

Classic clothing

Traditional hanfu garments gain appeal, recognition in Hong Kong

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Expert sees high potential for nation's economy

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Ingredients for success

Michelin-starred American chef dishes up culinary master classes

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CHINA DAILY

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WORLD WATCH

By Dennis Munene

China's sharing of growth has global impact

In the face of global upheavals such as the COVID-19 pandemic and prevailing anti-globalization trends, as demonstrated by the politics of isolation, unilateralism and protectionism, China's remarkable resilience stands unparalleled.

This was evident in the Government Work Report delivered by Premier Li Qiang on March 5 at the second session of the 14th National People's Congress during the annual meetings of China's top legislative and political advisory bodies.

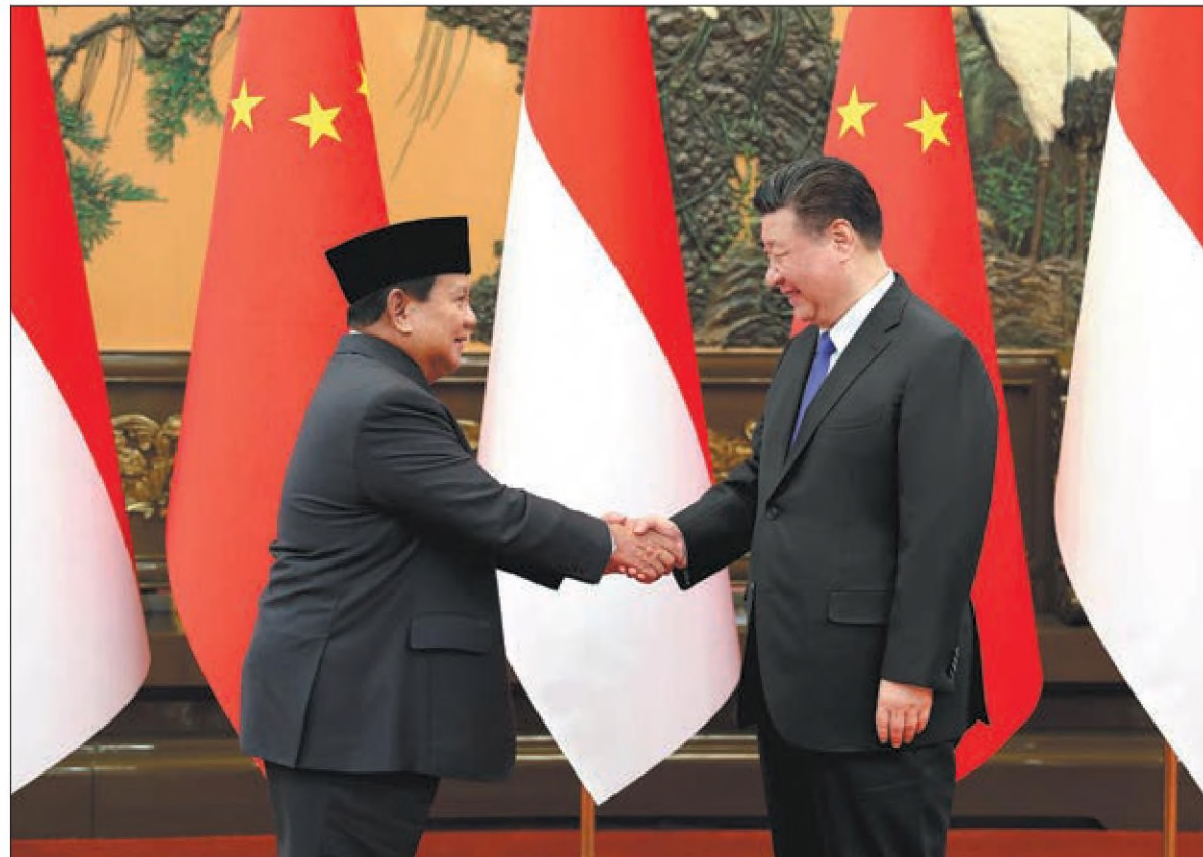
Serving as a blueprint for China's quest for modernization in all aspects, the report clearly showed Beijing's efforts to continue pursuing higher-quality economic growth and to appropriately increase economic output. Setting its growth rate target for this year and aligning with the objectives of the 14th Five-Year plan (2021-25), China is projecting GDP growth of around 5 percent. This projection of economic vitality comes at a time when many economies around the world are still facing unprecedented challenges.

In 2017, scholar Joseph Nye Jr said that if a rising China failed to deliver global public goods, this could result in the "Kindberger trap", a term he coined in reference to a situation in which no country takes the lead in maintaining international institutions.

However, China, in its push for shared prosperity, has ensured that the nation's continued economic success will be shared with the global community. The country has helped to transform the economies of developed as well as developing countries by offering global public goods.

With this noble act of generosity, China has achieved miraculous economic growth in less than four decades. It has transformed itself from one of the poorest countries to becoming the world's second-largest economy, top trader in goods, biggest holder of foreign exchange reserves, and the largest manufacturer. Through its peaceful rise, China has managed to achieve its industrialization goals and has lifted

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President Xi Jinping meets on Monday with Indonesia's President-elect Prabowo Subianto in Beijing. WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY

Beijing, Jakarta to deepen ties

President hailed substantive progress, highlights all-round strategic cooperation

By MO JINGXI

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President Xi Jinping and Indonesian President-elect Prabowo Subianto agreed on Monday to develop a closer relationship by deepening cooperation in various areas including poverty alleviation as the 72-year-old Indonesian politician arrived in China for his first overseas visit after winning the race to lead Southeast Asia's biggest economy last month.

During their meeting at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, Xi hailed the substantive progress achieved in the development of bilateral relations over the past decade, saying that the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway has become a shining example of high-quality cooperation between the two countries.

"China always views its relations with Indonesia from a strategic height and long-term perspective and is willing to run the historical relay race with Indonesia," he said.

Now that bilateral ties have entered a new stage of building the China-Indonesia community with a shared future, Xi said that China is ready to deepen all-round strategic cooperation with Indonesia so as to better benefit their peoples and make positive contributions to peace, stability and prosperity in the region and across the world.

Xi said that the fruitful results achieved in bilateral relations lie in

the two countries' adherence to strategic independence, mutual trust and assistance, cooperation for mutual benefit, and the upholding of fairness and justice.

He called on China and Indonesia, both of which are major developing countries and emerging economies, to cooperate in all sincerity in the future and make China-Indonesia relations an example of win-win cooperation, a model of common development and a pioneer of South-South cooperation.

Xi expressed China's willingness to share experiences on state governance with Indonesia, strengthen the alignment of development strategies and keep deepening maritime cooperation. China will also enhance cooperation with and provide support to Indonesia in the field of poverty reduction and eradication, he added.

The Indonesian president-elect, who is currently the nation's defense minister, started a three-day visit to China on Sunday. He will be sworn in as the next leader of Southeast Asia's most populous nation in October.

Calling China a powerful partner of Indonesia, he expressed full support for Indonesia to develop a closer relationship with China, saying that he will continue Indonesian President Joko Widodo's friendly policy toward China, uphold independence and firmly adhere to the one-China policy.

Indonesia and China are now at the peak of their bilateral relationship, anchored in strong ties between their officials and businesses."

Muhammad Habib, a researcher at the Department of International Relations of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Indonesia

The new Indonesian government will proactively promote the synergy of the two countries' development strategies, push for more results to be achieved in cooperation in various areas including trade and the economy, and strengthen coordination and cooperation with China in international and regional affairs, he said.

Muhammad Habib, a researcher at the Department of International Relations of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Indonesia, said that this visit would lay a promising foundation for the Indonesia-China partnership under the new Indonesian government.

"Indonesia and China are now at the peak of their bilateral relationship, anchored in strong ties

between their officials and businesses," he said, adding that the president-elect wants to preserve the current leadership's rapport with the Chinese president.

"China remains an indispensable partner in many of Indonesia's strategic projects, including the mineral downstream agenda and the energy transition," he added.

Xu Liping, a senior researcher on Southeast Asian studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that the Indonesian president-elect's trip to China will enable the nations to reach a consensus on medium- and long-term strategic cooperation in the upcoming five to 10 years.

"For the new Indonesian government, the priority strategic goal is to raise its economic growth rate from 5 percent to 7 percent and realize its vision of 'Golden Indonesia 2045'. To achieve this goal, cooperation with China is indispensable," Xu said, noting that China is now the largest trading partner of Indonesia.

According to Xu, the two countries' political, economic, cultural and maritime cooperation is constantly injecting momentum into their comprehensive strategic partnership, thus consolidating the political and social foundations for China-Indonesia friendship.

"As the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway has shown, China's development will bring concrete opportunities to Indonesia," he said.

Tighter US chip curbs prompting concerns

By MA SI

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The United States government's latest tightening of restrictions on chip exports to China once again highlights that Washington is using political power to disrupt normal commercial cooperation, and this would deal another heavy blow to the global semiconductor industry, said experts and company executives.

They noted that such restrictions will push Chinese companies to devote more resources to research and development, in order to achieve breakthroughs in key components and establish a beachhead in more future-oriented strategic technologies.

The comments came as the US' latest revised rules, which run to 166 pages, are set to go into effect on Thursday.

These tighter curbs will make it harder for China to gain access to US artificial intelligence chips and chipmaking tool markets. Washington expanded the restrictions to laptops containing those AI chips, Reuters reported.

Wei Jianguo, former vice-minister of commerce, said, "Despite Washington's shift in rhetoric from decoupling to de-risking in key supply chains, the US government continues to tighten its controls over chip exports to China."

"The move is the latest evidence that to contain China's technological rise, the US government is leveraging all means, regardless of how much pain it will cause to US companies," Wei said.

China's Ministry of Commerce said on Sunday that the latest revision of semiconductor export controls came less than six months after the US introduced the rule in October 2023.

The broadening of the so-called national security concept by the US, coupled with arbitrary rule changes and tightened control measures, not only creates more obstacles to normal economic and trade cooperation between China and the US but also imposes heavier compliance costs for global enterprises, the ministry added.

The latest tightened chip export restrictions have been introduced even though major US semiconductor companies are working hard to cement ties with China, which is the world's largest semiconductor market.

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Art of diplomacy



A portrait of Louis, the Grand Dauphin, is seen on display on Monday during a media preview of *The Forbidden City and the Palace of Versailles* exhibition, which celebrates the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between France and China, in the Palace Museum in Beijing. JADE GAO / POOL PHOTO VIA AP

XIONG'AN — WELCOME TO THE CITY OF THE FUTURE

New area enters next stage of high-quality development

By ZHENG JINRAN in Xiong'an New Area and ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang



When Xueying has become accustomed to taking the autonomous driving bus to and from work every day by clicking on her phone to book in advance. It's not a scene out of a science-fiction film, but the reality of her life in Rongdong district of Xiong'an New Area in Hebei province.

"It's safe and free," the 27-year-old Xiong'an resident said, adding that the bus trip takes just

over 10 minutes and is much more convenient than driving to work in rush hour.

The autonomous driving buses are capable of sensing traffic information, such as stoplights, within a 240-meter range. They can respond to sudden situations by braking or changing lanes with a reaction speed 10 times faster than

that of a human driver, said Kou Tianhao, from Yuexiang Xiong'an Technology, which operates the vehicles. "It's a Level 4 autonomous driving bus independently developed by the company, which is currently the highest level of autonomy achieved by such technology in China," he said.

The level of autonomous driving vehicles ranges from 0 to 5, with Level 4 not requiring human intervention and Level 5 classified as fully autonomous.

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PAGE TWO



Two customers are served their meals at the Nanwenying Community Canteen in Xiong'an New Area, Hebei province.

From page 1

The buses are equipped with over 20 sensing devices including laser radar and high-definition cameras, which constantly capture traffic information and then transmit the data to a decision-making central computer. However, a safety officer is onboard to intervene in operations when absolutely necessary, Kou said.

Digital roads

About 20 such vehicles are running on routes connecting residential communities, major parks and transportation hubs in Rongdong district. The successful operation of these autonomous vehicles relies heavily on the construction of digital roads.

Rongdong is the first district to complete comprehensive digital road construction in Xiong'an New Area, according to the government.

Along its 153 kilometers of roads including main, secondary and branch roads, and alleys, have been installed multifunction information poles, laser radars, electronic toll cameras and other sensing devices, as well as supporting intelligent equipment to monitor the roads and transmit and analyze data.

More districts including Xiongdong, Rongxi and a startup area will also introduce digital roads, making the total length of such roads more than 500 kilometers in Xiong'an New Area, the government website said.

City traffic data obtained from various sources such as the sensing devices, will be brought together in a unified platform for integration and display. The Digital Road Intelligent Operation Center utilizes big data analysis and algorithms to address problems in traffic management, according to China Telecom Digital City Technology, the operating company.

"The center will utilize algorithm models to optimize signal-light timing to improve vehicle movement efficiency and reduce traffic congestion," said Feng Shuntian, head of the company's intelligent transportation products division. The center's data analysis might also help traffic management departments to have a better understanding of traffic flow, and make advance preparations and scheduling arrangements, Feng added.

Digital roads and the intelligent operation center have presented effective solutions for Xiong'an to address traffic problems, one of the drawbacks of "big city malaise" that the area was designed to solve.

The establishment of Xiong'an New Area — located about 100 kilometers southwest of Beijing — was announced in April 2017. The flagship project was intended to relieve Beijing of nonessential capital city functions and advance the coordinated

development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.

Xiong'an New Area has built a digital twin city, which mainly operates in the Xiong'an Urban Computing Center. Since it began operations at the end of 2022, it has offered network, computing and storage services for big data, blockchain and the internet of things. The Digital Road Intelligent Operation Center is also part of the twin city, said the operating company Xiong'an Cloud Network Technology.

"In the process of construction, Xiong'an needs to introduce a large amount of information-based management methods like digital roads, and the data generated by these methods can be aggregated and integrated in the center, which will provide city management with a more scientific basis for governance," said Wang Yudong, deputy general manager of the company.

For example, if a residential building catches fire, the city-operations inspection platform immediately calculates the coverage area, affected people and key areas, and then provides the best route for fire-trucks to access the fire and checks nearby water pressure.

Wang said with the permission of a family, the center can also monitor the water utilization of elderly people who live alone. "Once no water use is detected in certain hours, an automatic alert is sent to community volunteers who check on the elderly people," he said, adding it's just one of the applications that uses the data.

"We can better serve the people and the city with various types of smart-city management applications," he said.

Feng, from the digital road intelligent operator, said his company had developed a non-motor vehicle behavior monitoring system in Cangzhou, Hebei, by using algorithms and big data technology. The system can detect other road users such as electric scooters.

"The Xiong'an New Area serves as a testing ground, where we pioneer initiatives and gradually inspire neighboring areas to embark on smart city construction," said Hu Junjun, head of the company's research and development department.

City of the future

The development of Xiong'an New Area has shifted from the initial planning and construction stage to focus on high-quality construction, high-level management and the high-quality transfer of the non-capital city functions from Beijing.

"In just six years, the Xiong'an New Area has transitioned from mere concept to palpable reality," President Xi Jinping said during an inspection tour in May 2023. "A



Children play on a slide in a street-side park in Xiong'an New Area.

ALL PHOTOS BY WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

Xiong'an: Talent attracted for development

highly modernized city rising from the ground is nothing short of miraculous."

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, also underlined the importance of promoting high-quality development and building the area into a "city of the future", a hub for innovation and entrepreneurship, and a model of green development.

Centrally administered State-owned enterprises have so far set up more than 200 subsidiaries and branches in Xiong'an, which have demonstrated the area's viability and stimulated agglomeration, said

Xiong'an's Reform and Development Bureau.

Zhongshi Boxing Technology, where Li Nan works as head of marketing, has focused on implementing AI digital human scenes, which can be applied in livestreaming sales, hospitals, and schools to provide basic information.

"We are optimistic about the innovative entrepreneurial atmosphere and promising market here, therefore, we partially relocated a team from Beijing to Zhongguancun Science Park in Xiong'an in January," he said, adding his wife and daughter had also moved to the area.

Xiong'an is also attracting busi-



Students exercise on playground equipment in the Xiong'an branch of the Beijing No 4 High School.



A woman and her child attend Xiong'an Xuanwu Hospital. The Xuanwu Hospital in Beijing opened the Xiong'an branch in October.

ness people and innovation companies from around the world.

"I see a lot of prospects and opportunities in this city," said Godsword George Chinemerem from Nigeria who has set up a logistics company in Xiong'an. He plans to ship goods from Xiong'an to African markets via Tianjin Port.

Omane Vincent Kwakye from Ghana also sees his future in Xiong'an where the cost of living and doing business is more friendly for startups. He plans to bring technological advances to African countries. "Besides, Xiong'an is focusing on sustainable energy and it will need certain natural resources from Africa. I plan to bring materials like cobalt and lithium into China," he said.

With an increasing number of startups, Xiong'an has welcomed the arrival of new talent and has rolled out comprehensive measures to ensure its development.

So far, 16 policy measures have been announced to attract global talent, including top scientists, high-level research teams and new university graduates. Eligible leading scientists can receive research funding of up to 50 million yuan (\$6.9 million).

"The talent pool and structure are crucial for the future development of Xiong'an New Area, and our comprehensive measures to attract talent have worked," said You Zhijun, director of the Party-mass Work Department of the Administrative Committee of Xiong'an New Area, who is in charge of talent issues.

You said they have had a strong response to the talent drive, with a significant increase in the number of people who have arrived in Xiong'an or inquired about moving there.

Since April 2017, over 10,000 Xiong'an talent cards have been issued. The card is an official document granted to talented people, and since 2023 Xiong'an has witnessed the arrival of 30,000 startups and entrepreneurs, according to the department.

Fu Chaoyang, who has a talent card, said his telecommunications and 5G technology business has thrived in the innovation-driven city. "It has gathered more talented people with preferential policies and efficient support measures, which allow more startups to find the people they need quickly and explore cooperation opportunities," he said.

Growing satisfaction

During the construction of Xiong'an, the top leadership urged implementing and refining policies and measures concerning children's education, healthcare, housing and other public welfare issues to fulfill the needs of residents.

Mi Yinuo, a first-year student at the Xiong'an branch of the Beijing

No 4 High School, is getting some practical life lessons.

"It was quite interesting to gain some 'boring' insurance knowledge when we played monopoly in our elective course," she said. When she received "lucky money" for Spring Festival, she deposited it in a bank account to earn interest, rather than keeping it in a purse.

Twenty other elective courses including Pilates have been introduced, and various activities such as walking have been promoted on campus to nurture the children's all-around development, said the principal, Huang Chun.

The first intake of about 50 students has been enrolled since September. The teachers have mentors at the main campus in Beijing, which has regular interaction with the Xiong'an branch and provides support to ensure high-quality education.

"My son's outlook has grown in just one semester and he's now able to speak in public with more confidence," said Weng Junwu, father of one of the students.

A kindergarten and a primary school, both branches of Beijing educational institutions, also started recruiting students in September and aim to provide quality education for the relocated families from Beijing.

In addition, 15 Beijing universities will establish new campuses in Xiong'an, and four of them, including Beijing Jiaotong University, started construction in November.

Xiong'an has also seen an improvement in medical services, especially after the branch of Beijing-based Xuanwu Hospital, affiliated to the Capital Medical University, started trial operations in October.

"The hospital has opened 30 departments and expects to gradually open the inpatient wards and operating rooms and then the emergency room," said Liu Dongbin, deputy director of the branch. The hospital has introduced innovations to improve its medical services, and the number of cumulative outpatient visits has reached approximately 35,000, he said.

Kang Hua, director of the hospital's breast treatment center, has witnessed the growing satisfaction of patients who also have easy access to experts from Beijing.

Weng Junwu said the improved medical services in the area, gave his family an assurance about living in Xiong'an where he hopes his son will eventually attend university.

"I'm honored to witness the overall improvement and grow with Xiong'an," he said.

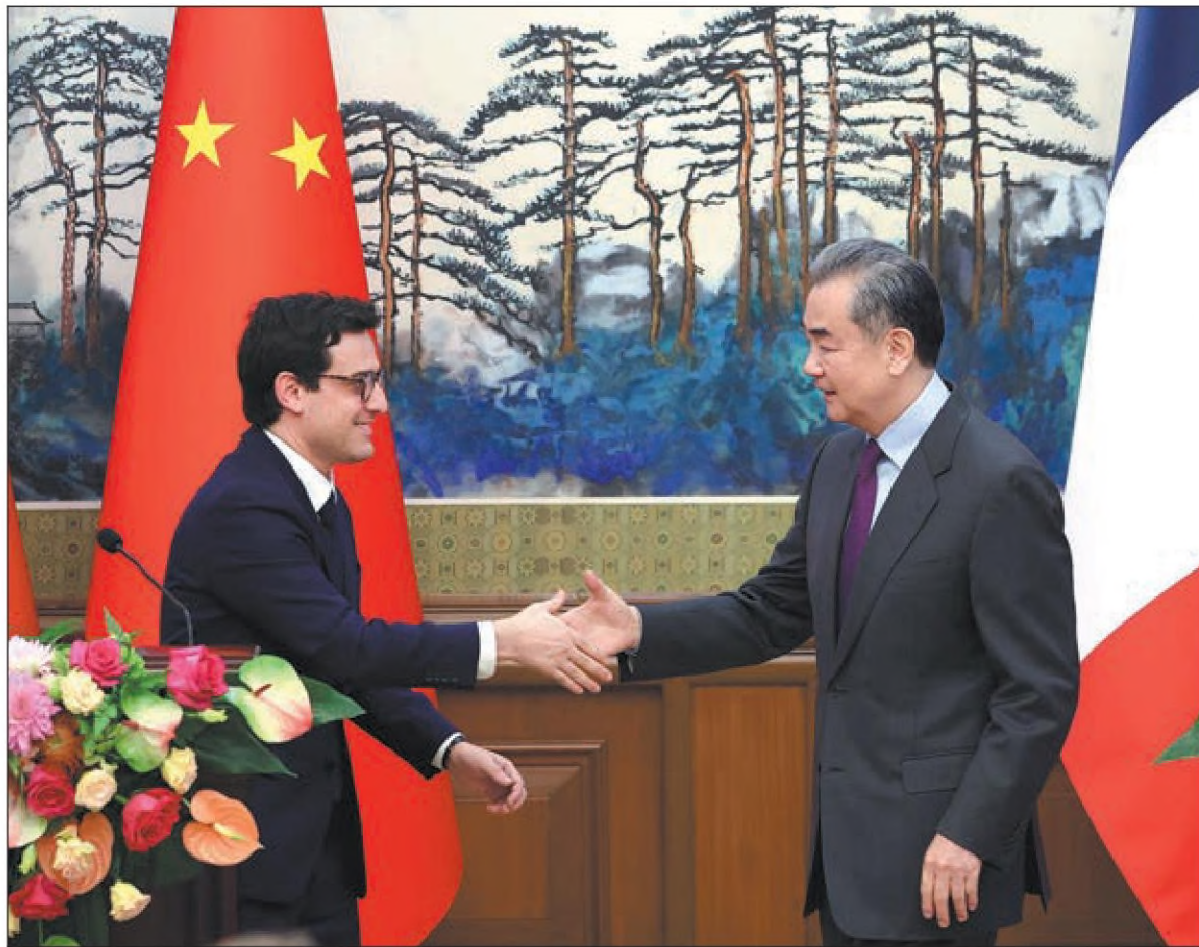
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Left: Tourists visit the Xiong'an exhibition hall in Hebei in March. Right: A visitor takes a photo of a planning model of Xiong'an New Area.



TOP NEWS



Foreign Minister Wang Yi shakes hands with French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Stéphane Sejourne on Monday in Beijing.

ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

China, France to enhance ties

Two sides agree to further pursue mutual benefits, inject more stability into relations

By ZHANG YUNBI

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Stéphane Sejourne, France's new minister for Europe and foreign affairs, undertook a packed schedule on Monday in Beijing during his first visit to China in his current post.

As a sign of the value that Beijing places on its ties with Paris, both Premier Li Qiang and Foreign Minister Wang Yi met separately with him.

Li told Sejourne that Beijing expects the stability of China-France relations to contribute to the respective development of the two countries and "inject certainty into the world's development".

Beijing looks to deepen practical cooperation with Paris in conventional areas, as well as in green energy and advanced manufacturing, to "better realize mutual benefits and a win-win situation", Li said.

The premier also talked with Sejourne about China-European Union economic and trade relations.

He expressed his hope that France will actively push the EU to follow the laws of economy and the

rules of the market, and to properly address the concerns of both sides through consultation.

Sejourne said Paris adheres to independence and self-reliance, opposes bloc confrontation, economic decoupling and disruptions of production and supply chains, and firmly adheres to the one-China policy.

France is willing to deepen exchanges and cooperation with China in various fields and promote greater development of the two nations' comprehensive strategic partnership, he added.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France.

As part of the recent and frequent high-level exchanges, Foreign Minister Wang met with Sejourne in Munich and visited France in February.

Analysts said the visit of the French foreign minister comes amid the chaos of the current international situation and rising divides in the global community, and the two countries, as major countries, should work together to be a stabilizer for the world.

Yu Jiang, vice-president of the China Institute of International Studies, noted that as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, China and France have transcended bloc confrontation and are both committed to the "two-state solution" to the Palestine-Israel conflict.

"The two countries have contributed to the reform and construction of the global governance system, setting a model for exchanges and cooperation between countries with different historical backgrounds, cultural traditions and political systems," Yu said.

Earlier on Monday, the two foreign ministers held talks at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse and met with reporters on the sidelines.

At the media briefing, Wang announced that the two sides agreed to "build China-France relations to be more stable and foresighted in strategic perspective".

Wang said Beijing and Paris agreed to play a leading role in four areas: international solidarity, innovative development, openness and win-win situations, and dialogue among civilizations.

"The two sides agreed to provide more convenience for people-to-people exchanges between the two countries and to deepen cooperation in areas such as science, educa-

tion, sports and cultural heritage preservation," Wang said.

France is China's third-largest trading partner within the European Union, and China is France's top trading partner in Asia and seventh-largest in the world. In 2023, bilateral trade volume reached \$78.9 billion.

China will create more convenience for enterprises from various countries, including France, and "it is also believed that France will provide a fair, just and predictable business environment for Chinese companies to invest in France", Wang said.

Sejourne told Wang during their meeting that Paris advocates openness and cooperation. On economy and trade, France is committed to properly handling differences through consultation, he added.

When asked by a reporter about the EU's seeking "de-risking" regarding China, Wang noted that this year, China and the EU have resumed interactions at all levels. He said cooperation in various fields is in full swing, "the EU's rational knowledge of China is increasing, and its willingness to cooperate with China is increasing".

"Some insightful minds in Europe are also soul-searching and believe that decoupling from China carries real risks," he added.

Official urges more efforts to increase cross-Strait exchanges

By JIANG CHENGLONG
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Ma Ying-jeou, former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party, called on Monday for more youth exchanges across the Taiwan Strait based on the 1992 Consensus and opposition to "Taiwan independence", as he leads a youth delegation on his second visit to the Chinese mainland.

Inside On Monday afternoon, Ma arrived in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, where he met with Song Tao, head of the Taiwan

Work Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council.

During the meeting, Song conveyed the cordial greetings of Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, to Ma.

Ma thanked Xi for his greetings. Song emphasized that compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are Chinese and must adhere to the 1992 Consensus and resolutely oppose "Taiwan independence" and interference from external forces.

He said that efforts should be made to actively promote cross-Strait exchanges and cooperation in various fields, jointly promote Chinese culture and enhance the kinship and welfare of compatriots across the Strait.

Song emphasized the need to promote the peaceful and integrated development of cross-Strait relations, steadfastly advance the great cause of the motherland's reunification and work together for national rejuvenation.

Ma said that compatriots on both sides of the Strait are bound by blood and closely related.

He said that on the political basis of the 1992 Consensus and opposition to "Taiwan independence", there should be a strengthening of exchanges and cooperation in various fields between the two sides, especially among the young people, to pro-

mote the development of cross-Strait ties.

On the first day of their mainland trip, Ma and 20 young people from Taiwan visited the offices of technology giants in Shenzhen, including the world's top drone manufacturer DJI and internet heavyweight Tencent, both headquartered in the technology hub in South China, to learn about their most important cutting-edge products.

Ma and the delegation spent about 25 minutes at DJI's office, where he showed keen interest in aerial drones and smartphone stabilizers.

Accompanied by Luo Zhenhua, president of DJI, who was born and raised in Taiwan, Ma experienced the subject-tracking function of the intelligent smartphone stabilizer. Several members of the delegation also tried this feature for taking selfies at the scene.

In the evening, Ma and the delegation watched a large-scale outdoor drone performance at Shenzhen Talent Park, against the backdrop of the city's skyline.

On Tuesday, Ma's delegation will visit the Museum of Dr Sun Yat-sen, the renowned Chinese revolutionary and statesman, in Zhongshan city, and arrive in Guangzhou, the provincial capital of Guangdong, later in the day.

Sun was born in 1866 and passed away in 1925. He is known to the Chinese people as a great pioneer for his leading role in the 1911 Revolution, which ended more than 2,000 years of feudal rule in China.

Ma's mainland trip runs through April 11. During his visit he will participate in the Qingming Festival Memorial Ceremony in Shaanxi province for Huangdi, or the Yellow Emperor, who is regarded as one of the common ancestors of all Chinese people.



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Ma Ying-jeou (second from left), former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party, is greeted on Monday at an airport in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, after his arrival. Ma is leading a youth delegation to visit the Chinese mainland.

CHEN YEHUA / XINHUA

Curbs: US restrictions expected to accelerate Chinese tech breakthroughs

From page 1

Contrary to Washington's business-disruptive move, business communities in the US still regard China as a pivotal part of their global business landscape. For instance, the CEOs of US semiconductor companies such as Qualcomm, Micron and AMD visited China to attend the China Development Forum in Beijing, highlighting their long-term commitment to the Chinese market.

Cristiano Amon, president and

CEO of Qualcomm, said that over the past 30 years, the company has established strong, trusting and mutually beneficial relationships with its Chinese partners. Nowadays, as its technology expands into numerous new industries, Qualcomm is constantly establishing new partnerships in China.

Meanwhile, Micron Technology broke ground at its new plant in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Wednesday, as part of its 4.3 billion yuan (\$595 million) investment plan announced in June 2023.

4.3 billion yuan

The investment plan Micron Technology announced in June 2023

Manish Bhatia, executive vice-president of global operations at Micron, said: "China is a critical part of our global business. We are focused on being able to support that business."

Bai Ming, a researcher at the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said that despite the political noises from the US government, US companies are trying their best to expand their presence in China, as "the market is too big for anyone to ignore".

The Chinese mainland consumes more than half of the world's semiconductors, which are then assembled into tech products to be re-exported or sold in the domestic market, according to

research firm Daxue Consulting.

Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Information Consumption Alliance, a telecommunications industry association in China, said the US chip restrictions will accelerate Chinese companies' efforts to achieve technological breakthroughs.

For instance, Huawei's AI processors became highly sought-after products in China after restrictions were imposed on the export to China of US company Nvidia's most advanced AI chips, Xiang said. Meanwhile, Chinese companies

are scrambling to pioneer the R & D of frontier technologies such as 5.5G, a crucial upgrade of the 5G network in functionality and coverage, which will give new vitality to China's tech growth, experts added.

For instance, 5.5G can support a downlink speed of 10 gigabits per second, compared with the current 5G speed of 1 Gbps.

China Mobile, the world's largest telecom carrier in terms of mobile subscribers, last week became the world's first company to start deploying 5.5G commercial networks. It aims to cover more than 300 Chinese cities with 5.5G by the end of this year, which would make its scale the largest in the world.

Partnership: Sino-African ties reflect win-win cooperation

From page 1

more than 850 million people out of absolute poverty, the largest number in world history.

By December 2020, China had eradicated absolute poverty and achieved the nation's first century goal, which was to finish building a moderately prosperous society in all respects by the time the Communist Party of China celebrated its 100th anniversary

in 2021. It has also put over 1.4 billion people on the path toward modernization.

China understands that "success is best when it's shared", as stated by businessman and author Howard Schultz, and its contribution to global economic growth from 2013 to 2021 surpassed that of most developed countries, according to World Bank data.

Today, China is the main trading partner of over 140 countries

and regional blocs. Its success has inspired Africa's search for an independent path to recovery in the post-COVID era and modernization in the 21st century, defined by the mantra of an "African Renaissance".

In Africa, China has channeled its offering of global public goods through two interlinked initiatives.

The first is the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, a collective

dialogue that began in Beijing in October 2000 as the premier policy forum for China-Africa relations. FOCAC's mandate is to promote the key tenets of Chinese modernization: promoting equal consultation, enhancing understanding, expanding consensus, strengthening friendship and promoting cooperation. Through FOCAC, China has channeled resources to support African development.

This year, the FOCAC summit, to be held in Beijing, will mark 24 years of fruitful, comprehensive and strategic Sino-African cooperation.

The second of the interlinked initiatives is the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, launched in September 2013 to "promote policy coordination, facilitate connectivity, promote unimpeded trade, promote financial integration and foster people-to-people bonds".

Combined, the BRI and FOCAC and other China-proposed global public goods, such as the Global Development Initiative, the Glob-

al Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, are proof of China's economic growth. This has not only transformed Africa, but the whole world. Furthermore, after the COVID-19 outbreak, China deployed massive resources to contain the disease in Africa and across the world. This helped stabilize the global economy.

The author is executive director of the China-Africa Center at the Kenya-based Africa Policy Institute. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Authorities crack down on school bullying

Measures range from inspections and punishments to enhanced supervision

By ZHAO YIMENG

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Local authorities have been ramping up efforts to prevent and punish school bullying amid heated discussions about several incidents involving teenagers.

In recent months, videos went viral on social media showing young students in provinces such as Shandong and Guangdong suffering from school bullying and being attacked by their peers.

Last week, the Education Department of Fujian province urged local bureaus to conduct a comprehensive inspection of all primary and secondary schools regarding prevention and control of campus violence and school bullying, aiming to promptly identify any potential risks and take necessary measures to mitigate such situations.

The Chengdu Education Bureau in Sichuan province announced last month that junior middle school students who have a record of school bullying will be deprived of recommendation opportunities for top senior middle schools.

In Shanghai, measures to prevent and identify student bullying were introduced in 2019 with the publication of a guidance manual for preventing and controlling bullying among primary and secondary school students.

Last year, the city upgraded the manual, strengthening the responsibilities of all parties involved in preventing bullying and enhancing operational aspects.

The manual defined different levels of student bullying, such as those that include physical injury and property damage, and provided clear operational guidance for schools and teachers.

Given the challenge of identifying student bullying, the manual proposed routine measures such as enhancing supervision in key areas and focusing on specific groups.

It also highlighted nine abnormal behaviors in student conduct and language as indicators of student bullying, which parents should be aware of.

For severe cases of school bullying, the manual emphasized the involvement of public security and judicial authorities.

It introduced a section requiring judicial intervention in the handling of bullying, specifying the obligations of schools, teachers and judicial authorities to collaborate effectively.

Xiong Bingqi, director of the 21st Century Education Research Institute, said the country must establish a long-term mechanism for addressing bullying, which includes having manuals for prevention and control, and establishing committees dedicated to

“We need to impose strict penalties for criminal behavior committed by juveniles involved in bullying... strengthening legal education for juveniles.”

Xiong Bingqi, director of the 21st Century Education Research Institute

preventing student bullying.

“We need to impose strict penalties for criminal behavior committed by juveniles involved in bullying. Even if their actions do not lead to criminal liability, we must follow legal procedures to solve the issue, thereby strengthening legal education for juveniles,” Xiong said.

Last fall semester, a middle school in Dehui, Jilin province, activated an intelligent voice system capable of recognizing distress calls and abusive language and issuing an alert within five seconds, according to the school.

Wang Jinghui, vice-principal of the school, said that since the system was put into use six months ago, no cases of campus bullying have been detected. However, it functions as a deterrent and the school will continue using it.

A school in Fuzhou, Fujian, has tried installing similar devices in washrooms and some key areas with high risks of school bullying.

When the device detects certain sounds and triggers an alert, the computers or smartphones of teachers will receive a message.

Wan Li, vice-chairman of the All China Lawyers Association and a national legislator who has been paying attention to school bullying in recent years, said prevention is far more meaningful than punishment.

The device can assist in preventing incidents by monitoring a broader area, but it cannot directly stop an assailant, Wan said.

Close coordination among police, communities, schools and families to handle the problem is necessary to establish a mechanism for prevention, related education and the control of campus bullying, he said.

In an education campaign launched last week among primary and secondary schools nationwide, the Ministry of Education urged local authorities to guide schools in improving students' ability to protect themselves, including curbing school violence and bullying.

Remembering martyrs



Students from an elementary school polish martyrs' gravestones at a cemetery in Guanyun county, Lianyungang, Jiangsu province, on Monday. The county organized young students to pay tribute to revolutionary martyrs ahead of Tomb Sweeping Day on Thursday. WU ZHENGXIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

More international flights for summer season

By LUO WANGSHU

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China's civil aviation sector is accelerating the resumption of international passenger flights, aiming to connect travelers with more destinations as the summer season kicks off.

The new season, which began Sunday and runs through Oct 26, will see over 12,600 weekly international passenger flights operated by 122 Chinese and international airlines. They will link China to 66 countries, representing a significant increase from previous periods.

More than 4,600 weekly freight flights, operated by 67 Chinese and international airlines and connecting 46 countries, have also been approved.

The number of international passenger flights is continuing to grow, with the recent restoration of flights to Ireland just one example.

The Civil Aviation Administration of China also said one additional domestic airline and two additional foreign airlines will be operating international passenger

flights this summer. The passenger market in neighboring countries has also recovered significantly, with substantial increases in passenger flights to Vietnam, Japan, Laos and Russia.

Since the introduction of relaxed visa policies for travelers from both sides, flights to countries such as Hungary, Austria, Spain, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore are expected to see significant increases during the new season.

The international cargo market is also expected to experience steady growth, with significant increases expected in services to European markets such as Spain, France and Belgium.

The administration said it will guide all airlines to continue increasing capacity and adding more flight routes between China and countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative to meet travelers' needs and better serve national strategies.

Measures will also be taken to promote the accelerated recovery of international passenger flights.

China's international civil aviation market was badly affected by

the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of flights between the world's two largest economies — the United States and China — has been in the spotlight since China adjusted pandemic travel restrictions in January last year.

More direct flights between the two countries will be introduced during the new season.

Dai Jun, deputy director of the administration's operation center, said Chinese and US airlines will now be allowed to operate 100 round trips a week. At the start of the year there were just 63 a week.

At the start of the new season, 52 round trips a week are planned to be operated between Beijing Capital International Airport and various destinations in the United States: 18 to San Francisco, 10 to New York, eight to Los Angeles, four to Washington, six to Boston and six to Seattle.

Air China, the national flag carrier, has increased the number of direct passenger flights it operates between China and the US to 14 a week, up from 11, since Sunday.

“Compared to the pre-pandemic days in 2019, the number of flights

between China and the US will return to about 20 percent,” said Liu Peng from Air China.

With more international flights planned, more international passengers can travel to China and more Chinese can travel abroad.

Shi Zeyi, deputy director of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism's international exchange and cooperation bureau, told a recent news conference that the number of entries and exits of foreigners in January and February reached 2.94 million, an increase of 2.3 times compared to the previous two months, and has recovered to 41.5 percent of the level before the pandemic.

During the Spring Festival in February, the effects of China's visa-free policy became evident, with an increase in tourists from countries such as France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Malaysia and Singapore, which had been recently added to the list of countries eligible for visa-free entry into China, Shi said.

The country will continue to take measures to attract more foreign visitors to China, he said.

Guangzhou airport improves tourist services

By ZHENG CAIXIONG in Guangzhou

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Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport, a major aviation hub in southern China, is ramping up efforts to create a world-class experience for international travelers by improving visa application services, customs clearance and payment options.

The airport recently launched its first optimized payment service demonstration zone, offering foreign visitors easier access to currency exchange and electronic payment options upon arrival. The initiative, a collaboration between Guangzhou's commerce bureau, financial committee and the central bank, aims to streamline the arrival process for business people and tourists.

“We're strengthening cooperation with various airport authorities to better serve international travelers,” said Liu Jindong, an official with Guangzhou's commerce bureau. “This includes simplifying procedures and offering dedicated support for those coming to Guangzhou for business, sightseeing or exhibitions.”

The airport currently boasts seven currency exchange centers and a dedicated consultation counter for overseas visitors seeking payment assistance. Since the beginning of the year, the centers have processed over 14,000 transactions, with over 4,700 foreign passengers utilizing currency exchange services last month alone.

Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport, one of the busiest airports

on the Chinese mainland, plays a crucial role in connecting the southern metropolis to the world. The recent service improvements further support the city's goal of promoting international exchange and fostering high-quality development.

For the 135th China Import and Export Fair, commonly known as the Canton Fair, which will open on April 15, the China Foreign Trade Center will establish dedicated counters at the airport. They will allow foreign business attendees to avoid lengthy queues by applying for necessary documents and certificates for the fair upon arrival, instead of having to visit the fair complex in Haizhu district.

“Coming to Guangzhou is becoming increasingly convenient,” said one foreign business representative

who recently attended a furniture expo in the city. “The airport offers counters specifically designed to guide visitors with setting up digital payment options, and even my hotel provides manual currency exchange services.”

“These improvements eliminate the need to carry large amounts of cash when visiting Guangzhou.” Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport has witnessed a significant surge in passenger traffic this year, with over 3.1 million inbound and outbound passengers recorded as of Thursday — a year-on-year increase of nearly 250 percent.

The airport has also facilitated visa-free entry and transit for nearly 280,000 foreign nationals, highlighting its growing importance as an international travel hub.

Four dead after thunderstorms batter Nanchang

By ZHAO RUINAN in Nanchang

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Four people died and more than 10 others were injured when severe thunderstorms and heavy rainfall struck Nanchang, in East China's Jiangxi province, early Sunday morning, China Central Television reported on Monday.

Around 3 am on Sunday, Nanchang was struck by strong winds, thunderstorms and heavy rainfall.

Many residents posted videos online, with footage showing shattered windows at one home, and shards of glass scattered on the ground.

Earlier on Monday, local media outlets reported that three people fell to their deaths in a residential area on Bayuehu Road in the city's Nanchang county during the

extreme weather. The disaster reduction division of the Jiangxi Meteorological Service confirmed the incident, but the cause of the fatalities in Nanchang county remains unknown and is under investigation by the local public security department.

On Monday afternoon, Nanchang's disaster reduction office sent a mobile phone message to residents of the city saying that another severe convective weather process was expected to hit the city from Monday to Saturday.

People were advised to pay attention to meteorological disaster forecasts and take appropriate precautions.

Photographs posted on social media showed uprooted trees in several neighborhoods in Nanchang due to strong winds and

heavy rainfall, and air conditioning units that had fallen from buildings. About 1,600 trees were uprooted in Honggutan district.

The heavy rainfall affected residential areas near Xiang Lake and some neighborhoods in Nanchang county the most.

Cao Lei, who lives in the city's Xihu district, said the rainfall there was relatively light and had little impact.

On Monday, the China Meteorological Administration forecast moderate to heavy rainfall for much of the country during the Tomb Sweeping Day holiday from Thursday to Saturday.

Over the next 10 days, overcast skies and rainy weather are expected in Southwest China's Guizhou province, Central China's Hubei province, and the provinces of

Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Zhejiang and Anhui in East China, as well as Shanghai.

Meanwhile, a hydrologist cautioned that due to the impact of extreme weather, this year's flood season, which started on Monday, will feature both droughts and floods, with floods being more widespread.

Hou Aizhong, the chief hydrological forecaster at the Ministry of Water Resources' information center, said that the seven major rivers in China — the Yangtze, Yellow, Haihe, Liaohe, Huaihe, Songhuajiang and Pearl — are likely to experience different levels of flooding, with other regions potentially facing intermittent droughts.

Jiangxi province is situated in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze.

Art of recycling



An art installation comprising 199 used skateboards on display at an environmental art exhibition at The Hub commercial complex in Shanghai on Monday. Twelve art pieces in the exhibition created using waste materials such as old clothing, plastic bottles and used batteries aim to increase visitors' environmental awareness. TANG YANJUN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

CHINA



From left: Li Na (right) wears *hanfu* while holding the national flag with her friend at a variety show in celebration of the 25th anniversary of Hong Kong returning to the motherland last year. Li wears *hanfu* and Tang Dynasty (618-907) makeup while modeling for a class on beauty in ancient times. Li poses at a traditional horticultural garden. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Classic clothing hurrayed in Hong Kong

Traditional Chinese garments gaining appeal, recognition at international hub where East meets West

By ATLAS SHAO in Hong Kong
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A birthday surprise is not easy to come by for 90-year-old Wong, having lived through the majority of the length and breadth of human experience, but dressing up in traditional Chinese *hanfu* this year came as a welcome treat.

For a group birthday party this year, Wong and her friends decided to dress up in the ancient Chinese attire, don elegant makeup, and get their photos taken.

It's remarkable what a bit of dress-up can do to liven up a party, with almost all guests making a point of saying they would like to do it again with their grandchildren and other friends and relatives.

Li Na, vice-chairwoman of the Chinese Culture and Hong Kong Hanfu Association, one of the event's organizers, said this response was typical.

She told China Daily that *hanfu* is gaining an increasing following in Hong Kong among people of different age groups, and that her association is growing by the day.

"At first, we only had a dozen or so pieces of *hanfu*, and our members would just need to keep them at home and take them out when needed. Now, we have over 100 pieces and need to rent a warehouse for storage," she said.

Li said joining the association over three years ago changed her life.

After finishing her day job as an office worker, Li, driven by a passion for ancient Chinese history and culture, became committed to promoting and organizing *hanfu*-related activities.

"The promotion of *hanfu* has become easier than before. With exposure growing on social media platforms, more and more people are interested and willing to learn about it," Li said.

The association constantly receives inquiries about events and invitations to collaborate from different sectors, she said.

Interest has been increased through a variety of different interactive events such as trying on *hanfu* and making *hanfu* accessories, which are held in Hong Kong as many as three times a month.

Gaining traction

Lin Zhihui, a fellow from the Department of Chinese History and Culture at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, teaches ancient clothing-themed courses and once served as a judge in a *hanfu* model-



Hanfu lovers browse for snacks at a fair celebrating Spring Festival in Hong Kong on Feb 4. ZHU WEI / XINHUA

ing competition. She agreed there is a trend that young people are more willing to take part in *hanfu* activities or wear *hanfu* to attend special occasions.

"When the *hanfu* modeling competition was held at Lok Fu Place (a mall in central Kowloon) in 2023, every floor was filled with people looking on," Lin said.

She said people are more willing to express themselves and wear *hanfu*, and even incorporate it with modern dress such as by wearing a blouse on top. These changes allow people to wear *hanfu* on more occasions in their daily lives.

As for the influence these changes may have on *hanfu*'s characteristics, Lin said the tradition itself is changeable, flexible and inclusive. As *hanfu* can be made more practical in modern society, it may encourage more people to try and learn more about it, thus helping promote the traditional attire in the mainstream, she said.

Han Yike, 23, who works in education, fell in love with *hanfu* six years ago, and said she always wears *hanfu* at traditional festivals or major events.

"The beauty of *hanfu* goes beyond its gorgeous appearance; it's unique and elegant," she said.



Hanfu lovers participate in a celebration of the Mid-Autumn Festival in Hong Kong on Sept 29. HOU YU / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Chinese style

Hanfu joins another form of traditional dress in Hong Kong that has long been preserved in the city — cheongsam, or *qipao* in Mandarin Chinese.

The sewing techniques used in Hong Kong-style cheongsam were included among 20 items inscribed into the city's first-ever representative list of intangible cultural heritage in 2017. It was later included

on the national list in 2021.

Haze Ng Kwok-hei, a committee member of the Hong Kong Cheongsam Association, told China Daily that Hong Kong is the best place in the world for preserving and passing on the art of cheongsam. Ng said in the 1950s, a large group of skilled tailors from Shanghai moved to Hong Kong, fueling the development of the city's tailoring industry. Cheongsam has appeared in sev-

eral acclaimed Hong Kong films, including *In the Mood for Love* in 2000, starring Hong Kong actress Maggie Cheung Man-yuk.

The glory days of the Hong Kong film industry have also served as a springboard, thrusting traditional attire representing Chinese culture into the international arena.

Technology and tradition

Despite flutters with the silver screen, the traditional techniques used to make cheongsam are being passed down to fewer and fewer people these days, due in part to modern technology and the fact the skills often take from three to seven years to master.

According to Ng, many cheongsam products on the market share only a similar shape to the authentic traditional dress.

For example, Ng said, a standard female cheongsam should have at least three things — a standing collar, be folded left over right, and two side slits.

"There is no zipper on the back of a traditional cheongsam, but most of the ones sold on the market today have back zippers," she said.

Although authentic cheongsam cannot be mass-produced, Ng said that Hong Kong's mature garment

technology can still help promote and popularize it so that the public can understand more about the traditional garment.

Ng added there is no conflict between tradition and modernity.

In the production of modern cheongsam, some new garment techniques include 3D printing, laser engraving and digital jacquard.

There are also more innovative fabric choices for making cheongsam available such as gambiered Guangdong gauze, corduroy and suit fabric. Ng said computer-aided pattern generation and digital jacquard weaving technology have been applied to reinvent men's cheongsam. By using the computer to draw the pattern, designers can overlay it onto the template and the computer can automatically align the pattern at the front, middle and back seams, saving twice as much fabric in the production process.

Joanne Lau Yee-kwan, a senior lecturer of the Department of Fashion and Image Design at the Hong Kong Design Institute, told China Daily that there are a growing number of textile technologies and modern fashion elements being applied to traditional Chinese attire. For instance, 3D printing can be used to create complex patterns and effects, and even be applied to buttons and lace embellishments.

Additionally, textile materials that are antibacterial, stain-resistant or self-cleaning can enhance the functionality and durability of clothes. Modern fashion elements such as innovative deconstructive tailoring and environmentally friendly design approaches can be employed to revitalize *hanfu*, making it more suitable for the needs and tastes of contemporary people and more accessible to the general public, she said.

The acceptance of *hanfu* hit another level when the city's culture, sports and tourism chief Kevin Yeung Yun-hung, dressed in it to promote the city's tourism with two other officials in a video last year.

In Lin's opinion, Hong Kong, as an East-meets-West city, has an inherent advantage in promoting traditional Chinese clothing, as it attracts people from all over the world.

Echoing Lin, Li believes the acceptance of *hanfu* is on the rise in Hong Kong.

"In the past, when we wore *hanfu* on the street, others always cast a strange look and even mistook it for Japanese or Korean clothing. However, now, many people will compliment us and proactively ask if it is *hanfu*," said Li, believing that people's recognition of traditional Chinese attire will continue to grow.

Cheongsam makers strive to pass on craftsmanship

By ATLAS SHAO in Hong Kong

Hong Kong had over 2,000 cheongsam makers in the 1960s when the city's tailoring industry was booming. That number has fallen to around five today, according to Lau On-hing, a master cheongsam maker with 60 years under his belt.

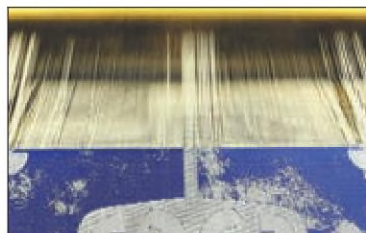
Lau, in an interview in 2022, said that Hong Kong is the only place where the traditional technique of hand-sewing cheongsam is still being inherited. However, that is about to change as the city's youngest cheongsam master

is already in his 70s and the number of serving masters who are proficient in men's and women's cheongsam can be counted on one hand.

Haze Ng Kwok-hei, a committee member of the Hong Kong Cheongsam Association, said the craftsmanship of cheongsam, especially in the production of men's cheongsam, is at risk of being lost.

"What academia is doing now is to preserve the master skills as soon as possible," he said.

"We are engaged in a salvage effort by recording the produc-



Left: Cheongsam made with creative metallic textile is on display. The dress is developed by Kinor Jiang Shouxiang, a professor from Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Right: A digital jacquard loom knits patterns onto a cut piece. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

tion techniques of cheongsam and the stories of the older generation of inheritors through videos, books and other forms," Ng added.

In the race to rescue the traditional crafts, Ng said Hong Kong needs to build a supporting system for craftsmen of intangible cultural heritage in the special administrative region, taking reference from the mainland.

China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism released a regulation on Dec 10, 2019, on improving the identification and management of representative inheritors of

national-level intangible cultural heritage.

With such a system of preservation for intangible cultural heritage with financial support provided by the government, the preservers have the responsibility to pass on the skills to the next generation, Ng said.

In addition, Ng proposed several solutions, including documenting traditional craftsmanship, innovating the inheritance model, applying digital design and connecting with society in order to promote the inheritance of the traditional techniques.

CHINA



Models display designs made of xiabu linen produced in Chongqing's Rongchang district at a fashion show. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Inheritor innovates to keep cloth relevant

Ma Linqin strives to make linen more versatile to fit modern lifestyles

By TAN YINGZI and DENG RUI in Chongqing

A young inheritor of Chinese textile art is breathing new life into the intangible cultural heritage in Southwest China's Chongqing.

Chinese linen, or *xiabu* — literally "cloth for summer" — is a traditional handmade textile made from China grass, also known as ramie. Being hailed as the "king of natural fibers", the linen is comfortable, durable and easy to wash. It's also delicate, yet not as fragile as silk.

A variety of *xiabu* was developed in what is now Chongqing's Rongchang district during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220). Royals and nobility during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) liked wearing the linen during the summer months. It was one of the first products to be exported from the region in the 20th century, with an annual output of around 700,000 bolts.

According to the district's commission of commerce, it now exports about 3 million bolts of *xiabu* annually overseas, of which 40 percent is sold to South Korea. Over the past three years, 13 *xiabu* manufacturing companies in Rongchang have exported goods worth more than 50 billion yuan (\$6.93 billion).

In 2008, the Rongchang *xiabu* craft was listed as a national cultural



A xiabu craftsman starches ramie fiber in Rongchang.

intangible heritage. A historical area with vibrant culture and unique traditions, the district has also produced two other national cultural intangible heritages — Rongchang pottery making and the Rongchang folding fan craft.

"Sustaining intangible cultural heritages requires responsibility and perseverance," said 37-year-old Ma Linqin, a municipal-level inheritor of Rongchang *xiabu* craftsmanship.

Born in a family that has worked in the *xiabu* industry for three generations, Ma's interest in the fabric was sparked when she was a child, and she gradually learned the craft.

In 2010, Ma decided to return home shortly after graduating from college to work at her family's business — Chongqing Rongchang Denan Linen Textile, one of the pillar *xiabu* companies in the area.

It takes more than 10 procedures — including ramie fiber reaping, thread

twisting, starching, reeding, weaving, bleaching and dyeing — over a period of about 20 days to make a piece of ramie cloth, Ma said.

To produce a fine cloth, a *xiabu* craftsman has to weave thread up and down over 2,400 times on a 1.5-inch-wide loom, with both hands and feet working in smooth coordination. This is the most important and complex part of the whole process. "Although it's time-consuming and labor-intensive, we need to recognize that *xiabu* is a long-term necessity in the marketplace," Ma said.

For over a decade, the young inheritor has been experimenting with *xiabu* to find a way to broaden its use. As a result, she has pioneered designs that combine the fabric with various materials such as rice paper, silver, leather, embroidery and folding fans, and has applied for a few patents.

Her design of a notebook made of ramie cloth won the top prize in an innovation product design competition at the 54th National Crafts Trade Fair in 2019.

Xiabu has become well-known and utilized in the modern fashion design industry. Four years ago, Ma was pleasantly surprised to find a skirt made of ramie at an international flagship store. In recent years, several fashion week events and individual stage shows partly in need of *xiabu* have placed orders with her.

"*Xiabu*, a highly versatile material, is suitable for the entire modern industrial chain," she said. According to the local cultural and tourism commission, Rongchang *xiabu* has been made into more than 1,000 products, including dresses, suits, decorative paintings, embroidery, bedding, tablecloths, towels and bags. "Our products are especially favored by the petty bourgeoisie who pursue a higher quality of life, and the consumer group is becoming increasingly younger," Ma said.

Now the company is concentrating on developing products that further enrich people's lives, such as decor that embellishes living spaces. "The use of *xiabu* in home decor is also very promising," Ma said, adding that some interior designers from China, Japan and South Korea use her company's linen to create high-end, minimalist Southeast-Asian style home decor. They prefer longer-lasting *xiabu* over rattan weaving, she said.

Because it's easy to clean, the fabric is also suitable for making table flags, coasters and place mats. It can be also made into Zen products, such as meditation clothing and cushions. Ma's company is currently in talks with a Buddhist temple foundation to develop such products.

Over the past year, Ma has given school children across Chongqing lectures on the intangible cultural heritage and its aesthetic appeal, and has held various study activities.

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Rescued desert cat given satellite positioning collar

XINING — On the vast Jinyintan grasslands in the northwestern province of Qinghai, a fluffy Chinese desert cat named Huang Taiji is roaming around in search of prey. It is hard to believe this adorable, inquisitive feline was a scared, injured creature only a few months ago.

According to its rescuers, Huang Taiji was caught in a mousetrap while hunting for chickens in a herder's yard in Qinghai's Haiyan county in June. Listed as a national first-class protected animal in China, the Chinese desert cat is a precious feline species of great importance to ecological diversity.

Fortunately, the trap did not hurt the cat's bones, and it was soon rescued and transported to Xining Wildlife Park in Qinghai's capital city of Xining for treatment.

The park decided to release Huang Taiji into the wild after about a month of treatment and recovery. Together with researchers from the College of Veterinary Medicine of China Agricultural University, rescuers set the cat free on July 23. A satellite positioning collar was attached to the animal.

It was the first time a Chinese desert cat was released with a satellite positioning device attached to it, said Qi Xinzhang, deputy director of the park.

"The collar collects information concerning its latitude, longitude, altitude, temperature and even instantaneous velocity via GPS satellite positioning technology, and it uploads the data every two hours," Qi said.

Thanks to such information, Qi and his colleagues can effectively monitor the cat's condition and activities. "We can tell from the collected data whether the cat is captured or injured, and thus offer timely aid should any emergency happen," he added.

The collar not only provides researchers with quick solutions to save the cat's life. In addition, Qi is able to pinpoint Huang Taiji's movement range on a satellite map, which revealed a total range measuring about 200 square kilometers, while highlighting a 36-sq-km area where the cat spent most of its time. "Previous research suggested that the average active area of Chinese desert cats was only about 3.3 sq km. With insights provided by the collar, we learned that the roaming area for the cat is much larger, shedding new light on related studies," Qi said.

Based on collected data, the park workers set up eight infrared cameras in the areas where Huang Taiji was most commonly found, and obtained lots of valu-



Chinese desert cat Huang Taiji is outfitted with a satellite tracking collar at Xining Wildlife Park in Xining, Qinghai, before returning to the wild on July 23.

QI XINZHANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

“We now have a better understanding of the living environment, diet and natural rivals of Chinese desert cats, all thanks to the collar.”

Qi Xinzhang, deputy director of Xining Wildlife Park

able information about the cat and other wild animals in the area. "We now have a better understanding of the living environment, diet and natural rivals of Chinese desert cats, all thanks to the collar," Qi said.

Satellite positioning technology not only offers a more efficient way to protect and study the Chinese desert cats, but is also empowering wildlife preservation in other places in China.

According to a report released by China's Beidou Navigation Satellite System, satellite positioning devices have been used for the protection and research of endangered animals ranging from Asian elephants to giant pandas. In addition to accurate positioning data, the system also offers innovative functions, including signal-free telegraph communication, enabling field researchers to track animals in remote areas.

Qi believes technologies such as satellite positioning are the future of wildlife preservation.

"We will keep releasing rescued Chinese desert cats fitted with satellite positioning collars, and initiate artificial breeding of these cats based on what we have learned," he said.

XINHUA

Ningxia wine grape growers brace for late cold as spring arrives

YINCHUAN — With the arrival of warm spring weather, the vast plantation of wine grapes at the eastern foot of Helan Mountain in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region will soon be waking up from hibernation.

The wine grapes will begin to sprout, starting a new life-cycle. However, they still need to pull through the likely late cold waves.

"The buds are too tender to survive the frost, which usually lasts for 20 days and always comes at midnight. At this time of year, we have to stay up all night to reduce the damage," said Zhang Tao, 51, who is responsible for over 173 hectares of wine grapes at Ningxia's Hongsipu winery.

However, this year he is less worried about possible frost disasters thanks to 50 "giant stoves" provided by Ningxia's meteorological department.

"Those stoves will be arranged upwind to protect the vineyard from cold waves," said Zhang, adding that they reduced the damage by at least 35 percent last spring.

The 2-meter-high stoves are actually iron buckets with "two doors" that burn the dead vines cut during the previous autumn. The holes uniformly distributed across their surface enable the fire to get plenty of oxygen, according to the inventor, Zhang Xiaoyu, who is the chief engineer at the

meteorological research institute under the regional weather bureau of Ningxia.

"Those holes work as windows that control the burning temperatures and speed by controlling the oxygen," said the expert. "When the cold wave arrives, the fires act like an air conditioner on windy days, heating every corner of the vineyard. On sunny days, the strong smoke keeps the vineyard warm like a blanket."

More importantly, said Zhang Xiaoyu, the stoves are cheap, removable and recyclable, costing just 200 yuan (\$27) each, with a working life of over 10 years.

By last year, the planting area of wine grapes in Ningxia had reached 40,133 hectares. With prolonged sunshine and a cool, dry climate, the autonomous region has become a rising star on the world wine map for its top-class wines, and it is also considered a "golden zone" for other fruits such as goji berries, apples and apricots.

However, against the backdrop of global warming, there has been a rise in extreme weather in recent years, bringing with it an increase in damage. Meteorological phenomena such as frost and hail pose a serious threat to the fruit industry.

The Chinese government has made great efforts to guarantee the high-quality development of



Workers prepare to tie vines for grapes in the spring at a plantation at the eastern foot of Helan Mountain in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region on March 16. WANG PENG / XINHUA

agriculture through refined meteorological services. Ningxia, for example, established a weather service center for the wine industry and also developed an effective disaster prevention and relief system, which aims to reduce weather-related losses by 15 percent each year, increasing the ecological sustainability of vineyards.

Zhang Xiaoyu, who is responsible for the program, spends at least three months every year on research and development. Apart from the stoves, he has also developed a digital frost-prevention system that can be used on almost all open orchards.

"The system can provide farmers with precise weekly weather reports and detailed frost alarms

in advance. In combination, these two methods can make a 'firewall' to keep out the cold," said Zhang, who is busy lecturing and demonstrating in the field these days.

Among those keen to learn is villager Chen Shixiong, who listens carefully to Zhang and asks questions from time to time.

"The frost sneaks in to attack our orchard almost every year at

midnight, especially in the blooming season. Zhang's lecture is important and helpful, and we shouldn't always respond passively," said the 58-year-old, who owns an apple orchard in Yongkang township, part of Shapotou district in Zhongwei, Ningxia.

Shapotou is Ningxia's main area for apple production, with a planting area of 4,400 hectares, and nearly 4,000 households from about 10 villages living near the orchards.

The economic losses from frequent frost disasters have undermined the confidence of some villagers in the apple business, according to Wu Qingbao, the deputy town chief. However, this year, they will take Zhang's advice and set up 18 automatic weather stations and prepare stoves in advance, along with the necessary fuel.

"We prune the vines every year, and the dead wood will come in handy. We've checked to ensure that the fire won't send out sparks, and it's safe," Wu said. "We have to admit that the weather service is playing an increasing role in people's lives and production activities."

Zhang Xiaoyu is happy to see that more and more villagers have been mobilized to engage in mass prevention and treatment. Meanwhile, Zhang Tao also hopes nearby wineries will do the same and jointly take precautions to make the "firewall" more solid.

XINHUA

WORLD

More flights take off under bilateral pact

Airliners, passengers applaud deal as China, US agree to increase frequency

By MINGMEI LI in New York
mingmeili@chinadailyusa.com

As passengers from Beijing land at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport, travelers from New York are checking in their baggage.

On Sunday, Air China operated the first round-trip flight from Beijing to New York after China and the United States reached an agreement to increase the number of Chinese passenger flights. Chinese airlines can now operate 50 weekly flights, up from the previous 35.

Both countries are making efforts to gradually restore air travel by increasing the frequency of direct passenger flights, which were interrupted by COVID-19.

The US Department of Transportation had said it was in talks with the Civil Aviation Administration of China about a "gradual" resumption of bilateral air services.

Several Chinese passenger airlines have announced more round-trip flights between major cities starting March 31.

China Eastern Airlines will add two weekly flights from Shanghai to Los Angeles and one weekly flight from Shanghai to San Francisco. China Southern Airlines will introduce one new weekly flight from Guangzhou to Los Angeles, followed by two new weekly flights from Guangzhou to San Francisco.

Air China is adding one more round-trip flight from Beijing to Los Angeles, and adding two more direct round-trip flights between Beijing and New York to meet the demand for passenger travel.

Upon the launch of the additional flights, the seat occupancy rate reached more than 90 percent.

"I haven't been there (China) in such a long time because of the pandemic, but I usually go quite often," Don Rad, 61, told China Daily.

"I intend to go to China more often, and this flight goes in Beijing and (connected flight in China) then goes into Shanghai, that's a pretty good convenience for me."

Rad said he would like to see more flights from the East Coast in the US to more cities in China.

"I love China, and I love the people of China. They've always been nice

to me and vice versa," he said, adding that more flights will contribute to more understanding between people of China and the US.

Wang Zhiyong, Air China New York office's general manager, told China Daily in a recent interview: "With the addition of these two new flights, our airline will now operate five flights per week, making travel between the two regions more convenient."

"Flying direct from New York to Beijing does help my travel plans overall. I only had to take an hour's flight from Toronto to here, and then that's a direct flight," Mary Grace Liu told China Daily. "Straight to China is very helpful."

Visiting list

Liu is traveling with her husband to Beijing and spending about two weeks visiting her husband's family in Beijing, and later traveling to Xi'an for a few days. "The Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, the Temple of Heaven, pretty much all the tourist places," she said.

Liu visited Shanghai five years ago, and she said she was very excited about her second visit.

Operating the first flight between China and the US after the increase in the number of flights, Air China is strengthening its operational support from the ground to the air.

"We will closely monitor developments in China-US aviation relations and take additional steps to expand flight operations. This commitment reflects our ongoing dedication to fostering bilateral economic, trade and cultural ties between our two nations," stated Air China in a news release.

"As cultural and tourism exchanges between China and the US increase, tourists are eagerly anticipating the addition of more flights, especially direct flights," Wang said.

US students will begin their summer vacations sooner, in May, while Chinese students will have their vacations in July and August, Wang said. Adding more flights can provide more seats and greater convenience for travelers from both countries during the summer vacation, he said.

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Protest in Seoul



Union representatives from training hospitals hold a news conference on Monday in Seoul, calling for the early restoration of diagnosis and treatment to the public. YONHAP PHOTO

US approves new military aid to Israel

By AI HEPING in New York
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The United States has recently approved the authorization of billions of dollars' worth of bombs and fighter jets to Israel, though the Biden administration continues to publicly express concerns about rising civilian casualties in the Gaza enclave.

The new arms packages include more than 1,800 MK84 2,000-pound bombs and 500 MK82 500-pound bombs, said the sources, who confirmed a Washington Post report.

Rifts have emerged between the US and Israel over the conduct of the war, but the Biden administration views weapons transfers as off-limits when considering how to influence the actions of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, according to the Post.

"We have continued to support Israel's right to defend itself," a White House official told the Post. "Conditioning aid has not been our policy."

The US provides \$3.8 billion in annual military assistance to its

longtime ally.

Politico reported that it will be years before the weapons arrive in Israel.

The 2,000-pound bombs, which can inflict damage to people up to 1,000 feet (300 meters) away, have been "linked to previous mass-casualty events throughout Israel's military campaign in Gaza," the Post reported.

Some Democrats, including allies of President Joe Biden, say the US government has a responsibility to withhold weapons in the absence of an Israeli commitment to limit civilian casualties during a planned operation in Rafah, a final Hamas stronghold, and ease restrictions on humanitarian aid into the enclave, which is on the brink of famine.

Washington's support for Israel has ranked some Democrats in Congress, some of whom have called for more transparency in arms transfers and raised questions about whether the authorization of older unfilled cases is an effort to avoid new notifications to Congress, which could face scrutiny, the Post reported.

"The Biden administration needs to use their leverage effectively and, in my view, they should receive these basic commitments before greenlighting more bombs for Gaza," Maryland Democratic Senator Chris Van Hollen told the Post. "We need to back up what we say with what we do."

Reporting from Washington, Al Jazeera said the transfer "amounts to about \$2.5 billion," adding that "this is taking place despite a growing rift between both the Israeli and US governments."

While Washington is publicly pressuring Israel to "dial back" its war in Gaza, its policy moves are sending an entirely different signal, Marc Owen Jones, associate professor of Middle East studies at Hamad Bin Khalifa University, told Al Jazeera.

On Saturday, the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticized the US, posting on X that "demanding Netanyahu to stop killing civilians and supplying him with weapons is an unprecedented principled and moral contradiction."

Moscow tells Kyiv to extradite security chief

By REN QI in Moscow
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Russia is demanding that Ukraine hand over all those who have been connected to terrorist acts committed in Russia, including the head of Ukraine's SBU Security Service, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Sunday.

The SBU immediately dismissed the demand as "pointless".

In a statement, the Russian Foreign Ministry listed violent incidents that have occurred in Russia since the conflict broke out in February 2022, including bombings that killed the daughter of a prominent nationalist and blogger, and an incident in which a writer was seriously hurt.

The ministry said investigations of these incidents showed that "the traces of these crimes lead to Ukraine".

"Russia has turned over to Ukrainian authorities its demands ... for the immediate arrest and extradition of all those connected to the terrorist acts in question," the statement said.

"Ukraine's violation of its obligations under anti-terrorist conventions will result in it being held to account in international legal terms."

"The Russian side demands that Kyiv immediately cease all support

for terrorist activity, extradite guilty parties and compensate the victims for damages."

The statement also referred to the recent mass shooting at a concert hall in Moscow in which 144 people died.

Alexander Bastrykin, head of Russia's Investigative Committee, the country's most important criminal investigation body, was quoted by Russian news agencies as saying on Sunday that work was proceeding to determine who was behind the attack.

SBU head Vasyl Maliuk earlier acknowledged that his agency was behind attacks on the bridge linking Crimea to the Russian mainland since Russia's special military operation in Ukraine began.

Maliuk last week dismissed Moscow's calls to arrest him, after giving a television interview detailing extrajudicial killings of Ukraine's opponents in Russia.

Stepping up campaign

On the front line, the Russian Defense Ministry said its air force has conducted a massive strike on objects of energy infrastructure and the gas industry inside Ukraine.

For over a week, Russia has stepped up an airstrike campaign against Ukrainian energy facilities,

leaving many fearing a return to blackouts seen during the first winter of the full-scale conflict.

Ukraine's largest private energy firm DTEK said on Saturday that five of its six plants had been damaged or destroyed with 80 percent of its generating capacity lost, and that repairs could take up to 18 months.

Ukrainian energy company Centrengo also announced that the Zmiiv Thermal Power Plant, one of the largest in the northeastern Kharkiv region, was completely destroyed following Russian shelling last week. Power outage schedules were still in place for about 120,000 people in the region, where 700,000 had lost electricity after the plant was hit on March 22.

In a message on Sunday to mark the date when some of Ukraine's Christians celebrate Easter, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky urged the country to persevere.

Meanwhile in Russia, 10 Czech-made Vampire rockets landed in the Belgorod region on Sunday, the Ministry of Defense said.

One woman was injured when a fire broke out following the attack, Belgorod Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said. Another woman was killed as shelling hit villages along the Russian border.

Washington urged to respect rule of law in Hong Kong

By ZHOU JIN
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China will take resolute countermeasures if the United States imposes visa restrictions on Hong Kong officials, the Foreign Ministry said on Monday, urging Washington to stop meddling in the region's affairs by any means.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced the decision in a statement regarding the 2024 Hong Kong Policy Act Report, which was released on Friday.

Blinken said the visa curbs will be imposed on multiple Hong Kong officials "responsible for the intensifying crackdown on rights and freedoms".

The statement did not mention the officials who would be targeted.

China deplores and opposes the so-called report, and has made serious demarches to the US, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a daily news conference.

Wang said Washington released the report to discredit the Law on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the region's electoral system and the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance.

It also slanders Hong Kong's democracy, rule of law as well as human rights and freedom, he added.

Wang slammed the report for "confusing right and wrong and calling white as black", saying that the move severely interfered with Hong Kong affairs, which is China's domestic affairs, and violated the principles of international law and the basic norms governing international relations.

After the implementation of the national security law and the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance, as well as revising and improving the electoral system, Hong Kong has been equipped with a solid barrier that safeguards national security, the spokesman said.

It also ensures the implementation of the principle of patriots administering Hong Kong, Wang said.

Rights safeguarded

Such practices have protected Hong Kong's prosperity and stability, and safeguarded Hong Kong residents' various rights and freedoms in accordance with the law.

Hong Kong has restored order and is set to thrive, Wang said, adding that the "one country, two systems" is implemented steadily on the right track.

The spokesman stressed that the Chinese government has unwavering resolve in safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests, implementing the "one country, two systems", and opposing external interference in Hong Kong affairs.

Beijing urged Washington to earnestly respect China's sovereignty and the rule of law in Hong Kong, he said.

Chinese expertise expected to boost Asian countries' supply chains

By XU WEIWEI in Boao, Hainan
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The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the need to enhance the robustness of global supply chains, and one way to do that is to boost the resilience of the industry chains in Asia by building on the strengths of the regional powerhouse China, an academic and industry observer said.

John Quelch, executive vice-chancellor of Duke Kunshan University, which is based in Kunshan, China's Jiangsu province, said that Asian countries, particularly members of the Association of Southeast Asian

Nations, can "piggyback" on China to improve their supply chains.

Speaking to China Daily last week on the sidelines of the Boao Forum for Asia 2024 Annual Conference in Boao, Hainan province, Quelch said the Belt and Road Initiative has served as an important vehicle for Chinese investments overseas, aiding other nations in accelerating their economic development.

The BRI has been a "very, very important initiative on behalf of China, and I'm very confident that many recipients of BRI investments and collaborations have benefited," said the expert, whose academic career includes a stint as a professor of



John Quelch

business administration at Harvard Business School in the United States.

In the supply chain area, the major advantage of the Asian region is that China, as a powerhouse of Asia, is responsible for 30 percent of manufacturing output worldwide, and that core capability is something that all Asian economies can build on, Quelch said.

"That means that other Asian countries can piggyback, in a way, on the reputation that China has built, and also on the reliance of other parts of the world on Asia-based supply chains," he said.

Among other strengths of China, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region can serve as the leverage for Southeast Asian countries to efficiently channel export goods to the entire world, Quelch said.

The Hong Kong SAR and Singapore will both flourish "once we can really further boost global supply chains, and get them back to the pre-COVID level", Quelch said.

Better coordination

"What needs to happen is better coordination across borders within ASEAN, and the Asia region more broadly, to ensure there is a free flow of goods without impediment from tariffs and non-tariff barriers."

In regard to geopolitics undermining Asian economic prospects, he said conflicts are always negative, and that peace is important.

That said, the region can still

overcome obstacles and ride new opportunities, he said.

A tremendous opportunity in the supply chain area comes from the application of artificial intelligence and blockchain technology, which will add tremendous value and bring down costs in the global supply chain, Quelch said.

He said technological improvement and innovation are always a source of potential advancement for mankind. If new technologies are harnessed appropriately, they can help move all people toward a more prosperous and peaceful lifestyle.

"So, this is a great opportunity for all of our companies internationally to get behind global standards that will enable the blockchain technology to be applied successfully to the global supply of goods and services."

BUSINESS

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HIGHER GROUND

Carriers sanguine on travel season

By ZHONG NAN
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China Southern Airlines, the country's largest carrier by passenger volume, will initiate a number of international routes between China and various offshore destinations during the summer-autumn flight season, said a senior executive on Monday.

The Guangzhou, Guangdong province-based group will launch new air routes including Guangzhou to London Gatwick International Airport and Doha, Qatar; Beijing Daxing International Airport to Tehran, Iran and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; and Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region to Moscow, from March 31 to Oct 26 this year.

In the meantime, China Southern Airlines will fly 188 international and regional routes, reaching countries and regions such as Europe, the Americas, Australia and New Zealand, Southeast Asia, Japan, South Korea and Africa.

The carrier opened a new route between Beijing Daxing International Airport and the Macao Special Administrative Region on Monday. These expansions are in response to China's favorable policies for inbound tourism and the steady recovery of the global tourism market, said Qu Guangji, vice-president of China Southern Airlines.

For example, thanks to visa-free policies for Chinese visitors, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore ranked as major overseas destina-



Passengers get off a China Southern plane at Langzhong Gucheng Airport in Nanchong, Sichuan province. WANG YUGUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

tions in terms of flight booking volumes in March, according to Qunar, a Beijing-based online travel agency. According to a report released by the Beijing-based China Tourism Academy, with the increasing momentum of the tourism market in China and the growing willingness of residents to travel abroad, it is predicted that the number of outbound tourists in 2024 will reach 130 million.

China Southern Airlines currently owns more than 900 passenger and cargo transport aircraft. It operates more than 3,000 daily flights to 224 destinations in 40 countries and regions across the world.

Air China, another major Chinese airline, recently announced that it will start its summer and autumn flight schedule for 2024 from midnight on March 31. The updated schedule will feature 96 international passenger routes, allowing the company to serve 40 countries and

regions across 187 cities.

The Beijing-based airline will increase the frequency of 25 international and regional routes, including Beijing to Los Angeles, New York, Frankfurt, Stockholm, Athens, Geneva, Budapest and Vienna during the summer-autumn flight season. The service frequency of European routes will surpass the operational level in 2019.

With China creating more favorable conditions to facilitate foreigners to visit the country, Club Med SAS, a Paris-based travel and tourism operator, has launched a number of promotional programs in cities such as Lijiang, Yunnan province, and Guilin, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region in late March, to attract international guests to visit the country to enjoy its rich cultural heritage, natural landscapes, vibrant urban scenes and diverse local lifestyles.

In the first two months of 2024,

Club Med's business volume in the Chinese market experienced a 74 percent increase compared to the same period last year. The company currently operates nearly 70 resorts in 26 countries and regions.

The surge in overseas tourist arrivals can be attributed to China's implementation of visa-free policies for a number of countries like Switzerland and Ireland, and the recent introduction of several measures aimed at simplifying entry procedures, said Andrew Xu, CEO of Club Med China.

"With a robust demand for skiing and summer vacations across all regions, we anticipate a sustained increase in bookings throughout 2024. China is one of Club Med's most crucial markets," said Xu.

"Leveraging Club Med's global channels and resources, and supported by favorable entry and exit policies, we welcome more overseas guests to China," he added.

Expert sees high potential for economy

Nation will remain key contributor to global growth going forward

By OUYANG SHIJIA
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Erik Berglof

"But one should not think of this in such negative terms, because it also means that when China expands the economy per capita, China will become richer,

even if the overall growth rate may not be as high as it could have been compared to other countries with a different demographic structure," he said.

Berglof highlighted China's pivotal role in promoting sustainable global growth, saying the country is dedicated to achieving the goal of peaking carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and reaching carbon neutrality before 2060. "I think that's very good news for China, but also good news for the world as a whole."

"China has made a major contribution by bringing down the costs of renewables so much and also now with electric vehicles. That is a contribution to the world," he said.

Berglof said multilateral development banks such as AIIB will play a key role in bringing new technologies and innovation to emerging and developing economies, and helping them address global challenges of climate change and biodiversity law.

"We need to find ways of really investing in climate mitigation, climate adaptation and nature," he said. "I think the multilateral development banks can work with governments and the private sector to put in place plans that can really help these countries address climate change."

Last year, AIIB launched its 2023 Asian Infrastructure Finance report titled "Nature as infrastructure," which offers a transformative approach for recognizing the value of nature and enhancing investment in the protection of nature and biodiversity. It includes nature-based solutions, direct investments into nature assets to sustain critical infrastructure-like services and directing more finance toward nature.

"There are a lot of things that nature can do, and we need to make sure that we value this property," Berglof said. "I think the trade-off between growth and addressing climate change is overplayed. If you want to achieve growth and improve innovation, a lot of the innovation in the future will be about how to more effectively address these global challenges of climate change and biodiversity law."

China's economy is resilient and has great potential despite facing short-term challenges, and it is a major contributor to global economic growth, the chief economist of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank said.

According to Erik Berglof, China "has been and will remain an important contributor to global growth in the foreseeable future."

"There is a huge potential in the Chinese economy," Berglof told China Daily in an exclusive interview recently. "China graduates around 1.5 million engineers every year. There's a lot of potential for technological development, more productivity and more economic growth."

However, the broader economy is still facing downward pressures, including uncertainty in the private sector and weakness in the property sector, which may continue to drag down growth over the short term, he said.

"What China needs to do is exactly what is being announced," he said. "China needs to create clear conditions and rules on how the private sector can contribute. It needs to focus on innovation, trying to bring new ideas and new ways of organizing things. All that is part of China's contribution to the global economy."

China's economy is showing fresh signs of steady recovery following effective measures by the government to boost confidence, stabilize expectations and bolster demand.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed that China's official purchasing managers index for the manufacturing sector rose to 50.8 in March from 49.1 in February, climbing into expansionary territory for the first time in six months.

Berglof also said that China setting an annual growth rate target of around 5 percent for 2024 is reasonable and ambitious, and provides a solid foundation for shaping economic policies going forward.

Dismissing speculation that the Chinese economy is showing signs of peaking, Berglof said "it's quite natural that growth pace slows down as an economy reaches the world frontier."

He noted that China is facing demographic challenges, particularly due to a declining birthrate, saying that it has significant implications for the country's future growth trajectory and is expected to persist for the foreseeable future.

China may overtake Japan in patent filings at EPO

By MA SI
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China is likely to overtake Japan and become the third-largest patents filer at the European Patent Office this year, according to an analyst.

This comes as Chinese companies show continued innovation prowess and embrace the international intellectual property system for IP protection.

The EPO's latest data showed that Chinese companies and inventors filed 20,735 patent applications in 2023, trailing Japan's 21,520 applications, Germany with 24,966 and the United States with 48,155.

Aidan Kendrick, chief business analyst at the EPO, told China Daily in an exclusive interview that patent applications from Chinese companies at the EPO grew by 8.8 percent year-on-year in 2023.

"It is always difficult to make forecasts, but if one were to extrapolate the trends of patent applications from China and the next higher-ranked countries, China could move up a spot to rank third already in

2024," Kendrick said.

According to him, the growth in 2023 is part of a trend as patent filings from China at the EPO have more than doubled over the past five years. Patent filings from Chinese companies and research institutes now account for more than a tenth of all applications at the EPO.

The main drivers for growth from China in 2023 were increases in filings in China's top two technical fields: electrical machinery, apparatus, energy (which includes battery technologies) and digital communication, including inventions related to mobile network technology, Kendrick said.

In the sub-field of battery technology, China has increased its share significantly in the past five years, and now accounts for 20 percent of all patent applications at the EPO. In 2023, three Chinese companies (CATL ranked No 2, Ampere 6th and BYD 8th) were among the top 10 applicants at the EPO for battery technology-related patent applications.

Meanwhile, patent applications from Chinese firms increased in

organic fine chemistry; China National Chemical Corp was ranked No 5 in this technology field at the EPO in 2023 among all companies. Patent applications from China have also increased in several other fields, including medical technology with annual growth rate of 27.7 percent in 2023 and biotechnology with an annual growth rate of 23.7 percent.

"This shows that while Chinese companies are still highly specialized in key technologies, they are increasingly patenting in a diverse range of other fields, so innovation is taking place across key sectors," Kendrick said.

"The increased presence of Chinese companies across the leading technology fields in the latest Patent Index reflects their investments in R&D and their focus on high-growth technology sectors, from digital communication and electrical machinery to medical technology and biotechnology, and their interest in protecting their inventions on the European market," he added.

Specifically, Huawei has been the top applicant at the EPO in

five of the past seven years; the company increased its filing in 2023 to more than 5,000 applications at the EPO. There are seven Chinese companies among the Top 50 applicants at the EPO including Huawei, ZTE, Contemporary Amperex, Oppo Mobile, Vivo Mobile, Xiaomi and Honor Device.

Asked about China's latest emphasis on nurturing new quality productive forces, Kendrick said the country has focused greatly on innovation and IP protection in recent years as a key factor for the growth of its economy.

"The country's remarkable growth in terms of patent applications shows that Chinese companies are increasingly protecting their inventions," Kendrick said.

According to him, the EPO has worked closely with the China National Intellectual Property Administration for nearly four decades to align and strengthen intellectual property protection in China and Europe in order to foster innovation, support bilateral trade and investment, and support Chinese and European innovators.

CHN Energy's high-altitude hydropower unit connects to grid

By ZHENG XIN
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Maerdang hydropower station, the highest-altitude facility of its kind on the upper reaches of the Yellow River, has been connected to the grid and entered into operation on Monday, said its operator China Energy Investment Corp, also known as CHN Energy.

With a total installed capacity of 2.32 million kilowatts, the station, located 3,000 meters above sea level along the Yellow River in Qinghai province, is expected to generate an average of more than 7.3 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity each year, cutting 2.2 million metric tons of standard coal equivalent consumption and 8.16 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions, it said.

The project is also the core of the company's first integrated clean energy facility in Qinghai to include hydropower, wind power, solar

power and energy storage. It will take better advantage of the abundant clean energy in the western parts of China while benefiting the energy-hungry eastern regions, the company said.

With a construction period of only 36 months, the project marks an unprecedented milestone in the history of hydroelectric projects in China, said Li Jingchang, technical director at PowerChina Northwest Engineering Corp Ltd, who is responsible for the design of the hydropower station.

Li said the development of hydro resources in low-altitude areas, such as the Yangtze River and Yellow River, is nearing completion, and the next step will inevitably move toward high-altitude areas.

The construction experiences and technological achievements brought by the design, construction, and installation processes of the Maerdang hydropower station are of great significance for

the construction of similar hydroelectric facilities in the future, he said.

Experiences will further benefit future hydropower projects in regions such as the Xizang autonomous region, he said.

An analyst said energy giants are increasingly transitioning toward cleaner energy resources, demonstrated by their rising investments in renewables like wind, solar, and hydropower.

Leading traditional energy companies are strategically pivoting toward cleaner and more sustainable energy resources, said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

CHN Energy has been accelerating the construction of wind and solar power facilities nationwide in recent years, while pushing forward the clean utilization of coal. It achieved a record in



A view of the Maerdang hydropower station in Qinghai province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

installed renewable energy projects last year, with power generation capacity in 2023 reaching 320

million kW, with renewable energy accounting for 35.5 percent of the total.

Briefly

Logistics sector up 5.9% in Jan-Feb

China's logistics sector expanded in the first two months of the year, an industry report showed. From January to February, social logistics rose 5.9 percent year-on-year to 55.4 trillion yuan (\$7.81 trillion) at comparable prices, according to the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing. The growth rate was 3 percentage points higher than during the same period last year.

PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 2 billion yuan (\$281.94 million) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.8 percent on Monday. The move aims to keep liquidity in the banking system reasonable and ample, the People's Bank of China said in a statement.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS

Pharma perfect match for China's new forces

Takeda applauds nation's improved biz, high-tech environment

By ZHENG YIRAN
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Acknowledging China's vision of cultivating new quality productive forces, Takeda Pharmaceutical Co Ltd remains upbeat about the Chinese market, aiming to further invest in the country, said its top executive.

Christophe Weber, CEO of Takeda, said that China's pursuit of new quality productive forces, which features innovation and high-end technology, happens to perfectly match the company's vision, which positions itself as a global research and development-driven digital biopharmaceutical company.

"China is one of the most strategically important markets for Takeda. Our biggest revenue comes from the United States, but our strongest growth comes from China," he said.

He noted that in past years, the Chinese government has been giving priority to the development of the healthcare industry, and laying emphasis on enhancing drug accessibility.

"We have seen a huge modernization of the pharmaceutical market, with many more innovative medicines being approved and reimbursed."

As this year marks the 30th anniversary of Takeda China, the company said the number of innovative products introduced to the Chinese



Christophe Weber

pharmaceutical innovation in China, noting that the change was "significant".

A few years ago, he said, the majority of Chinese biotech firms focused on biosimilars and slightly improved molecules, which contained relatively low R&D value compared to innovative drugs. But today Chinese companies are moving toward more innovative drugs.

"I have seen a very significant improvement in terms of the innovation, and I am pretty sure it will lead to more and more partnerships with Chinese biotechs," he said.

In 2023, Takeda partnered with Shanghai-based Hutchmed, gaining the commercial rights to colorectal cancer drug fruquintinib outside of China for \$400 million upfront, plus \$730 million in potential milestone payments.

"This collaboration was the first time that we were bringing molecules designed and developed in China to the rest of the world. The example signals that China's innovation is moving up," Weber added.

Since the start of the decade, big pharma companies from Europe and the United States have descended on China to get in on the country's biotech boom.

On Jan 2, Swiss pharmaceutical company Roche reached an

agreement with Suzhou, Jiangsu province-based biopharmaceutical company MediLink Therapeutics. The agreement, which focuses on the cooperative R&D of an innovative product targeting solid tumors, is the third agreement within the past two years in which Roche has inked a deal with innovative Chinese companies.

In October, British pharmaceutical giant Astra-Zeneca reached an agreement on clinical research with Jiangsu province-based biopharmaceutical company Ascentage Pharma. The clinical research focuses on lymphatic diseases.

Zheng Shanjie, head of the National Development and Reform Commission, has said previously that China has been stepping up efforts to meet growing market demand with its stable manufacturing supply chains, and provides huge business opportunities for investors from home and abroad.

He noted that with China's pursuit of new quality productive forces, the NDRC will constantly carry out practical measures, especially in the sectors of life sciences, high-end manufacturing, and digital technologies, to facilitate companies in doing businesses in China.

Weber added: "The Chinese government has been committed to creating an open environment for multinational corporations. I think that China wants to leverage the new quality productive forces to move to a different level of innovation-based economy. The pharmaceutical industry fits perfectly with this vision. We never reduce our investment in China."

China's emphasis on nurturing new quality productive forces is set to inject fresh impetus into the country's high-quality development and contribute greatly to global economic recovery, while offering enormous business opportunities for investors both at home and abroad, according to an economist.

China should ratchet up efforts to bolster sci-tech innovation, especially innovation in cutting-edge and disruptive technologies, so as to foster new growth drivers and gain a competitive edge amid a new round of global technological revolution and industrial transformation, said Huang Hanquan, head of the Academy of Macroeconomic Research, which is affiliated to the National Development and Reform Commission.

Emphasizing the key role of innovation, the phrase "new quality productive forces" refers to advanced productivity liberated from traditional economic growth models. Such productivity is characterized by high-tech, high efficiency and high quality, and is in line with the nation's new development philosophy.

According to him, the country has favorable conditions for fostering new quality productive forces given its innovation-driven development strategy, increased investments in research and development, high-caliber talent, as well as people's rising demand for high-quality products and services.

Dismissing speculation that the Chinese economy is showing signs of peaking, Huang said the country's economic growth has gained

momentum during the first two months of the year, with improvements in key indicators, including consumption, fixed-asset investments, and imports and exports.

He said the Chinese economy is expected to expand at a steady pace, with the potential growth rate reaching 5 percent to 6 percent in the coming years mainly fueled by technological innovation. He said that the development of new quality productive forces will play a crucial role in propelling China's economic growth.

Noting that China serves as an important engine of global economic development, Huang said the country's intensified efforts to develop new quality productive forces will bring about immense market demand for new technologies, products and services, as well as new investment opportunities for domestic and foreign investors.

He said the new quality productive forces are mainly driven by revolutionary technological breakthroughs, innovative allocation of production factors, and deep industrial transformation and upgrading.

More efforts should be made to give full play to the role of enterprises, especially small and medium-sized ones, in bolstering sci-tech innovation, propelling the integration of innovation achievements with industrial applications, as well as fostering strategic emerging industries and future-oriented industries, and upgrading traditional industries, Huang said.

Huang stressed the need to deepen reforms in fields like technology, education and talent development, speed up the establishment of a national unified domestic market, and strengthen

the training of high-tech talent, in a bid to accelerate the development of new quality productive forces.

It is of vital importance to expand high-level opening-up, strengthen international cooperation and exchanges in sci-tech, and support foreign enterprises in carrying out technological research and innovative practices in collaboration with Chinese research institutes and companies, to further attract foreign businesses to China, he added.

Denis Depoux, global managing director of market consultancy Roland Berger, said, "I believe what's very important for China this year is to transform its economy, to further transform its economy toward higher productivity, more added value and more sophisticated products not only for the domestic market, but also for exports."

He said foreign companies can play a bigger role in supporting China's transformation in fields such as decarbonization, automation, and digitalization of industrial and supply chains, adding the country's emphasis on developing new quality productive forces is all about the transformation of its economy.

He said these new quality productive forces will attract more investment by foreign companies to support Chinese companies' transformation, and to bring more technologies to the world's second-largest economy.

Technology and innovation are key to bringing disruptive changes to the Chinese economy, and China boasts strong competitive advantages in some new areas, such as electric vehicles, energy storage, photovoltaics and wind power, Depoux said.



Employees work at a production facility for display units in Chongqing on March 14. ZENG QINGLONG / XINHUA

Expert highlights innovative drivers to bolster high-quality development

By FAN FEIFEI
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Holiday to see pickup in outbound travel

By FAN FEIFEI

The ongoing recovery in China's outbound tourism sector is expected to pick up steam during the upcoming Tomb Sweeping Day holiday, thanks to eased visa policies for Chinese visitors and the resumption of international flights, according to Airbnb.

Data from the US-based lodging and short-term vacation rental provider show that the number of Chinese mainland users searching for outbound stays with check-in dates between March 30 and April 7 surged more than 2.5-fold year-on-year, while their searches for tourist destinations in the Asia-Pacific region jumped 3.5 times on a yearly basis.

For Chinese travelers, the most popular overseas destinations during the spring season are Japan, New Zealand, the United States, Italy, France, South Korea, Thailand, the United Kingdom, Australia and Spain, Airbnb said.

Moreover, the number of Chinese mainland users who booked outbound stays during the Spring Festival holiday in February surged more than sevenfold, compared with the same period of last year.

China's outbound tourism market has witnessed a steady recovery since the Spring Festival holiday,

showcasing an upward trajectory, said Kong Zhiqiu, director of Airbnb China for outbound business.

Kong said that he is upbeat about the growth prospects of China's outbound tourism, which has been an important engine of growth in the Asia-Pacific region.

According to Airbnb, outbound travel has gained in popularity among Generation Z travelers during the Tomb Sweeping Day holiday.

Gen Z refers to those born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s.

The number of room searchers between the ages of 18 and 24 has seen rapid growth in China. Moreover, the number of group tours consisting of more than three people has grown more than fourfold year-on-year for the approaching holiday.

It has been encouraging to see China outbound travel gathering additional momentum in the Asia-Pacific region, said Dave Stephenson, chief business officer and head of employee experience at Airbnb, in an earnings call in February.

The company said it expects China outbound travel to be above 2019 levels by the end of the year.

China saw outbound passenger trips exceed 87 million last year, and this is projected to reach 130

million in 2024, according to a report published by the China Tourism Academy.

Japan has become a popular destination for young Chinese travelers seeking the beauty of gentle spring breezes and fluttering cherry blossoms, as the search volumes from Gen Z users for stays in Japan on the Airbnb platform since early spring have skyrocketed over sevenfold year-on-year, with Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto increasingly favored by Chinese youth.

Southeast Asian countries, particularly those with visa-free policies for Chinese nationals, have emerged as red-hot destinations. Moreover, Chinese tourists have shown a rising interest in mid-to-long haul destinations such as Europe and New Zealand.

Dai Bin, president of the China Tourism Academy, said the nation's outbound trip segment is expected to see a robust recovery and inject strong impetus into the country's tourism sector this year.

With the steady rebound of the outbound tourism market, people are showing increased demand for short-term home rentals and homestay services, which are now wide-ranging to satisfy the needs of various types of tourists, said Lai Zhen, an analyst at market research company iResearch.

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BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

Flash-express shows way to biz prosperity

Such warehouses have no specific requirements for location, thereby cutting costs

By ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin
zhouhuiying@chinadaily.com.cn

"You have a new Meituan takeaway order, please prepare for it."

Each day, as this message gets played repeatedly on a loudspeaker, staff members at Feixiang Convenience Store in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, busy themselves, packing commodities according to their serial numbers and waiting for the delivery partners to pick them up.

Teaming up with a childhood friend, 35-year-old Sun Zhang opened their first flash-express warehouse — an emerging business model for instant retail delivery — in the ice and snow city in March last year, and named it Feixiang.

Flash-express warehouses essentially sell all their goods online via deliveries.

The partners opened their 10th store on March 20, and plan to open two more in April.

"The store has no specific location requirements, which may help us save on expenses such as rent and wages. Relying on online platform Meituan for sales and delivery, we can achieve an average delivery time of about half an hour per order, with deliveries covering a radius of about five kilometers. Moreover, unlike most traditional retail stores that close at night, our stores are open 24 hours a day," Sun said.

China's leading online delivery platform Meituan began the flash-express warehouse in 2020, mainly focusing on fast-moving consumer goods and general merchandise.

Each warehouse covers an area of about 200 square meters with an average of 4,000 to 5,000 stock keeping units, according to Meituan.

Before the flash-express warehouse was set up, Sun had achieved success from his community group buying business in Harbin.

"With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, customers urgently needed a shopping model where they could place an order one day and pick up the goods from nearby convenience stores the next day," said Sun. "Community group buying could meet their needs, so I



A staff member prepares orders at a Feixiang Convenience Store in Harbin, Heilongjiang province. ZHOU HUIYING / CHINA DAILY

made my first pot of gold."

"The fast-paced life returned after the pandemic and people are no longer satisfied with next-day delivery, especially young customers," he said. "Therefore, at the end of 2022, I decided to close my community group buying business and put all my efforts into instant retail."

In the following months, Sun and his partner visited flash-express warehouses in cities such as Beijing, Wuhan in Hubei province and Guangzhou in Guangdong province.

On March 28 of last year, they opened the first Feixiang Convenience Store in Harbin's Songbei district.

After just three months, Sun's business venture began to make a profit. They subsequently opened eight more stores, including seven in Harbin and one in Shenyang, Liaoning province, by the end of 2023.

"Big data from Meituan can help us determine the category of goods and the timing of stocking," said Sun. "The variety of goods in the stores has now expanded to more than 6,000, from sewing kits and hardware accessories, to quilts, electric appliances, breakfast foods and beer. "We are trying our best to provide

customers with whatever they need. For instance, we finished an order for a printer at 10 pm one day when all the shopping malls and large supermarkets had closed. We will seize market opportunities and provide our customers with good shopping experiences."

Sun said an online convenience store with an area of around 200 square meters has a daily average turnover of over 10,000 yuan (\$1,383), which is about 10 times that of a 70-square-meter convenience store.

According to Meituan's flash-express warehouse business department, after several years of rapid development, its flash-express warehouse has become the preferred convenient format for instant retail customers, and has developed to more than 6,000 warehouses in over 200 cities across China, with a daily order volume of over 2 million.

The surge of tourism in Harbin during the past winter season also brought Sun more sales volume, especially for stores near scenic spots and popular business districts.

"We received more orders from tourists, such as hot packs, portable power banks and data cables. The sales volume of bath towels, swim-



Consumers gather at a stall at a food market in Harbin in February. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

suits and suitcases was also quite high. During the period, we introduced new items such as refrigerator magnets and local souvenirs, which were favored by tourists. The order volume during the winter tourism season doubled," he said.

Sun had, however, expected the orders to decrease significantly after the tourist season, but the reality was different.

"Currently, the order volume keeps steadily increasing with an average of 12,000 orders per store every month and 15,000 orders per month during peak periods. I think the new model has been accepted by more customers after the busy tourist season," he said.

Policy support

In fact, there are more market

opportunities and support has been forthcoming from the government.

In May 2023, the local government released the "Implementation Plan for the Construction of Harbin's 15-Minute Convenient Living Circle", which encourages the establishment of new types of operating and distribution points represented by front warehouses, and the provision of convenient, rapid logistics and distribution services tailored to different customer needs.

"Meituan's flash-express warehouse business is a good attempt to transform the digital and intelligent business service industry, which can provide consumers with more convenient and personalized products and 24-hour instant delivery services," Ji Jingyan, deputy director of the Harbin municipal bureau of commerce, said at a city summit in November.

Sun is also confident about the prospects of his business.

"We have plans to open 22 Feixiang stores in Harbin this year, which will also create employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for more people," he said. "So far, we have recruited 20 youngsters, who are responsible for the daily online maintenance of the convenience stores, product big data analysis, and product selection."

"We also plan to open a central warehouse in Harbin where most of the goods will be stored, thus reducing stocking pressure on individual convenience stores," he added.

Wang Lili, a researcher at the Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Science and director of its regional economic research office, said: "Relying on Meituan's online traffic, the business can get a stable customer base."

"Compared to common convenience stores or small and medium-sized supermarkets, flash-express warehouses have larger coverage radius and a wider range of goods," Wang said. "Operators should pay more attention to the selection of products to ensure quality and marketing promotion to expand the consumer market."

"However, the current high profits partly stem from Meituan's policy support and partly from the fact that the market supply is not yet saturated," she said. "When a large number of competitors enter the market and platform support policies disappear, there may be a situation of market saturation and declining profits."

City in Heilongjiang finds its niche on creative map

By ZHOU HUIYING

Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang province in Northeast China, scaled new heights, culturally and creatively, this winter as its ice and snow, and design economies fused to bring forth a large number of innovative ideas and technological empowerment.

So far, over a thousand new stores selling cultural and creative products have sprung up near various scenic spots in the city, with some achieving a daily turnover of 500,000 yuan (\$6,915), according to a report by Harbin Daily recently.

For instance, 10,000 units of the first batch of augmented reality refrigerator magnets featuring Harbin design elements sold out within five days, and exceeded 100,000 units in sales through the ice and snow season.

Harbin's cultural and creative market not only opens up a new path for the ice and snow economy, but also serves as a sample for cultural and creative products in the national cultural tourism market, according to the report.

The booming cultural and creative industry has also inspired talented young people to return to their hometowns.

Shao Weiwei, a member of the post-1990s generation, quit her job in Beijing to take up the position of chief designer at the design team of Heilongjiang Sino Shine Media Group last autumn.

"When our team began to design, we took different routes for city walks to seek inspiration," she said. "We spent much time developing a

complete and vivid design to make the appearance of the product match the inner spirit."

As the 9th Asian Winter Games will be held in Harbin in 2025, the team created four sports-themed refrigerator stickers and cups based on Siberian tiger "Nini", one of the two mascots for the Games.

Zhang Xuli, assistant to the chairman of the group, said: "We have opened three specialty stores in Harbin, selling over 400 cultural and creative products, among which more than 100 are original works of our team. After the opening of a store located near a huge snowman on the bank of the Songhua River in January, we saw a constant stream of customers every day during the tourism season."

"Among all the products, AR refrigerator magnets, cups, fans, power banks, and keychains received much applause, especially those with Harbin characteristics," Zhang said. "During the Spring Festival holidays, the daily sales of the store reached nearly 40,000 yuan."

Zhang said when tourists scan a QR code of the AR refrigerator magnet using their phones, they will see an animated video of the big snowman.

The experience has reinforced

Shao's determination to stay in her hometown and achieve her career development goals together with her young colleagues. "Our company has four design teams, including around 50 members responsible for the visual and IP categories," said Shao. "Many of the young designers returned to Harbin from first-tier cities." "The popularity of Harbin has

brought about a new business environment and new opportunities and I believe that more idealistic young people will return to better build the city," Shao added.

Pioneering efforts

At the end of last year, Harbin Polar Park upgraded its cultural and creative product store, renaming it after its superstar seven-year-old "Smart Penguin", which has become the ambassador for the city's tourism industry.

"In 2017, we began to focus on creating the 'Smart Penguin' series of cultural and creative products as a nationally pioneering penguin ice and snow parade garnered widespread attention," said Zhang Dongyue, vice-general manager of the park. "So far, we have developed over 400 cultural and creative products, among which over 60 products rank in the 'Smart Penguin' series."

In the first two months of this year, Harbin Polar Park sold cultural and creative products worth over 20 million yuan.

According to data from the store, a "Smart Penguin" doll wearing a little red hat and carrying a small schoolbag has been ranked as the bestselling product every month.

"We will continue to develop a wide variety of cultural and creative products," said Zhang. "Simultaneously, we will continue to develop more products that appeal to young people."

Apart from exquisite souvenirs, various Harbin-themed flavors and shapes of ice lollipops from local brand Modern have also attracted numerous youngsters.

In 2023, over 300,000 cultural and creative Modern ice lollipops were sold, with the sales value exceeding 3 million yuan.

During the Spring Festival holiday, daily sales of the cultural and creative ice lollipops reached around 1,500.

"We have designed serious shapes for ice lollipops, such as snowflakes and the city's landmarks, including the Saint Sophia Cathedral, the Modern Hotel and the Central Avenue," said Liu Fubin, director of the marketing department at Harbin Madieer Group Co Ltd. "To enrich the flavors of the ice lollipops, we incorporated flavors such as coffee, durian and blueberry, and even collaborated with a liquor brand to develop an alcoholic ice lollipop."

To build Harbin as the capital of creative design, the local government has promoted a series of policies and measures.

Through policy guidance and talent support, Harbin New Area has constructed a diverse and multilevel cluster of creative design enterprises.

Following a joint effort with the Harbin Creative Design Center, the area carried out a talent development plan that trained over 900 designers in 2023.

In 2023, five enterprises in the area received special funds for supporting the development of the creative design industry, with a total subsidy amounting to over 1.7 million yuan, which can also help attract talent and capital to flow into the field of creative design, thereby promoting the prosperous development of the creative design industry.



Customers pick cultural and creative products at a store in Harbin, Heilongjiang province. ZHOU HUIYING / CHINA DAILY

Founded on September 30, 2022, the Creative Design Industrial Park of Harbin Normal University has attracted 23 teams.

"Leveraging the advantages of high-end talent and the university's disciplines and specialties, such as media, fine arts, music, and international fine arts, we have seen rapid development of cultural and creative products in the park," said Zheng Fangming, director of the park's management committee office and Party head of the university's School of Media. "Our cultural and creative products mainly revolve around rural tourism, agricultural cultural creativity, artistic rural construction, ice and snow tourism, intangible cultural heritage and regional characteristics cultural creativity."

"In the future, we will employ more advanced technological means such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and augmented reality to promote the innovation and digital transformation of cultural and creative products," said Zheng.

With the rapid development and increasing emphasis on cultural and creative industries, the university has also added relevant content to its curriculum and paid more attention to cultivating students' entrepreneurial consciousness and abilities.

"Some new courses have been designed to provide students with multifaceted knowledge and skills to help them fully understand and participate in the cultural and creative industries, develop their professional competence in the fields of art, design, management and entrepreneurship, and prepare for future career development," said Huang Qian, director of the visual communication design department of the School of Fine Arts at the university. "The university also encourages outstanding students to engage in related industries, especially in Heilongjiang, and provides them with development opportunities, hoping to bring new vitality into the development of local cultural and creative industries."

COMMENT

Editorials

Countries should beware 'Indo-Pacific' NATO creating war zone in the region

Amid rising tensions in the South China Sea, the United States, Japan and the Philippines will reportedly launch joint naval patrols in the waters later this year. Such military maneuverings, self-serving and irresponsible in nature, will only do a disservice to efforts to maintain peace and stability in the region.

According to the Politico news website, the joint patrols will be part of a package of initiatives to be unveiled by US President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. at their first-ever trilateral summit in Washington this month.

Recent Japanese media reports also indicate that the US and Japan are looking to strengthen their respective security partnerships with the United Kingdom, Australia and the Philippines by staging more joint military exercises in the "Indo-Pacific".

It does not require much acuity to appreciate that the expanding of AUKUS — the "Indo-Pacific"-focused military cooperation mechanism of Australia, the UK and the US — into a quintuple AUKUS+ is a further step toward the formation of a US-led "Indo-Pacific NATO". The US is likely to push for the conjoining of the Quad — the security cooperation mechanism grouping of Australia, India, Japan and the US with the "Quint". The countries concerned have made no bones about containing China being the *raison d'être* for their joining forces. Given the conflict the US has managed to spark in Europe by means of NATO with the aim of debilitating Russia, the agenda of the "Quint" does not bode well for the region.

The US likes to portray its designs as being for the common good: to uphold the "rules-based order". But in fact they are nothing of the sort. Its scheming is nothing but that of a gangster. It has hyped up a "threat" from China and is now peddling protection. As a result, the South China Sea situation, which had remained largely calm in the past few years, has become increasingly tense since Marcos took office as the Philippine president, as he has proved willing to pay the US' asking price for "protection" for the Philippines' snatch-and-grab attempts — namely, that the Philippines be the US' proxy in provoking China.

Covert and overt US support has emboldened Manila to repeatedly provoke China over some hot spots in the waters, such as the Ren'ai Reef and the Huangyan Island, with the seeming intent of causing an incident that triggers the Mutual Defense Treaty between the two countries. Both parties have been hyping up the possibility of the treaty being triggered in the last few weeks.

China holds irrefutable sovereignty over the Ren'ai Reef and the Huangyan Island and is fully justified in responding to Manila's provocations, such as its repeated attempts to send construction materials to reinforce the warship it deliberately grounded on China's Ren'ai Reef. But bearing in mind the importance of peace and stability not only for its own development but that of the region as a whole, China's response to the provocations has been restrained.

While China does not seek to fight or create trouble in the South China Sea, all parties should be clear it will not be cowed into silence and submission. While Beijing has continually urged Manila to resolve the maritime disputes through dialogue and negotiations, Manila and its Western supporters should not misinterpret that and underestimate China's resolve and capability to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Manila should realize it is on a collision course if it continues with its unwise and irresponsible adventurism. Peace and stability in the South China Sea serve the security, development and prosperity of all countries in Asia, and they should look to Europe to see what will be the consequences of buying the snake oil Washington and its out-of-town "partners" are selling.

PMI uptick another positive sign

There was more good news for the Chinese economy as the manufacturing purchasing managers' index reached 50.8 percent in March, up 1.7 percentage points from February. This is the first time the figure has returned to the expansion range after running below 50 percent for five consecutive months.

The previous contraction of the manufacturing PMI was mainly due to domestic demand being in the recovery stage, insufficient demand, de-stocking in some industries, and the Spring Festival holiday. The uptick gives policymakers and industries more space in which to maneuver.

It is an encouraging sign that all three major manufacturing industries — high-tech, consumer goods and equipment manufacturing — expanded simultaneously, with their PMI in March standing at 53.9 percent, 51.8 percent and 51.6 percent respectively, up 3.1, 1.8, and 2.1 percentage points from February.

The production index and new order index of the manufacturing PMI were 52.2 percent and 53.0 percent respectively, up 2.4 and 4.0 percentage points from February, indicating a recovery on the demand side to some extent.

External demand has improved too. The new export and import order indexes have both risen to the expansion range, reaching 51.3 percent and 50.4 percent respectively, up 5.0 and 4.0 percentage points from February. In the first two months of this year, China's exports were \$528.01 billion, a year-on-year increase of 71 percent, with the 6.0 percent growth of exports to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as the main driver.

In addition, the nonmanufacturing industry has continued to stabilize and improve. In March, the nonmanufacturing business activity index rose to 53 percent, rising for four consecutive months and hitting a new high since July 2023.

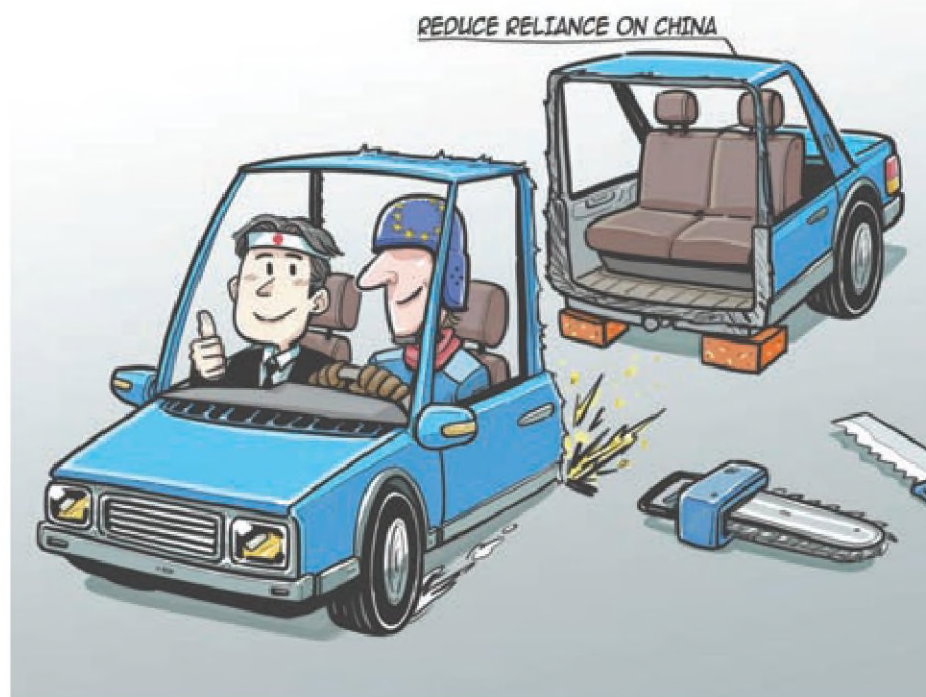
The continued rise in economic activity has had a positive impact on business confidence, with the business activity expectation index in the service industry and construction industry both rising above 58 percent. And the series of pro-consumption and pro-business policies China is implementing are also expected to drive the growth of new orders in the manufacturing industry, further boosting entrepreneurs' confidence.

But it is difficult to say whether the rebound in manufacturing PMI can be sustained in the long run. For one thing, although the number of orders has rebounded recently, it has not translated into an increase in profits. In March, the purchasing price of raw materials in the manufacturing PMI was recorded at 50.5 percent, an increase of 0.4 percentage points from the previous month, but the ex-factory price index was 47.4 percent, which fell by 0.7 percentage points, and that figure has been in the contraction range for six consecutive months.

In order to grab orders, the export industry has reached a new level of cutthroat price competition. Most manufacturing factories currently adopt an upstream-downstream joint approach, with raw material suppliers and factories directly cooperating in production to reduce costs and create price advantages, although at the expense of future performance. The increase in purchase prices was mainly driven by the increase in international commodity prices, while the ex-factory price index fell, reflecting insufficient terminal demand and the weak bargaining power of enterprises. With increasingly narrowing profit margins, it is obvious that the difficult times for enterprises have not yet come to an end.

Although the rebound of the manufacturing PMI is largely a result of seasonal factors, it still shows that favorable factors are accumulating. But as most of the downward pressures that have depressed the manufacturing PMI have not yet been resolved, more needs to be done to boost the market's confidence so that the recovery can be sustained.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Unleashing value of public data assets essential for fostering digital economy

China has one of the fastest growing digital economies in the world. A recent report shows that China's digital economy exceeded 50 trillion yuan (\$6.91 trillion) in 2022, accounting for 41.5 percent of the country's GDP, making it the world's second-largest digital economy.

However, China's data assets are facing such problems as the lack of high-quality supply, the lack of a clear path for compliance-based use, and the insufficient added value after application.

The Ministry of Finance recently issued a guideline document, further improving the data asset management system. It stip-

ulates that greater efforts should be made to expand the scenarios for the application of data assets, and improve and enrich their economic and social value.

According to the document, the government should guide the establishment of a development and utilization and income distribution mechanism for public data assets. On the basis of the laws on data security and personal information protection, the country should fully consider the particularity of data asset measurement and evaluation, and take proper measures to measure data assets and protect public data resources.

Ways should be explored on how to use

public data resources to serve public undertakings. As long as the use of data serves the public and produces positive effects, such as for scientific research, public health, environmental protection and other undertakings, priority should be given to the use of public data, with simplified application procedures. The country should clarify the scope and rules of data security supervision, and avoid restricting the use of data assets for public purposes on the grounds of security concerns. The management of data assets should effectively protect personal information.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

Humans can do more than tech to curb bullying

Bullying on campus is increasingly becoming a problem, but the move by Aofeng School in Fuzhou, capital of Fujian province, to install gadgets inside toilets to catch bullying incidents is getting a lot of attention.

The school has installed a campus alarm system in sensitive places such as toilets that employs voice recognition and sensitive word activation, so that if someone is being bullied, the system can alert members of staff by triggering specific distress signals, prompting their intervention.

The system utilizes artificial intelligence for voice recognition, but its effectiveness doesn't depend solely on these technologies. More important than the technology are the members of the school staff that are deployed to respond swiftly and effectively to the distress calls.

Fundamentally, technology serves as a conduit for reporting instances of bullying

to the school authorities. What is truly noteworthy is the authorities' realization that timely intervention is required to halt bullying. In most cases of bullying in schools, educators and the administrators have overlooked early warning signs, allowing the situation to spiral out of control. And this can, at times, prove fatal. For instance, in a recent tragic case in Handan, Hebei province, three middle school students plotted and took the life of their 13-year-old classmate. The perpetrators had reportedly bullied the boy extensively, yet the school's dean claimed there was no evidence of bullying before the murder.

Had the school paid closer attention to the bullying that preceded the murder, the tragedy could perhaps have been averted. Paying greater attention to "minor" instances of bullying at school can surely help nip it in the bud.

Returning to the system in Fuzhou, the

school has indicated that the initiative is currently in its experimental phase and will be implemented once it is refined further. Should the system prove effective, relevant government bodies can consider implementing similar mechanisms in other schools to curb bullying on campus. However, it is crucial for them to bear in mind that it is human action, not just technology, that can help address this pervasive issue.

In the battle against bullying on campus, just deploying advanced technology is not enough. Conscientious attention to the issue and a proactive response from the authorities is also necessary. Technology can definitely serve as a vital tool, but it is the human element — attentiveness, care, and timely intervention — that ultimately holds the key to creating a safer environment for all students.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

China-ASEAN cooperation needs to go to sea

President-elect of the Republic of Indonesia and Great Indonesia Movement Party General Chairman Prabowo Subianto's visit to China from Sunday to Tuesday conveys the significance the Southeast Asian country attaches to its relations with China.

As a key member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, a major player on the world stage and a main emerging market economy, Indonesia keeping sound economic and trade cooperation with China is conducive to maintaining regional stability and promoting the common development of China and ASEAN.

ASEAN has maintained its position as China's largest trading partner for four consecutive years. But bilateral economic and trade cooperation is mainly land-based, and the two sides need to further

promote their maritime cooperation.

Some estimates say that if China and ASEAN can invest \$2 trillion to \$3.7 trillion in areas related to the blue economy from 2020 to 2050, they can bring in net benefits of \$8.2 trillion to \$22.8 trillion.

Promoting the cooperative development of renewable energy resources should be one of the key areas of the blue economic cooperation between the two sides. In 2021, renewable energy accounted for 14.4 percent of the total energy supply of ASEAN countries, which is still far behind the goal of making it 35 percent by 2025. As one of the major investors in ASEAN's energy industry, China should provide more support for ASEAN in the energy sector.

China and ASEAN should further strengthen their port and logistics cooperation, strengthen the joint development of maritime routes, form a regional port alliance with enterprises as the main body, and promote digital transformation of ports and the mutual recognition of standards.

In view of the common marine ecological and environmental issues faced by the region, the two sides should strengthen collaboration in the green transformation of regional marine industries, jointly formulate energy consumption standards for marine industries, work together to build a marine science and technology innovation consortium, and explore the establishment of a China-ASEAN marine carbon credit trading market.

Hainan island should make full use of what it has to play an important role in China-ASEAN blue economic integration. On the one hand, Hainan should become a major channel for the two-way flow of sea-related goods and factors between China and ASEAN. On the other hand, it should become a distribution hub to promote the optimal allocation of sea-related elements between China and ASEAN, as well as a large platform for the transfer, transaction and allocation of high-quality sea-related elements between the two sides.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

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COMMENT

Lau Siu-kai

Ma's visit strengthening bond of shared roots

Ma Ying-jeou, former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party, will lead a delegation of young students on a second exchange visit to the Chinese mainland from April 1 to 11. During the first exchange visit last year, Ma and the young students mainly visited places of political and economic significance, especially those that have historical connections with Kuomintang.

During this trip, Ma and the students will visit Chinese cultural and historical sites and attend a ceremony to honor the Yellow Emperor, generally acknowledged as the common ancestor of the Chinese people, at his mausoleum.

Cross-Taiwan Strait relations are at a low, and the ruling Democratic Progressive Party in Taiwan is to blame for that. The situation is so grave that the opposition Kuomintang and Taiwan People's Party are reluctant to directly promote cross-Strait reunification, because the DPP, which refuses to acknowledge the 1992 Consensus that there is only one China and, instead, seeks "Taiwan independence", regained power in the January elections on the island.

On the other hand, the United States, to fulfill its narrow interests, is ramping up efforts to ensure the mainland maintains the "status quo" across the Taiwan Strait, and continuing to upgrade its political and military ties with Taiwan by violating the three Sino-US communiqués. Under such adverse circumstances, civilian forces will inevitably have to shoulder the historical task of prevent-

Using traditional Chinese culture to strengthen the emotional bond between compatriots on both sides of the Strait is the most feasible and effective method of easing cross-Strait tensions.

ing a military conflict between the two sides of the Strait and facilitating the peaceful reunification of Taiwan with the motherland.

Due to the toxic political atmosphere in Taiwan, Ma may face heavy political criticism for visiting the mainland. In particular, the US may view Ma and his visit to the mainland with suspicion. This means Ma is showing tremendous political courage by visiting the mainland and is committed to facilitating the peaceful reunification of the Chinese nation.

Ma's visit to the cultural and historical sites on the mainland and his attendance at the ceremony to honor the Yellow Emperor convey the critical message that compatriots on both sides of the Strait share the same roots, the same ancestors, the same culture, the same destiny, and their historical bond is unbreakable.

Taiwan compatriots for long have been poisoned by the "de-Sinicization" poli-

cies and actions of the DPP. Hopefully, Ma's trip will awaken them to their "Chinese identity" and prompt them to think about cross-Strait relations and Taiwan's future based on the understanding that compatriots on both sides of the Strait are members of one Chinese nation. When compatriots on both sides of the Strait recognize and respect the Chinese nation, the peaceful reunification of the Chinese nation will become a matter of course.

Using traditional Chinese culture to strengthen the emotional bond between compatriots on both sides of the Strait is the most feasible and effective method of easing cross-Strait tensions. Although "Taiwan independence" forces have long used their advantage of being in power to pursue "de-Sinicization" and try to detach Taiwan residents from the Chinese nation, traditional Chinese culture is too deep-rooted in Taiwan compatriots to abandon it.

Taiwan residents revere traditional Chinese values, institutions and religion. It is impossible to supplant these values with concepts such as "independent Taiwan", which is the antithesis of the Chinese nation, "Taiwan indigenous culture", which is alienated from Chinese culture, or "Taiwan history", which is separated from Chinese history. All these "concepts" are heretic contrivances propagated by Taiwan separatists and aimed at dividing the Chinese nation.

In recent years, traditional Chinese culture has become an essential component of Chinese modernization and the

rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, with the Chinese leader repeatedly emphasizing the importance of traditional Chinese culture, especially in helping shape the country's domestic and foreign policies.

In October 2023, at a work conference on publicity, ideology, and culture, the top Chinese leader emphasized the need to strive to continue the Chinese cultural heritage and promote the creative transformation and innovative development of China's excellent traditional culture, advance China's excellent traditional culture and promote the protection and inheritance of China's excellent traditional culture. Way back in January 2017, the central authorities have issued a document to promote the inheritance and development projects of excellent traditional Chinese culture.

Given the importance both sides of the Strait attach to and the respect they have for traditional Chinese culture, the interactions and cooperation between cross-Strait non-governmental organizations to promote and carry forward traditional Chinese culture will become increasingly close, and play a positive role in strengthening the emotional ties of compatriots on both sides of the Strait and lay a firmer foundation for the peaceful reunification of the Chinese nation.

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Kang Bing

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Specific law needed to regulate museum operation

Visiting one or two museums has become an integral part of my trips to cities. While scenic spots and historical sites usually provide us with impressions of a place, museums offer us an in-depth understanding of the local history, culture and lifestyle.

To enhance people's confidence in the Chinese culture, governments at different levels have been spending huge amounts of money to build museums which, in many cases, are becoming their name card due to their huge size and/or beautiful design. The museum fever is likely to continue, because the country's top leader, while talking with the delegations to the two sessions in March, called for building better museums so they could play their educational role to the full.

During my youth days in the 1970s, museums were a luxury for the Chinese people. Each provincial capital had one or at most two museums while Beijing, the country's cultural center, had about 10. Now, China has 6,565 registered museums — and the number is increasing by about 200 a year.

The museums vary in ownership — State-owned, company-owned and privately-owned — with most of the State-owned museums allowing free entry to visitors thanks to government subsidies and grants. The ones that charge an entrance fee claim to use the money, or part of the money, to protect the relics by limiting the number of visitors. But despite that, some museums are crowded round the year, with the tourist favorite being the Palace Museum (Forbidden City) in Beijing that receives nearly 20 million tours a year.

This has happened while many important excavations have been conducted and thousands of precious relics unearthed during the period.

While most of the museums are located in big cities, some are in remote areas. I was highly impressed by the rich collection of dinosaur fossils and stone-dog sculptures at a museum in Dongxiang county in Gansu province and one in Xuwen of Guangdong province.

While we are happy to have more museums and admire more fancy buildings, we may not have realized that the problems haunting the sector are getting bigger. Wang Chunfa, curator of the National Museum of China, recently said that not a single piece from archaeological excavations has found its way into the collection of NMC which received about 8 million visitors a year for 30 years.

This has happened while many important excavations have been conducted and thousands of precious relics unearthed during the period. Even though Wang did not explain the reason, it is not difficult to understand that "local protectionism" and the absence of strict laws and regulations have prevented the precious relics from being included in the collection of high-profile museums like the National Museum of China.

I have visited the National Museum of China several times and marveled at the national treasures exhibited there but did not realize most of them were transferred from other museums 30 years ago. It used to be easier for the National Museum of China and other high-profile museums to include some of the new-found relics in their collection because important archaeological excavations were part of a national project with archaeologists from the whole country joining in the effort.

Now that many such excavations are conducted by local experts with investment from local governments — and perhaps some subsidies or grants from the central authorities — the local authorities assume the new finds are local treasures and are reluctant to hand them over to museums at the provincial or national level for better study and display.

In China, museums are classified into three categories according to their size, collections and the research capability. Realizing such a situation will frustrate the healthy development of the museum sector, Wang Chunfa, a deputy to the National People's Congress, called for working out a specific museum law to further regulate the operation of museums, management of collections and increasing the channels of investment. The existing Regulation on Museums, passed by the State Council, China's Cabinet, nearly 10 years ago, no longer suits the new development.

The "battle" between different levels of museums and between the central and local administrators has highlighted the need to make our museums better and protect the interests of different parties. Perhaps a specific museum law, as Wang has suggested, should allow us to visit more museums with rich displays of historical and archaeological relics.

Mike Bastin

Chinese brands becoming bigger hits abroad

Many would argue that a true indication of a country's economy is the number of home-grown international brands and the level to which they have made inroads into global markets. China and the Chinese economy are no different.

It is, therefore, encouraging to see an increasing number of Chinese companies, across an increasingly diverse array of industrial sectors, reaching beyond a recognizable level of international brand development. This became all the more evident when both Brand Finance and BrandZ, reputable international brand valuation organizations, put a record number of Chinese brands in their world top 100 list.

The new Chinese entrants to the top 100 most valuable global brands are Shein (clothing and accessories) and Nongfu Spring (bottled water). In fact, Shein was the highest ranked newcomer in BrandZ's June 2023 global rankings — 70th with a valuation of \$24 billion.

But it is perhaps the consumer technology sector where Chinese brands are really going global — notable companies being TikTok, Tencent, Huawei, Taobao and Haier. For example, Brand Finance ranks TikTok seventh, WeChat 34th, Tencent 43rd, Huawei 55th and Taobao 96th in its list of 100 most valuable global brands for 2024.

It is clear therefore that Chinese brands can rise internationally and compete with the most well known and successful global brands across categories. For example, Chinese sports/fashion brands Anta and Li-Ning have both become international brands and compete against global giants such as Nike and Adidas.

But how can Chinese brands continue their global rise and in which sectors should we expect more internationally successful Chinese brands?

The global popularity of Chinese social media platforms and apps, such as TikTok, WeChat and Weibo, will surely play a big role in the continued growth of Chinese brands. Global brand development and brand management have for quite some time been dominated by an emotional narrative that attaches a brand to the country's roots, which resonates with consumers. It is with this in mind that the Chinese brands should incorporate into their brand-building exercise strategies to infuse traditional Chinese elements and symbols in their products.

This association with Chinese history and culture will not only work well with Chinese consumers, particularly the youth, it will also strike a chord with global consumers. Recent media coverage around the world of the Chinese Lunar New Year celebrations proves that Chinese history, culture and heri-



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

tage are enjoyed and respected by people far and wide.

But importantly, the international ascent of more and more Chinese brands will also require careful collaboration with established Western brands. Hence, the plethora of collaborations between established Western fashion brands and Chinese fashion designers and their brands. Chinese fashion designers Angel Chen and Chen Peng both have collaborated with major Western brands, including H&M, Prada and Nike, in recent years.

Such cooperation between rising Chinese brands and their more established Western counterparts will help build a robust global supply chain that also underpins continued success across countries and regions. But perhaps most crucial of all factors in the continued

global growth of Chinese brands is the input and influence of the younger generation, particularly those born in the mid-1990s. It is this group, which is most digital savvy and open-minded, that perhaps holds the key to boosting the confidence and creativity of designers to develop and maintain global brands.

Encouragingly, the younger Chinese generation is also consuming Chinese heritage. If it feeds itself into the design and development of Chinese brands, then international success is far more likely to follow, and soon.

Once again, it depends on the fashion industry and young, globally successful, Chinese fashion designers, many of whom have adopted such a bold and yet creative approach to their work and exhibited a determination to produce

results to achieve global leadership.

For example, Yuan Qiqi's design was recently selected by US singer/songwriter Beyonce Knowles as the cover of her latest album, *Renaissance*. Examples such as this show the speed with which Chinese elements can go global.

Careful recruitment and development of the younger generation is, therefore, pivotal to the continued rise of global brands from China. It is the digitally savvy who value Chinese heritage that can best promote Chinese brands on the international stage, as Chinese fashion designers are playing a leading role in this endeavor.

The author is a senior teaching fellow at University of Southampton. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

GLOBAL VIEWS



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

MUHAMMAD HABIB AND PIETER PANDIE

Critical partnership

China and Indonesia should work together to ensure supply chain resilience in Asia

Recent developments in international trade have signaled that the United States is working to increase its economic engagement in the "Indo-Pacific", with a view to challenging the economic influence of China. The Joe Biden administration launched the "Indo-Pacific" Economic Framework for Prosperity in 2022 with regional partners including Indonesia. However, a notable absentee from the IPEF is China. The exclusion of China from the framework can be perceived as the Biden administration's attempt at undermining the de facto common denominator. The souring of US-China relations does not offer strategic benefits to emerging economies in the long-run. Instead, it will cost a lot if the IPEF turns out to be a mere geopolitical tool of the United States.



Muhammad Habib



Pieter Pandie

The initial idea behind the IPEF was appealing to Indonesia for two reasons. First, the initiative offers more choices. This is important, as emerging economies such as Indonesia are interested in having flexibility and the ability to choose the most beneficial option for their own national interests. It goes without saying that Jakarta perceives both Beijing and Washington as

The two countries must continuously improve their entangled supply chain by adhering to higher environmental, social, and governance standards. Only with better standards can the Asia-based supply chain capture the global demand and compete with those of Europe and the US. Affordable products may bring the world the quantity it needs but only sustainable production can answer the great challenges of this century.

friends and wants to work with them for the greater benefit of the over 270 million Indonesians. Second, the initiative offers upgrades to the local supply chain. Consumers around the world have been demanding cleaner products with fairer treatment of workers throughout the supply chain. Looking at this trend, Indonesia wants to seize any opportunity, even the smallest one, to improve its understanding, if not necessarily capacity, to keep up with global demand. As such, Indonesia decided to partici-

pate in the IPEF since its inauguration.

Now the real question is whether the IPEF has served its initial purposes or is functioning as a geopolitical instrument. From the perspective of a staunch supporter of non-alignment, Indonesia would be the first participant to resist the temptation to geopoliticize this initiative. Indonesia believes that there is no value in pushing China away from the economic conversation.

China remains a critical and indispensable partner for the regional and global supply chain. As mentioned in one article published in the Diplomat in January, China possesses tremendous strengths in manufacturing intermediate products and supplying production inputs to other countries, to the extent that a geopolitically driven de-risking agenda would be unlikely to achieve its goals. Moreover, China's Belt-and-Road Initiative has also inspired Indonesia to play an active role in supplying the world not only with mineral ores but also processed materials. Indonesia and China continue to strengthen economic cooperation by building the Indonesia Huabao Industrial Park in addition to the existing Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park.

Nevertheless, that does not mean Indonesia and China should be satisfied with their current cooperation. The two countries must continuously improve their entangled supply chain by adhering to higher environmental, social, and governance standards. Only with



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

better standards can the Asia-based supply chain capture the global demand and compete with those of Europe and the US. Affordable products may bring the world the quantity it needs but only sustainable production can answer the great challenges of this century. As two major economies in Asia, both China and Indonesia reserve much capital to rally support from other countries in the Global South in favor of a high-quality supply chain without any geopolitical requirements.

Discussions regarding geopolitics unquestionably remain tied with the IPEF. It would be a waste of time and resources if China and Indonesia are heavily focused on one single initiative. What the two countries may have to start doing is elevating their commitment to jointly oversee the implementation of Belt and Road projects in Indonesia. All industrial parks

under the partnership between the two countries must begin to use renewable energy power plants, invest in the best occupational safety measures possible, and publish relevant development information for the public. Pursuing multilateral actions must not be forgotten too. Beijing and Jakarta can advance sustainable development and green economy provisions in the currently negotiated upgrade of the Free Trade Area between China and the Association of Southeast Asia Nations. This area of cooperation has not been thoroughly explored in the industrial sector.

The other option is going the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership route. Since there is no sustainability chapter in the RCEP, the low hanging fruit that China and Indonesia can harvest is exploring ways to build up the sustainability capacities of the RCEP

Support Unit. The unit could act as an anchor to mainstream sustainable agenda across RCEP member countries and sectors. As challenging as it may sound given Indonesia's inclination toward coal and palm oil, this idea may be the rational pathway to make the supply chain resilient against geopolitical disruptions and climate change. It is time to seize the opportunity together and focus on what actually matters

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WEIZONGYOU

Remedial action required

Concerted efforts needed to prevent the polarization and militarization of the international order

The comprehensive confrontation between the Western world and Russia, which has found its latest expression in the Russia-Ukraine crisis, as well as the United States' escalation of its strategic pressure on China and accelerated steps to promote its "Indo-Pacific" strategy, have had significant impacts on the international order in at least three aspects.



First, the international political order is trending toward bloc confrontation. On the issue of the Russia-Ukraine crisis and sanctions against Russia, the West, led by the US, advocates for extremely harsh comprehensive economic sanctions against Russia and provides massive military aid to Ukraine. Under US pressure, a group of "like-minded" countries have formed closer political and security partnerships, emphasizing the competition and rivalry between "democracy and autocracy".

However, countries in the Global South, such as China, India, Brazil, South Africa and Indonesia, refuse to join the US-led economic sanctions against Russia, advocating for the right to maintain normal economic and trade relations with the country and seeking a cease-fire and political resolution to the crisis.

Most countries from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the African Union, the Gulf region, and Latin America reject the "democracy versus autocracy" narrative and a new Cold War, advocating for dialogue and engagement to reduce confrontation and ease international tensions. With the intensification of US-China strategic competition, the Russia-Ukraine crisis, and international economic inequality, the Global South has increasingly become an important international political force outside the West, promoting the multipolar development of the international system.

Second, the international economic order is trending toward fragmentation. The economic sanctions imposed by the US and its

Western allies on Russia aim to cut the energy and trade ties between Russia and Europe. At the same time, the Joe Biden administration has accelerated steps to advance its "Indo-Pacific" strategy, increase its technological blockades against China, and push for decoupling and reshoring of its manufacturing sector. In doing so, Washington has politicized and securitized economic and trade relations, and weaponized technological exchanges and supply chain dependencies, severely disrupting international economic exchanges and the division of labor in the global industry and value chains.

Moreover, the rise of economic nationalism and trade protectionism in the West has exacerbated the North-South development gap and international economic inequality. The energy and food crises, along with various trade protection measures and steps to build small circles in economy, trade and supply chains, have obviously led to more economic damages and a greater drag on the Global South than on developed countries. Especially, Washington has intensified its drive for the resurgence of its manufacturing sector, under slogans such as "America First" and "friendshoring", which have intercepted investments, production and manufacturing originally flowing to many developing countries, further exacerbating the development gap and international economic inequality. A study by the World Trade Organization shows that decoupling and the formation of small trade blocs increase trade costs. According to the study, if the global economy decouples, the pub-

lic well-being in some countries could drop by up to 12 percent, with low- and middle-income regions hit the hardest.

Third, the international security order is trending toward militarization. The Russia-Ukraine crisis and the advancement of the US "Indo-Pacific" strategy have triggered a new arms race in Europe and the Asia-Pacific, exacerbating regional and international tensions. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, global military spending reached a record \$2.24 trillion in 2022, with European military spending surging by 13

percent and Asia's military spending also climbing. The substantial increase in military spending by European and Asian powers, together with the shocks from the Russia-Ukraine crisis and the Biden administration's formation of a small multilateral security network against China in the "Indo-Pacific" region, has greatly propelled the militarization and bloc confrontation in the international security order, casting a shadow over world peace.

To avoid the international order falling into possible disorder and to prevent a resurgence of the Cold

War and bloc confrontation in international relations, it is necessary for the international community to work together to promote the establishment of an international order with lasting peace, inclusive cooperation and common prosperity.

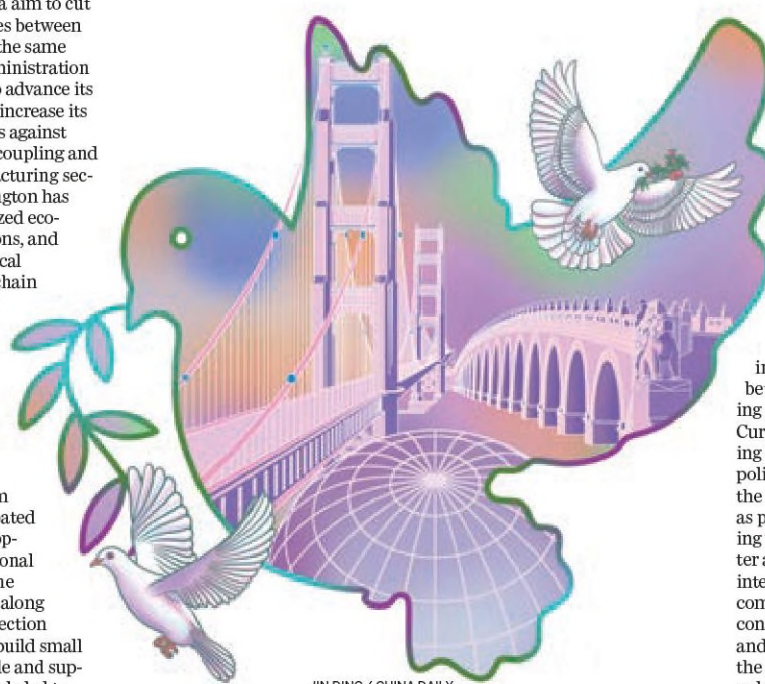
First, it is important to seek a political resolution to end the Russia-Ukraine crisis as soon as possible. The prolonged crisis has not only led to huge losses both sides but also greatly intensified the confrontation between major powers, endangering global energy and food security. Currently, the Global South, including China, are actively seeking a political resolution, hoping to end the crisis and restore peace as soon as possible. This requires complying with the United Nations Charter and the basic principles of international relations, seeking common ground through dialogue, consultations and compromises, and finding a peaceful way out of the crisis. Moreover, as major external military and economic aid providers to Ukraine, the US and the European Union should also join the international community to promote peace talks and seek a political resolution to the crisis, allowing Europe to regain peace as soon as possible.

Second, it is important to strengthen engagement and strategic communication between Beijing and Washington to prevent a new Cold War. In recent years, the narrative that China-US relations are entering or have already entered a new Cold War has been incessant in the West. The Russia-Ukraine crisis and the accelerated advancement of Washington's "Indo-Pacific" strategy have

undoubtedly further exacerbated the concerns of the international community. To prevent China-US relations from sliding into a new Cold War, it is necessary to enhance engagement, eliminate misunderstandings and reduce misjudgments. It is also important to view China-US relations from a global and long-term perspective, rationally handle the differences and disputes between the two countries, strengthen the management of strategic risks and enhance strategic guidance for the relationship. The goal is to avoid the traditional path of confrontation and conflict between hegemonic countries and emerging powers, and embark on a new path of peaceful coexistence and joint development.

Last, the so-called democracy versus autocracy narrative championed by the US, attempts for "decoupling" and "friendshoring" in the economic and trade fields, and building "a small yard with high fences" and the "democratic tech alliance", as well as the piecing together of small groups in the military field, have exacerbated the suspicions and risks for strategic competition among major countries, pushing the international order toward disorder, fragmentation, polarization and militarization. To prevent the international order from further sliding toward confrontation, the US needs to truly take on the responsibility of a major country, strengthen exchanges with China and other countries of the Global South on an equal footing, and jointly explore ways to establish a fair, just and lasting peaceful international order. Washington must abandon the incitement of trade protectionism and the implementation of "decoupling" policies, and work toward a new model of major-country relations based on mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation.

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JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

LIFE

COMPOSER'S MEMORIES HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE

Having studied music through pictures as a child, renowned musician still 'sees' his work, **Chen Nan** reports.



Dance production, *See*, with inspiration from the rugged beauty of the Inner Mongolian autonomous region, is performed in Beijing in March. Composer Xue Tingzhe (below) wrote 21 works capturing the region's natural scenery, animals and people. PHOTOS BY ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

Xue Tingzhe can still recall his first piano lesson with his Japanese teacher when he was 6, after he had moved to Japan with his parents, who were pursuing medical degrees. The teacher, Osmi Emi, in Tokyo, had Xue listen to three pieces of music and asked him to choose his favorite. Then, she gave him a piece of paper and a pencil, and asked him to draw the pictures he saw after listening to it.

"I remember that I drew some birds, clouds and a street. We colored them together," Xue says. "It was so much fun when the piano lessons became art class. It wasn't boring at all."

Xue, who was born in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, started learning to play the piano when he was 5, and says that his Japanese teacher asked him to put the score and the painting side by side when he practiced.

"For the first time, I felt that I was connected to the music I played, because I'd chosen the piece and my painting was inspired by it," says the 34-year-old.

Xue returned to China when he was 12 and studied with veteran music educator and pianist Dan Zhaoyi at the Shenzhen Arts School. Xue went on to win a number of international music competitions, including first prize in the youth section of the third Isidor Bajic Piano Memorial Competition in Serbia in 2006, which led him to perform 12 concerts in Europe in commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the birth of Mozart later that year.

The experience in Japan was like a seed planted in Xue's heart. From

then on, music evoked not only an emotional response but also a visual one closely linked with those emotions.

Now a composer, he continues to picture his music in his head. His latest album, *See*, released by the Chinese division of Universal Music Group on March 22, features 21 compositions for a dance production (also titled *See*) that was co-directed and performed by leading dancer Tang Shiyi. On March 22, Xue took on the role of conductor when the production was staged at Tsinghua University.

He says that after Tang and her co-director Zheng Zihao approached him in the summer of 2022, he was intrigued by the project, which was inspired by the grasslands of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

Xue drove to Hohhot, the capital of the autonomous region, and out to the grasslands, where he recorded Mongolian folk music, including *khoomei*, an ancient throat-singing technique, and performances of the horse-headed fiddle, a traditional Mongolian bowed stringed instrument.

In addition to the music, he was also impressed by the natural scenery.

"When I walked on the grasslands, I was attracted by their vastness. When I looked up into the blue sky, the clouds seemed so low that I could catch them with my hands," Xue says. He then turned those feelings and the beautiful scenery into music.

This is not the first time Xue has composed music for a dance drama.



See is performed at Tsinghua University in Beijing, on March 22.

Since 2021, he has been music director for the China National Opera & Dance Drama Theater.

"It is a rewarding experience working with dancers because they visualize my music on the stage through their movements," Xue says, adding that he had also worked with Tang before.

The 33-year-old dancer-choreographer, trained to become a traditional Chinese dancer and graduated from the Beijing Dance Academy, is now the principal dancer at the China National Opera & Dance Drama Theater. She has won many major awards, including the Taoli Cup, the most prestigious honor for young professional dancers in China, and has a large fan base among dance lovers in the country.

In 2016, Tang made her debut as a choreographer in *The Flowing Dance From Tang Poetry*, a dance production that combined traditional Chinese dance movements with ancient Tang Dynasty (618-907) poems. *See*, the first dance she has directed, premiered at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing in February 2023.

"I tried to express something by using a whole variety of theatrical elements. We let the composer write the music first and then arranged the choreography based on his music," she says. "It's not like a traditional dance drama that tells a story. With *See*, we moved away from stories and allowed our bodies to follow the inspiration floating in the back of our minds, a word, a sound or an idea."

Asked why *See* was inspired by the grasslands of Inner Mongolia, she

says that the idea came from her performance in the dance drama, *Lady Zhaojun*, in 2016. Tang played the lead role of Princess Wang Zhaojun, a beautiful woman from the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), who was married to the leader of the Xiongnu, a nomadic ethnic group to the north, and who helped establish peace between them.

The drama allowed her to explore the beautiful landscapes of Inner Mongolia, she says.

"Like the dance *See*, the music for it is also contemporary," Xue says, describing the 90-minute soundtrack as romantic, poetic and cinematic.

"Although we used some Mongolian folk music elements, we merged them with a symphony orchestra, giving the music a different twist," he adds.

Xue was signed up by the Universal Music Group's Chinese division in 2010 at the age of 21, then the youngest classical artist signed by the division.

He has released five albums, including his debut, *Magic Finger*, and *Silent Song*, on which he interprets classical music and performs his own compositions for the first time.

In 2013, he worked with renowned conductor Li Xincuo and the China National Symphony Orchestra to release the live performance album, *The Concerto*, and finally in 2023, he became artist-in-residence at the China National Symphony Orchestra.

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Sports collector's museum is a triumph of dedication

HAIKOU — US-raised Xie Fei has turned his lifelong passion into a unique contribution to China's sports culture.

Residing on Hainan Island, Xie has established an extensive private museum, filled with his personal collection of memorabilia, in Hainan's Fushan town of Chengmai county, to preserve the history of Chinese sports.

"This has been my biggest hobby," says the 42-year-old, who began collecting sneakers and jerseys back in high school in California and continued his passion in Beijing during his college years. "I have devoted more than two decades to it."

Items from NBA stars Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant, and LeBron

James feature prominently in Xie's Tianfu Sports Museum. These items mark the beginning of his collection journey, which, however, extends far beyond that.

Around 25 years ago, Xie returned to China for higher education and, in 2002, started his own business in Hainan, a resort hotel in Fushan, which highlighted local coffee and showcased his sports memorabilia.

"At that time, I thought I had many sports items in my collection, and instead of keeping them at home, I wanted to showcase them at the hotel. It might appeal to tourists and neighborhood residents," Xie says.

Indeed, many tourists expressed an interest in the exhibition, leading to

more permanent displays, and eventually, the official opening of his own museum in a four-story building.

At that time, Xie, who just returned to China and was still not fluent in Mandarin, found that the museum could be a bridge connecting him to others. His collection began to expand beyond the NBA, embracing a richer tapestry of Chinese items. Since then, he has been searching for more Chinese sports items to add to his collection.

Jerseys from China's women's volleyball team, the signature of China's first Olympic champion Xu Haifeng, and a torch from the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games are among the items collected. As his valuable collection expanded, he

began to feel more responsibility.

According to Xie, the collection preserves the history of Chinese sports and the country's Olympic spirit. "The collection has rich value in educating people," Xie says.

Therefore, Xie decided to donate his more than 2,000 items to the government, while continuing to exhibit them for free in his museum. He funds the museum's maintenance with the proceeds from his hotel and often invites sports experts to hold seminars there.

In recent years, he has frequently taken items from his collection to schools to teach children about the history of Chinese sports. He has also built a swimming pool and a basketball court next to the museum

for local teenagers to use for free.

"Sports provide the best education," Xie says. "I hope the next generation will learn from the items in the collection and the stories behind them."

As China decided to establish a free trade port system in Hainan in 2018, Xie wanted to contribute more to the island where he has lived for more than 20 years.

"To promote the construction of the free trade port, enhancing Hainan's local culture is important, and sports are one of the key elements of doing that," he says.

Since then, Xie has started collecting local sports memorabilia. During this process, he found that records of local sports history were

incomplete, so he contacted local scholars and began compiling and filling in the gaps.

From the medal of Hainan's first-ever Games, to the traditional sports equipment of local Li and Miao people, after several years of effort, Xie's museum has been able to organize a special Hainan sports exhibition, while also delving into more detailed historical research.

But the collector's efforts do not stop there. Looking forward, he has set a new goal.

"I want to build a new museum, one that features only Hainan sports memorabilia," Xie says. "I want everyone to know how vibrant Hainan's sports culture is."

XINHUA

LIFE



In 1979, Thomas Keller was just another cook working for a French chef, not yet dreaming of becoming a professional chef himself. That changed one day when his boss asked him a simple question: "Why do cooks cook?"

Stumped, Keller couldn't muster an answer. "We cook to nurture people," the chef explained. This insight struck a chord with Keller. "Immediately, I understood that I'm a nurturer and I wanted to become a chef," he says.

Fast forward to today, Keller, now 69, has reaped an impressive seven Michelin stars across his celebrated establishments: Per Se in New York and The French Laundry in California have each been honored with three stars, with the additional star gracing the Surf Club Restaurant in Florida.

Beyond his kitchen exploits, Keller's influence has extended into popular culture. He served as a consultant for the 2007 Pixar animated hit, *Ratatouille*, bringing his expertise to the film by training the producer in his kitchen and creating a special dish for the movie.

In March, he visited China, where he held master classes in Shanghai and Beijing, sharing insight from his illustrious career and his cooking philosophy with young chefs.

Encouraging them to embrace a broader, more global approach to the culinary arts, Keller emphasized the importance of passion and creativity in crafting exquisite dining experiences. His classes sought to inspire the chefs to unleash their creativity, and to paint a vibrant picture of innovation in Chinese cuisine.

Keller shared the six disciplines of his success: organization, efficiency, critical feedback, ritual, repetition and teamwork.

"I learned that when washing dishes when I was 14 years old, but I didn't understand it from a professional point of view then," Keller says, adding that his philosophy of cooking has remained unchanged over the decades, and that the first thing is the ingredients.

No matter whether it's fine dining or casual dining, Keller says that chefs look for the best ingredients they can find and then their skill dictates the quality of the results.

Inspired by his anecdotes, the chefs attending the master classes eagerly posed thoughtful questions, actively engaging in the learning process.

Among them was Wang Shuo, a 33-year-old chef who specializes in Italian cuisine at Tavola in Beijing.

With 16 years of experience under his belt, Wang is perpetually in pursuit of

KELLER'S CULINARY MASTER CLASSES COOK UP A STORM

Michelin-starred American chef brings experience, philosophy and passion to collaborative events in Beijing and Shanghai, **Li Yingxue** reports.



Top from left: Three of Thomas Keller's signature dishes — Hass Avocado and Kaluga Queen organic caviar (10 years) "Louie"; Macaroni and cheese; steak and eggs. **Above:** Keller holds a master class in Beijing, sharing insight from his illustrious career and his cooking philosophy with young chefs. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

fresh, creative ideas and eagerly enrolled in Keller's master class as soon as he learned of it.

Keller's personal journey, particularly his humble beginnings as a dishwasher, resonated deeply with Wang. "I was so inspired by the story Keller shared with us because, like him, I also started my career as a dishwasher," he says.

The chef's enduring passion for cooking, despite his years in the industry, also strikes a chord with Wang. During the class, Keller divulged the intricacies of managing a kitchen in a three-Michelin-starred restaurant and the process of conceiving new dishes.

Wang was particularly captivated by the American chef's transformation of the simple donut into a dessert worthy of Michelin acclaim.

"He reminisced about his daily ritual of enjoying a cup of coffee with a donut and how one day, that routine sparked the inspiration to elevate the dish. He pointed out that sometimes, we overlook the potential in everyday foods," Wang says.

This was Keller's first trip to Beijing, although he has visited Shanghai and Hong Kong before. When he lived in New York, he liked to eat in Chinatown and during this trip, he got the chance to try authentic Chinese cuisine.

Keller says he feels connections with China, a bond born in 2016 when a vendor introduced him to Kaluga Queen caviar from China. Since that pivotal moment, all his restaurants have exclusively used Chinese caviar, eschewing sources from elsewhere.

"For a long time, we haven't had wild caviar, so the best farmed caviar in the world is a brand from China. There's no question," Keller says.

Keller's admiration for caviar runs deep. Many of his signature dishes incorporate it as an essential component, rather than just as a garnish. At his two three-Michelin-starred restaurants, he uses between 1 and 1.5 kilos every day.

During this trip to China, Keller teamed up with Da Dong, a pioneer of cuisine nurtured by Chinese aesthetics and Weng Yongjun, a master of Chinese culinary arts. Together, they created two special "four-hands feasts", with caviar as a key ingredient.

The partnership is believed to be a reflection of the essence of both Chinese and Western culinary traditions, while also exploring the potential for innovative fusion.

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Ethiopian painter takes his inspiration from Chinese classic *I Ching*

ADDIS ABABA — Standing in front of a canvas in an art gallery in the heart of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, 50-year-old artist Dawit Muluneh is fully absorbed in the painting of ancient Chinese characters.

Surrounding him are pieces he has painted based on the *I Ching*, or the *Book of Changes*, a classic that has existed for more than 2,000 years and which remains a source of Chinese culture.

"*I Ching* means truth and is founded on the eight gifts of nature, namely heaven, earth, thunder, wind, water, fire, mountain, and lake. In general, the *I Ching* explains the wisdom of nature," Muluneh told Xinhua at the Medemer Africa Art and Sculpture Space.

His collection of 64 paintings represent the 64 divinatory symbols in

the book. They portray the day-to-day interaction between man and nature, and impart knowledge and feeling to visitors through descriptions in Chinese, English, and Amharic.

Although Muluneh does not speak Chinese, he became interested in the book a few years ago after his friend Gossa Oda, who owns the gallery, introduced him to *The Complete I Ching*, which explains the ancient Chinese classic in English.

"The paintings express delight, hindrance, relief, encountering, courage, childhood, and union," says Muluneh, who was inspired first and foremost by the characters *qian* and *xian*, which respectively translate as "humbleness" and "mutual influence".

Over the course of the year it took

him to paint, Muluneh turned to the internet to research these characters and drew surprising similarities between ancient Ethiopian and Chinese civilizations, in terms of painting styles, landscapes, and people's attitudes toward nature.

"Both Ethiopia and China have a long history of working with clay and bamboo, traditional medicines, and musical instruments," he says, stressing that cultivating ancient knowledge will help both countries prosper in the right way.

In explaining the book, the artist says it not only speaks about the present and future potential but also gives instructions on what to do and what not to do to achieve good fortune and avoid misfortune, and that its guidance is based on the observation of natural laws by ancient philosophers.



I Ching means truth and is founded on the eight gifts of nature, namely heaven, earth, thunder, wind, water, fire, mountain, and lake. In general, the *I Ching* explains the wisdom of nature."

Dawit Muluneh, Ethiopian artist

Mentioning that Ethiopia and China have greatly contributed to current world civilization, Muluneh says the *I Ching* helps culti-

vate well-disciplined citizens and promotes a good way of life.

Launched in May 2023, the Medemer Africa Art and Sculpture Space is frequently visited by schoolchildren, artists, and members of the Chinese community in Addis Ababa.

"Visitors to our gallery space will be introduced to the basic concepts of the *I Ching*, and its complicated concepts are translated into both English and Amharic," says Oda.

He says that Muluneh's paintings are unique for their beauty, variation, and composition, and share aesthetic sensibilities and cultural correlations between Ethiopia and China.

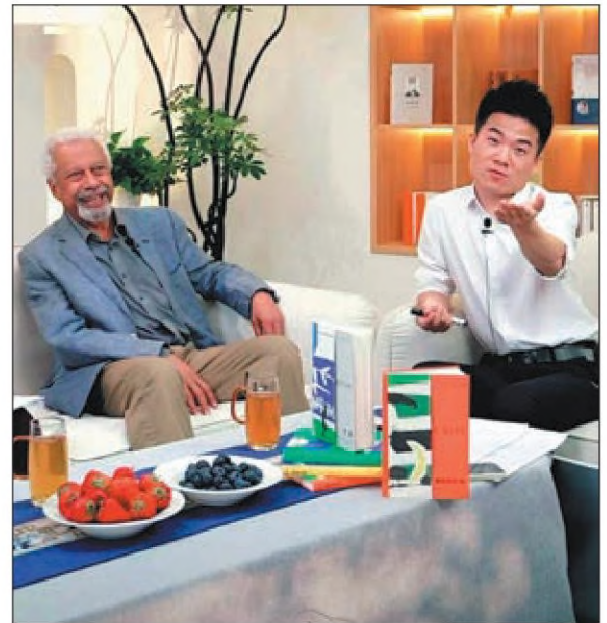
The ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius and his disciples are believed to have written an interpretation of the *I Ching* several hun-

dred years after it first appeared and according to researchers, it would be difficult to understand the ancient classic without the philosopher's annotations and comments.

"After viewing the *I Ching* paintings, visitors will be able to learn about Chinese civilization and delve deeper into the book. By reading Confucius' commentaries, they will understand China's cultural and aesthetic influence, such as the virtues of duty and piety, on world civilization," Oda says. "The *I Ching* can help visitors understand their future potential as well as their present circumstances, and each painting can be interpreted differently. Each is associated with a divinatory symbol, which indicates future potential or tendency."

XINHUA

LIFE



Nobel winner cherishes hometown memories

China visit first by literature laureate since pandemic, **Fang Aiqing** reports.

Memories of home, the smell of the sea lingering in the town he was born and raised in Zanzibar, and the sea horizon as seen from there, remain with Abdulrazak Gurnah, the 2021 Nobel literature laureate.

Having moved to the United Kingdom from Tanzania at 18, he has preserved a sense of nostalgia and keeps refreshing impressions of home as part of his inspiration, while infusing his observations as an outsider in British society and reflections on his displacement into his books.

From March 5 to 12, the 76-year-old writer visited Shanghai, as well as Ningbo in East China's Zhejiang province, and Beijing, and shared his life and career experiences with Chinese readers and writers in a variety of activities. It was Gurnah's first trip to China.

Notably, as the last public event of this trip, Gurnah was a guest on a nighttime livestream show on short video platform Douyin on March 12, where he interacted with English teacher-turned-influencer Dong Yuhui and netizens.

At its peak, there were more than 550,000 viewers watching the show at the same time.

After around 90 minutes, nearly 100,000 copies of Gurnah's novels were sold, generating revenue of more than 4 million yuan (\$550,000). That figure grew to 110,000 copies later that night.

The Tanzanian-born British novelist was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature for his "uncompromising and compassionate penetration of the effects of colonialism and the fate of the refugee in the gulf between cultures and continents", according to the Swedish Academy that gives the award.

Among the 10 novels Gurnah has written, *Paradise*, published in 1994, was shortlisted for the Booker Prize that year.

Apart from writing, Gurnah was also a professor of English and post-colonial literatures at the University of Kent, until his retirement in 2017, and is now emeritus professor at its School of English.

During his time in China, Gurnah was often asked about his African roots and their influence on his

thinking and writing. He said in his first speech in Shanghai on March 6 that for him, the discontent he grew up with concerning the historical narrative of the colonial presence and its activities and how this narrative requires the simplification of his people's complex culture was one of the impulses that led him to writing.

"I left my country in some turmoil when I was 18 years old, and that experience of departure and wanting to retrieve my knowledge and understanding of what I have left behind was the other impulse," he adds.

The writer revealed to readers the multicultural backdrop he was immersed in during childhood and how these memories have influenced the way he looks at things.

In Shanghai, Gurnah mentioned Zheng He (1371-1433), the great Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) admiral, mariner and diplomat who set off on seven voyages between 1405 and 1433, the farthest being one to East Africa.

"I grew up with stories of the many connections between us and places across the ocean. A walk on the beach on parts of the coast would deliver shards of celadon pottery, first made in China, and part of the debris left behind by Admiral Zheng He's expedition. There were stories of Chinese people who stayed behind after the armada sailed away.

"Many such stories of the connection across the ocean would have seemed like legends or myths if I had not seen the evidence of this varied humanity every year and just outside our doorstep," says Gurnah, a keen observer who used to live near the port, which like ports all over the world, served as an aggregator of stories brought by travelers from afar. One of those he assumed was Zheng, who was carried by the seasonal monsoon to Zanzibar.

In Beijing, Gurnah talked about the fact that his mother tongue is Swahili, and he was born to a Muslim family, and recalled the small town he grew up, where different languages can be heard, multiple religions are practiced, and celebrations, weddings and funerals are held in different forms.

"I was living in a place where it



Top: Gurnah and his wife enjoy a dragon dance and pose for a photo with primary school pupils at the Qing'an Guildhall, Ningbo, on March 8. Above: Chinese versions of the writer's books.

was almost inevitable that you have to be aware of difference — different cultures and different ways of doing things — not only aware of but tolerant to that. People were used to that," he says.

He adds that he later experienced and witnessed how increasing numbers of immigrants have changed the once predominantly monocultural British society and won acknowledgment by struggling to retain aspects of their own cultures.

The acknowledgment never comes easily, he says. During his talk, writer Ge Fei marveled at the broad scope of time and space in Gurnah's work, as well as the breadth of social life in them.

"A world map pops into my mind when I read Gurnah's novels," he says. Mo Yan, also a Nobel literature

laureate, said in his dialogue with Gurnah on March 11 in Beijing, that it's likely that a novelist's work constitutes his or her autobiography. Mo Yan took Gurnah's book *Desertion* as an example to analyze a novelist's talent for "going through a narrow door into the wider world".

Mao Jian, a professor at the School of International Chinese Studies, East China Normal University in Shanghai, listed several words of high frequency in Gurnah's writing: "Pain" alone appears 27 times in *By the Sea*; "suffer", "distress", "torment" and "agony" appear 70 times.

In *Gravel Heart*, "pain" is used 31 times, and 53 times in *Afterlives*, his most recent book, published in 2020.

For Gurnah, the pain — of memories and the mistakes one has made

— becomes an intense feeling, rather than something like an ache in the back, as a reflection of age.

"It's a natural thing that the more time passes, the more memories accumulate and the more painful it is to live with them," he says.

Yet, the calm, delicacy and accuracy of his portrayal of individuals stuck between the cracks of different cultures — and clear conveyance of complexity that leaves no room for ambiguity — impresses writers such as Ge Fei, Sun Ganlu and Huang Yuning.

According to Gurnah, writers need to be more honest about themselves and their characters to talk about these experiences in order to be original.

Connections found

As an unexpected winner — Gurnah himself believes as much — it wasn't until he won Nobel recognition that Chinese readers and publishers, like many of their foreign counterparts, got to learn about him.

According to Huang, who is also deputy editor-in-chief of the Shanghai Translation Publishing House, her company managed to get the copyright for all of Gurnah's work shortly after the Nobel announcement. They published Chinese editions of five of his novels — *The Last Gift*, *Paradise*, *Afterlives*, *By the Sea* and *Admiring Silence* — within 10 months.

His other five novels were published in Chinese last July.

Gurnah is about to publish a new book next year and Huang's publishing house has already taken on its translation. Nevertheless, it's not hard to discover the many connections between the writer and Chinese readers.

In his livestream show, Dong managed to relate Gurnah's life and writing to the numerous Chinese readers living and working far from home — Dong being one of them — who not only feel uneasy about fitting into their new environment, mostly in big cities, but also find it difficult to return home.

After all, as Gurnah says: "Home-

sickness is not about being away from home. It's about losing home."

When he visited Beijing's Jingshan Park on March 11, where he was able to get a bird's-eye view of the Palace Museum, or the Forbidden City, he showed interest in the lives of feudal emperors and asked about what they did and how they lived in the palace, as well as about royal family relationships, according to a report in Sanlian Lifeweek magazine.

Walking in the *hutong* alleys around Baita Temple, he was curious about life in *siheyuan* (courtyard dwellings), which turns out to share similarities with what he writes about in *Afterlives* and *Gravel Heart*, according to the magazine.

Coincidentally, Huang has been particularly touched by the intertwined family relationships described in Gurnah's work, which are intermingled with humor and tragicomic expressions. The tensions and resolution between members of big families can easily find resonance in Chinese family structures.

Even Gurnah's career choice — treading the fertile soil of literature both to study and write his own works, rather than being a lawyer, a doctor or an engineer — finds a counterpart in the household story of luminary modern writer Lu Xun's choice to give up medicine and turn to writing to inspire his countrymen.

Gurnah expressed hope that more Chinese literature will be translated and introduced to the British book market.

It's been a while since world-famous writers like Ian McEwan, Svetlana Alexievich and Amos Oz visited China. Gurnah is the first Nobel literature laureate to have visited China since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Huang says that she and her colleagues appreciate Gurnah's empathy and consideration during his visit and look forward to more foreign writers coming to meet their Chinese readers in person.

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By XU FAN
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Curtain set to rise on Beijing film festival

As an annual event bridging filmmakers in China and abroad, the 14th Beijing International Film Festival will be held from April 18-26, with submissions for its top honor, the Tiantan Award, reaching a new high.

According to the organizers, 4,273 movies were submitted to the festival. The final nominated 15 movies were selected from 1,509 feature-length movies from 118 countries and regions.

Three Chinese films were shortlisted in the final nominations: *Gold or Shit*, which depicts a young man encountering an unexpected twist in life; *I Love You, to the Moon, and Back*, a romantic story about two lovers working in different cities; and *Strangers When We Meet*, a poignant tale about a man released from a 27-year prison sentence who endeavors to find a wife.

Other nominated films include *A Real Job* (France), *A Whole Life* (Austria and Germany), *All the Long Nights* (Japan), and *Death Is a Problem for the Living* (Finland).

The jury panel for the Tiantan Award was revealed, with Serbian director Emir Kusturica — one of the most distinguished European directors active since the mid-1980s — serving as the jury president.

Consisting of seven members, the jury panel includes Brazilian animation director Carlos Saldanha, Australian sound editor David White and Jessica Hausner, a female director from Austria.

Three A-list stars well-known to the Chinese audience have also joined the jury, Chinese-American actor Kris Phillips, also known as Fei Xiang, whose recent blockbuster is *Creation of the Gods I: Kingdom of Storms*; Zhu Yilong, renowned for hits such as *Lost in the Stars*; and actress Ma Li, celebrated for comedies like *Goodbye Mr. Loser*.

For the first time since the annual festival's launch in 2011, the Diplomat Film Season — a segment intended to enhance inter-



Left: The main poster for the upcoming 14th Beijing International Film Festival is unveiled during a news conference on Thursday. Right: The jury panel for the festival's top honor, the Tiantan Award.

national exchange and cooperation by showing high-quality films — will be introduced this year. In a bid to enhance its global appeal, the festival plans to extend invitations to diplomats from the embassies of Brazil, Seychelles, the Republic of Gabon, and ASEAN countries, in China, as well as representatives from the



countries with films nominated for the Tiantan Award.

Huo Zhijing, director of the Beijing Municipal Film Administration, said that Brazil will be the guest of honor at this year's festival, to mark the 50th anniversary of China-Brazil diplomatic relations this year.

As one of the top highlights drawing many die-hard movie fans, more

than 240 Chinese and foreign films will be shown in 27 theaters and around 750 screenings in Beijing and neighboring Tianjin municipality and Hebei province, some of which have not been widely released in or officially imported to the Chinese mainland. The most anticipated include the American sci-fi film *Blade Runner 2049*, director Zhang Yi-

mou's *The Story of Qiu Ju*, and Spanish film *The Spirit of the Beehive*.

As a platform for the local audience to gain insight from prestigious filmmakers, the festival will hold three master classes. These will be respectively given by Kusturica, president of the Tiantan Award jury, who has won the Cannes Film Festival's top honor, the Palme d'Or, twice; Hong Kong director Ann Hui, a recipient of the Golden Lion award for lifetime achievement at the Venice International Film Festival; and actress-director Joan Chen, who shot to international fame with her role in the 1987 epic *The Last Emperor*.

Additionally, four themed forums will delve into hot topics in the industry, from raising investment to using cutting-edge technology, such as artificial intelligence.

Yu Junsheng, deputy director of the Publicity Department of the Beijing Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China, said that the festival seeks to boost mutual learning between civilizations, and enhance Beijing's soft power and cultural influence.