environment are viewed as an integrated whole. So, in treatments, TCM doctors emphasize achieving balance. By adjusting dietary habits, exercising, or changing one's mindset, one can correct factors in daily life that lead to the imbalance of body and nature, thereby achieving a state of harmony."

Walker takes acne problems as an example to further explain the philosophy. The system of Western medicine suggests that acne is a skin condition that occurs when your hair follicles become plugged with too much oil, while TCM often attributes it to a "disorder" between the human body and the external environment, he says.

"TCM points out that having spots on your face is also due to bad living habits, such as staying up

late or unhealthy diet, and excess oil production is only a part of the question," he says. "This is like a place being very humid. Just cleaning off the mold can only have a short-term effect. Changing the overall environment is what brings long-lasting results."

Whether it is the holistic approach or the pursuit of balance and harmony, Walker views it as part of the "unique wisdom" inherent in Chinese culture, and he believes these concepts can not only benefit physical well-being but can also extend beyond medicine and offer excellent guidance for the whole world.

"Using myself as an example, in the past, I might have experienced significant emotional ups and downs, and tended to be somewhat stubborn, often viewing things from my own perspective. However, now I have become more tolerant, approaching issues from multiple angles and with a more inclusive perspective. So, my personality has also become more balanced," he says.

"If more people could understand this (TCM) wisdom, I believe the world would become more peaceful. I also hope to do my best to spread awareness of TCM, Chinese culture, to those around me, including my family and people in the West."

## British musician takes Chinese music to heart

Shaun Gibson's access to Chinese music began in the karaoke bars of Liverpool, England.

When he was a student studying music at the University of Liverpool, his Chinese friends pulled him to such bars, where he became fascinated by the hit Chinese pop songs of the day.

But as a British songwriter who has been constantly exploring the combination of Chinese traditional instruments and Western pop rhythms, Gibson's interest in the ancient sounds that also come out of China was sparked during his first trip to China in 2014, when he heard a busker playing *pipa* (a four-stringed Chinese lute) in Chengdu, Southwest China's Sichuan province.

"I thought *pipa* would be more like a cultural relic, not really relevant in modern society," he says. "But when I saw that lady performing in the shopping center, just like a busker would play the guitar in the streets of Liverpool, I realized that *pipa* is also part of modern Chinese culture. And I could, maybe, have the opportunity to work with this amazing-sounding instrument and put it into my own music. All of that started my journey to where I am today."

Gibson is now a music influencer, with more than two million followers worldwide, and has been invited occasionally to compose Chinese-style songs.

Fusion music sounds like a cliché nowadays because it is frequently mentioned, but he says it is not easy to achieve a smooth mix between two distinct and different sounds.

And when asked how he chooses the appropriate traditional Chinese instruments for a piece, Gibson says: "It just happened very naturally for me."

For example, in a song named *China Blue*, which evokes imagery from Jingdezhen city in East China's Jiangxi province, Gibson integrates *dizi* (Chinese flute), *pipa*, and *yangqin* (a Chinese hammered dulcimer) into the main tune, to paint a picture of the misty place where water frequently trickles down the lanes from the mountains so often topped with an emerald haze.

As *dizi*, *pipa*, and *yangqin* can all have lyrical tones, Gibson says the instruments do a good job of capturing the essence of Chinese water towns.

"How I chose the instruments is purely based on what the song needs,"

he says. "If I am going to write a song about Jingdezhen, I won't use big drums or the sounds of Peking Opera because it is not appropriate. Different instruments are like an artist's palette. If you are trying to paint, you need certain kinds of colors to create the pictures that I'm imagining in my mind. So, it's my instinct as a musician (that dictates which instrument to use)."

And the development of that instinct came from years of accumulated experiences.

Although he has never formally studied Chinese traditional music, he has constantly gathered knowledge during his travels throughout the land.

"For example, when I was in Xichang (a city in Sichuan), I came across a busker, literally singing one of the most beautiful songs I've ever heard. Although I totally don't understand the local dialect, it just touched me, touched my soul."

"Now, I am curious. I am going to start doing research, find out who are the singers, and how I can create something new from that."

And, just as in the case of the *pipa*, he heard all those years ago, the busker and all the other timeless sounds of China have connected with his soul. Gibson says it is his wish to bring that sort of emotional connection to people in the West, through his compositions, bridging gaps between civilizations in an ever-turbulent world.

"Music has the beauty of being an international language," he says. "It transcends borders. It's an expression of life in its purest form, encompassing stories of love, loss, excitement, discovery, and adventure. You can experience all of these things anywhere you live, anywhere you're from."

"If I am inspired by Chinese culture, then other people might also be inspired as well. I really hope that Western people can discover Chinese culture through my works. And I think this kind of exchange is the way by which we can move into the future more peacefully."

"We need to promote understanding between each other... There are a lot more similarities between people than there are differences, and our differences are also things to be celebrated, not things to be feared."

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## Influencer develops a taste for Chinese cuisine

Orange chicken, salt and pepper chips, sweet and sour pork, fried rice...Max Burns lists several typical Western-style of Chinese dishes that disappoints him. For a 21-year-old British young man who spent his first 13 years in China, those cuisines are far from authentic, but rather a category which is invented to cater to Western preferences.

What also upsets Burns is that the view of Chinese food has been subsequently skewed. Quite a few Westerners recognize that particular type of

fare as the whole of Chinese cuisine.

"They almost have no clue about the extent of Chinese cuisine, about how it varies because people forget how big China is. It is a country that has deserts from one side, jungles and sea from the other side. Each area has its unique style of cooking," he says.

"The average Westerners are not as informed and educated as they could be, that is why I would like to do my best."

Burns tries to showcase the richness of Chinese delicacies by vlogging about making Chinese dishes at home, and that variety embodies in his cooking process, from the ingredients and spices to the cooking equipment and cooking methods.

Sometimes, his British friends would join to help. "And quite often, they were shocked by the diversity of Chinese cuisine. They've had a long time to figure out that Chinese food is just a lot more complex. It's always fun to watch their reactions."

The food adventure has helped Burns grow into an influencer with more than three million of subscribers worldwide today.

"So, I can definitely say that I've changed some people's ideas (about Chinese food)."

Interestingly, when Burns first started vlogging in 2016 after moving back to Brighton, England from Beijing, replicating Chinese food at home was a then "stupid idea," as he puts it, because he was never super into cooking. At the time, the videos centered more on explaining aspects of Chinese culture, including movies, snacks, restaurants and more.

Until the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United Kingdom and Burns was not able to dine outside, while the stay-at-home order also gave him plenty

of time to learn to cook, test, fail in the attempts and try again.

"Then I instantly fell in love," he recalls. "The more I learned about Chinese cooking, the more I got into it."

The cooking journey also serves to maintain his connections to the land where Burns passed his childhood. He always says that he has spent two-thirds of his life in China.

"My mom is Bulgarian, my dad is English. They met each other in China. I was born in Bulgaria in 2003 but I would have been born in China if it wasn't for SARS. When I was 18 days old, we flew to Qingdao (a city in East China's Shandong province)."

"I spent six years in Qingdao and seven years in Beijing. I had a Chinese *ayi* (babysitter). I went to Chinese schools with all Chinese teachers and Chinese peers."

From a young age, when asked where he came from, the little kid would identify himself as half English, half Bulgarian and half Chinese. "I think it has been the same ever since. I just got a very big connection to China," Burns highlights, even though he has left the country for years.

Burns appreciates the experiences of mixed heritages, which enable him to develop empathy for different cultures, teach the Western world about genuine Chinese cuisine and build a cross-cultural bridge, through food, between the East and the West.

"Food is probably the most accessible way for everyone to learn an alien culture," he says.

Looking ahead, Burns has some plans in mind. "I would love to do a travel food show throughout China on TV. Also, I would love to have my own restaurant in the future. That's definitely going to happen."



Max Burns cooks Chinese noodles and hands them out to British people for free in Brighton and Hove, England in 2023.



Shaun Gibson plays piano with children in a primary school in South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region in 2020. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY