

Day of remembrance

Rwandan president criticizes US as being vague on 1994 genocide WORLD, PAGE 6



Famous Taiwan author passes away at 100

CHINA, PAGE 5



Easier transactions

Mobile payment service providers bring convenience to foreign users BUSINESS FOCUS, PAGE 10

# CHINA DAILY

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## China, Russia to step up communication

Countries to maintain close contact to ensure relations constantly move forward smoothly

By ZHANG YUNBI zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping said on Tuesday that Beijing is ready to ramp up bilateral communication with Moscow, boost multilateral strategic cooperation, and step up solidarity among countries of the Global South.

He made the remarks during a meeting with visiting Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

Lavrov arrived in Beijing on Monday on a two-day official visit.

Xi said he and Russian President Vladimir Putin have agreed to continue maintaining close contact to ensure that "the relations between the two countries constantly move forward in a smooth and stable manner".

He stressed that Beijing supports the Russian people in taking their own path of development that is in line with their national conditions, and it supports Moscow in combating terrorism and maintaining security and stability.

China always values its ties with Russia, and is willing to strengthen bilateral communication with Russia and enhance strategic collaboration under multilateral framework, such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, he said.

The two countries should "work on unity among countries of the Global South in the spirit of equality, openness, transparency and inclusiveness", advance the reform

of the global governance system, and take a strong lead in building a community with a shared future for mankind, he added.

Lavrov said the relationship between the two countries is based on equality and mutual benefit. It transcends alliances in the Cold War era and shows strong resilience, he added.

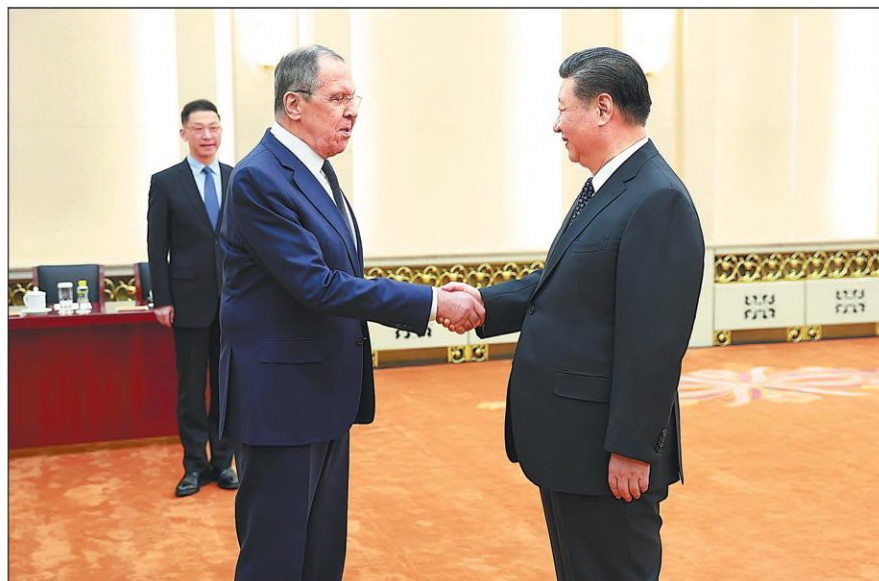
He said that Moscow is ready to work with Beijing to earnestly implement the consensus reached by the two heads of state, intensify bilateral and multilateral cooperation, work with other Global South countries to boost solidarity and cooperation, and contribute to shaping a fairer and more just international order.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, and the two sides will celebrate the China-Russia Year of Culture.

President Xi told Lavrov that the two countries have joined hands on a new path featuring harmony and win-win cooperation between two major countries and between two neighboring nations.

Lavrov said that Moscow's foreign policy prioritizes consolidating and enhancing relations with China in a comprehensive manner, and Putin's reelection success ensures the continuity of Russia-China relations.

Earlier on Tuesday, Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Lavrov. They signed a plan of consultations between the two foreign



President Xi Jinping meets with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Tuesday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

ministries for this year and met with journalists.

Russia holds the BRICS presidency this year, and China will take over the rotating chairmanship of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization this year. Wang said that Beijing and Moscow agree to support each other's presidency and light up the moment of the Global South in global governance.

Speaking of multilateralism, Wang said that Beijing opposes any cliques that work on bloc confrontation, not to mention making that

happen in the Asia-Pacific region.

"NATO should not have its hands in our common homeland, and there is no room or prospects for any words or actions that seek division and confrontation in the Asia-Pacific region," he said.

Wang said that China supports convening at an appropriate time an international conference that is recognized by both Russia and Ukraine, and ensures the equal participation of various parties in a fair discussion on all options for peace. Yang Cheng, a professor at Shang-

hai International Studies University and executive president of the Shanghai Academy of Global Governance and Area Studies, said, "The China-Russia relationship is multi-dimensional, multifaceted and multi-layered, and its scope goes far beyond a single specific topic."

"Regular meetings of the two foreign ministers ensure a smooth flow of dialogues between Beijing and Moscow on global, regional or bilateral issues of common concern, which help underpin the sustainable growth of the relations," he added.

## Nation's growth target 'achievable', experts say

By OUYANG SHIJIA ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn

China will maintain the momentum of steady economic recovery throughout the year, and the nation's GDP growth target of around 5 percent for this year is achievable, according to economists and entrepreneurs.

They said the Chinese economy is showing signs of stabilization in the first quarter of the year amid improvement in both demand and supply, paving the way for stronger recovery in the coming months.

Meanwhile, they noted that market concerns surrounding insufficient demand, local government

debt and the property market correction underscore the need to take a more pro-growth approach, suggesting that more aggressive stimulus policies are needed to bolster the world's second-largest economy.

Their comments came after Premier Li Qiang on Monday convened a symposium with experts and entrepreneurs, who acknowledged the rising complexity, severity and uncertainty in the external environment.

Li noted that to consolidate and boost the positive economic trajectory, it is imperative to intensify efforts toward expediting the implementation of government policies, further stimulating market entities,

bolstering the endogenous momentum, and tackling prominent problems systematically.

Zhang Liqun, a researcher at the macroeconomic research department of the Development Research Center of the State Council, emphasized the importance of boosting domestic demand, particularly through boosting consumer spending and expanding corporate investment.

"Addressing the current challenges entails fostering a willingness and capacity among entities to scale up investments, thereby driving significant growth in enterprise orders driven by investment," Zhang said.

While warning of pressures

from shrinking demand and weakening expectations, he said the fundamentals supporting China's modernization remain unchanged, underpinning a positive long-term outlook.

"This year has commenced on a stable note," he said. "Industrial growth has seen a notable improvement, alongside a rebound in investment compared with the previous year. A sustained upward trajectory in China's economic recovery is becoming increasingly apparent."

Data released by the National Bureau of Statistics showed the latest official snapshot of the stabilization of the economy, as China's official purchasing managers index

for the manufacturing sector rose to 50.8 in March from 49.1 in February, moving back into expansion territory for the first time in six months.

"I think the economy is stabilizing," said Ben Simpfendorfer, a partner at consultancy Oliver Wyman. "The foundations are there for recovery."

While China's growth target for this year seems challenging, Simpfendorfer said he believes the goal is "still achievable if the real estate sector begins to stabilize".

Despite downward pressures and uncertainties, he said China's economy still enjoys favorable conditions and factors, given a potential soft landing of the United States' economy and the stronger growth in the global economy.

See Recovery, page 3

### Parents sentenced



Seated, from left: James Crumbley, defense lawyer Mariell Lehman, and Jennifer Crumbley await sentencing in Oakland County, Michigan, court on Tuesday. The Crumbleys, the first parents to ever be charged and convicted in their child's mass shooting, at a US school in 2021, were both sentenced to 10 to 15 years in prison. ED WHITE / AP See story, page 7

### OVERSEAS HANFU CLUBS SERVE AS CULTURAL AMBASSADORS

Traditional Chinese attire helps weave connections within the US, build bridges of understanding

By MINGMEI LI in New York mingmeili@chinadailyusa.com



Serving as more than just fabric, the traditional Chinese hanfu continues to weave a cultural tapestry that binds individuals, communities and nations.

Hanfu, the traditional attire of the Han ethnicity in China, boasts a history spanning nearly 4,000 years. In recent times, there has been a resurgence of interest in hanfu in China and the United States, as more people are drawn to wearing and analyzing it.

Rachel Yu, from Boston, told China Daily that her introduction to hanfu came unexpectedly one day while she was browsing art documentaries online. It was a chance encounter with a hanfu video that captivated her attention.

"I was like, well, this is very cool, but I didn't think that much about it," she said, noting that the

clothing truly stands out from many fashions she had seen in the past.

Yu developed her interest in hanfu after marrying her Chinese husband, who gifted his wife her first set of hanfu and introduced her to more knowledge about the traditional clothing.

"Then, I was looking online at all the pictures, trying to learn, is this from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)? Is this from the Tang Dynasty (618-907)? How do you style it? What hairstyle matches? How did they do their makeup? It's just like going down the inter- net rabbit hole and never coming back out," Yu said.

See Heritage, page 2

WORLD WATCH By Daya Thussu

## Global South is being re-imagined, transformed

The phrase Global South has become a buzzword in contemporary international relations. Not a day passes without its mention in one or the other policy document, media commentaries or think tank reports across the globe.

Some see the Global South as a latter-day name for what was once labeled the "Third World"; a term said to have been coined in 1952 by French demographer and economist Alfred Sauvy. In this Cold War-era theory, the world was divided into the capitalist First World, led by the United States, and the socialist Second World, with its center in Moscow. The "Third World" was an undifferentiated mass of countries remaining outside these two blocs.

In this formulation, a city-state like Singapore and a continent-size nation such as Brazil were both described as "Third World" countries. Furthermore, two major Asian nations did not fit into this neat description: the Sino-Soviet ideological split had taken place way back in the early 1960s, while India was outside the Cold War blocs, following a "nonaligned" foreign policy.

The term "the South" gained currency after the 1981 Brundt Commission report, which aimed to go beyond the East-West dichotomy by examining global problems within a North-South axis. The commission, headed by former West German chancellor and Nobel laureate Willy Brandt, suggested that the "North" and "South" were broadly synonymous with "rich" and "poor", "developed" and "developing" countries. With the end of the Cold War, the "Second World" disappeared from the political lexicon, and "Third World", too, became a redundant concept.

Much has changed since then. The Global South has gained salience, and Western domination of Asia, Africa and Latin America has gradually waned. As the West recedes, groupings such as the BRICS nations have increased their global imprint. China remains an important member of the group, offering alternative geopolitical as well as economic perspectives to counter the Western

hegemony embedded in the international financial system through institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The creation in 2014 of the BRICS New Development Bank as an alternative to the Bretton Woods institutions has sparked the interest of many countries in the Global South. Some have made a case for setting up a "new Bretton Woods" to address the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and develop an alternative and sustainable post-COVID world economic order.

During the 2023 BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, six new countries were admitted: Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Ethiopia and Argentina (although Argentina later decided not to join). Indonesia and Türkiye also want to join.

Beyond BRICS, in other forums the Global South is receiving more attention. India used its presidency of the G20 in 2023 to reestablish its credentials as an articulate voice for the Global South. A virtual summit, the "Voice of the Global South", which was held in New Delhi in January last year, was attended by representatives from 125 countries. Providing further impetus to amplifying the voice of the Global South, India ensured that the African Union was given full membership of the G20 at the summit in September last year in New Delhi.

See Global South, page 3

INSIDE Empowering those who 'hold up half the sky' Global Views, page 13

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# PAGE TWO

From page 1

She always asks questions, expressing fascination whenever encountering *hanfu* online or seeing people wearing different kinds of the attire.

"And there's a lot of variety in the different dynasties because it is so many years," she said. Yu said the one she likes the most is from the Ming Dynasty.

"It goes so well with everything. You can just wear that in your daily life with a sweater or something. And it's so pretty and fancy that it suits daily life well," she said.

Yu added that she also likes to wear the *Ru* skirt — which is made up of a short jacket and a long skirt — that was very popular during the Tang Dynasty.

"Wearing it now would be too cold, but the makeup is so fun because they have all the flowers and stuff drawn on their faces," she said.

Yu said that she has accumulated some knowledge about *hanfu*, but beginning of the research process was very hard for her as a foreigner.

"When I watch Chinese videos about *hanfu*, to be honest, I'm just looking at the visuals. But the details of what they're saying, unless they're showing it on screen, I don't understand," she said. "It was very hard to research because there is almost nothing about *hanfu* in English to teach people about (the attire)."

She said she decided to search online and usually found answers through blog posts, so she could ask specific questions and seek help. Yu is now learning Chinese to know more about the traditional clothing from a faraway country.

To encourage herself to learn Chinese, Yu opened accounts on Douyin and TikTok platforms to record the process. To her surprise, she gained as many as 53,000 followers who were interested in the Western girl, who was deeply immersed in Chinese culture. Additionally, people were learning English content about *hanfu*.

Yu is not only a student but also an ambassador who is a bridge between Chinese *hanfu* culture and international fans around the world.

"It sort of snowballed into the account becoming more *hanfu* over time," she said. "When I was trying to figure out how to do my hair because a lot of *hanfu* videos just show pre-made hairpieces, suddenly, a flash of inspiration rushed into my head: why don't I make my own hairpieces," she said.

"So I tried to look at what the hair looked like. I examined old drawings, statues from online or museums. And I thought, how can I replicate this? So I tried to copy it. And then people, mostly in China, were like, 'What? What is the white girl doing?'" Yu said that was how she started posting *hanfu*-related content on her account.

"Sharing more about making the hair, because I found it really fun, and other people found it interesting as well. But I didn't have any intention of being a *hanfu* teacher. I'm not qualified for that at all," she said, citing the long history and variety of types and styles of *hanfu*.

"And as someone in America who wears *hanfu*, I think that shines a great positive light on Chinese culture, because a lot of people in America don't know much about China," she said. Yu added that her interest in *hanfu* brought her friendships with other lovers of the traditional Chinese attire, as she joined the *hanfu* club in Boston.

Yu wore *hanfu* for her wedding, and also wears it with her husband and friends during Chinese festivals and other important events. She also likes to incorporate *hanfu*-related elements into her daily life.

"I just find it very interesting and also often functional as well," Yu said. "For example, the horseface dress is very convenient for daily usage. I could just wear the skirt or just wear the vest and, add it to your everyday outfit."



A student from the Confucius Institute of Belgrade poses in *hanfu* in the Serbian capital in September last year. XINHUA

Yu said she felt really welcomed by the *hanfu* community and believed that the "magic clothing" has helped her build many personal connections and friendships.

"*Hanfu* is really a way to smooth the relationship between two countries also," she said. "You have the cultural connection; then people start ignoring the government because they care about their own opinion more. They want to know the country more through the culture and friendship, and form their own personal understanding."

### Global network

While bridging the people-to-people interest in *hanfu*, it also expands a network across the globe and has an increasing presence through communities that represent Chinese heritage and culture.

Ming Liang, president of the New York Hanfu Corporation, said that they have a large *hanfu* club network across the US, with more than a dozen clubs in different states that operate independently but maintain regular connections.

"During the pandemic, we had an online *hanfu* gathering. At that time, people from five continents and eight countries attended, with hundreds of participants simultaneously online," she recalled with pleasant surprise.

"Our members here are either second-generation Chinese immigrants or people from China who are studying abroad," Ming said.

She said her *hanfu* club is a government-registered nonprofit organization that has around 300 active members, with weekly activities and celebrations on important dates.

Studying folklores and having previously taught Chinese herself, Ming has been interested in Chinese culture and has devoted herself to operating the club. The board of the *hanfu* nonprofit is made up of people from different backgrounds, from finance to IT, but they are brought together by the same interest.

Ming said the first time she participated in activities for Tomb Sweeping Day, was a memorable experience. This traditional festival is devoted to remembering and honoring the

A student from the Confucius Institute of Belgrade poses in *hanfu* in the Serbian capital in September last year. XINHUA

## Heritage: Embracing the hanfu



Rachel Yu, from Boston, developed an interest in *hanfu* after marrying her Chinese husband, who introduced her to more knowledge about *hanfu*. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

deceased, but it also signifies the arrival of spring, during which people typically go on outings. She was attracted to an activity organized by the *hanfu* club at Manhattan's Central Park and was eager to see what it would be like.

"In their tiny space, I felt a sense of sanctity. It's the reverence for ancestors, that mindset, which really moved me," she said. "And the ceremony was done so meticulously, using traditional rituals."

"I joined their event again during the Dragon Boat Festival. We were discussing the relationship between Confucianism and Taoism. There weren't many people, maybe just around a dozen or so, but each person shared their interpretation of our Chinese traditional philosophy very seriously," Ming added.

### Reaching beyond

For the group, *hanfu* is a hobby that brings people together, but individuals with similar backgrounds and interests get the chance to sit together and have deep, meaningful conversations about Chinese culture, beyond just taking photos.

Ming said that members of the club also share their interests in other aspects of Chinese culture which they exchange with each other. For example, they have a member who is very into Chinese tea culture and food culture; a member who loves ancient Chinese poetry; a member who is interested in analyzing the pronunciation of Ancient Chinese, and herself, who is an expert in Chinese history and folk traditions.

"During the Dragon Boat Festival, for instance, we engage in activities like pot-throwing and shooting arrows at the five poisons, promoting the simple yet profound Chinese belief in warding off evil. ... Our aim is for everyone to enjoy these traditions," she said.

As the *hanfu* society expanded, their members have married and had children, giving rise to the *hanfu* second generation. This prompted them to organize *hanfu* parent-child events. The children have shown great enthusiasm for *hanfu*. Besides speaking Chinese and writ-

ing Chinese characters, Ming said she hopes younger generations will inherit traditional Chinese cultural attire and pass down the heritage.

"We wear *hanfu*, symbolizing our identity. Through community activities such as *hanfu* parades and *hanfu* try-ons, we want to enhance the sense of participation and influence of Chinese and Asian culture in the community," she said.

"We want to share with the entire community and exchange our culture, telling them more about this wonderful tradition. The grand festivals, like celebrating Christmas or New Year, even if they're not part of my ethnic tradition, still bring us joy and allow our families to bond more closely. These events also provide the community with opportunities to enjoy diverse cultures."

"It [*hanfu*] represents our AAPI identity and empowers us," she said, referring to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

In California, the Northern California Hanfu Association recently hosted the Huazhao festival to celebrate the flower goddess' birthday, holding an event at the Filoli Historic House and Garden in the Bay Area of Woodside, California. The venue also hosted the diplomatic summit between President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden on Nov 15, during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

### Bridging gap

Liu Yuquan, the executive officer of the association, told China Daily that Filoli House has invited them to host the *hanfu* event again at the venue.

This place serves as a miracle for bridging the gap, easing tensions between China and the US, and improving relations, he said.

"Generally, the improvement of relations between two countries starts with culture. Traditional Chinese culture is something that both China and the US recognize and appreciate," he added.

"When we saw the news and found out that the leaders of both countries were meeting at the same venue, members of our *hanfu* club felt extremely surprised. For me, this place feels like a milestone, marking a fresh start in improving the 45-year relationship between China and the US. Therefore, we are even more eager to showcase *hanfu* and traditional Chinese culture," he said.

Belonging to the younger generation, Liu hopes to showcase cultural confidence through wearing *hanfu*. He said *hanfu* represents the clothing of Asian ethnic groups. As for the older generation of immigrants, they basically had no influence. No one paid attention to their culture, and no one cared about their identity. And sometimes even the people themselves will not wear their own ethnic clothing.

"But we want to wear it out, on various occasions," he said firmly.

The Northern California Hanfu Association is devoted to *hanfu* and cultural analysis, preparing an illustrated handbook to introduce the attire with pictures and English introductions to cater to more international fans.

From artifacts and attire to detailed accessories and literature, they have gathered knowledge of *hanfu*, from the pre-Qin period (pre-221 BC) to the Ming Dynasty. They use easily understandable English to introduce the evolution and development of clothing and culture, documenting every detail and providing explanations for the Chinese pinyin names of the garments to aid understanding.

"Whenever foreigners ask us, 'Hey, what's that clothing you're wearing?' sometimes even we struggle to translate or find specific terms for those clothing items. So, we want to undertake a project like this. It's not just a hobby; it also requires professionalism and accuracy," Liu said.

"We often present the glamorous and joyful aspects, but managing our community has its challenges. We hope that *hanfu* culture can garner more attention," he said.



Hanfu enthusiasts perform rituals in the Filoli Historic House and Garden near San Francisco in California, US, in March. LIU YILIN / XINHUA



Hanfu enthusiasts display hanfu in front of Big Ben in London in February. LI YING / XINHUA

## TOP NEWS



Ma Ying-jeou (center), former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party, and members of a delegation of young people from Taiwan sing a patriotic song during a visit on Tuesday to the Badaling Great Wall in Beijing. CHEN YEHUA / XINHUA

## Cross-Strait efforts by youth urged for revitalization

By JIANG CHENGLONG  
jiangchenglong@chinadaily.com.cn

Ma Ying-jeou, former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party, encouraged young people across the Taiwan Strait to work hard for the revitalization of the Chinese nation, as he led a Taiwan youth delegation on a visit to Peking University on Tuesday.

Ma is on his second visit to the Chinese mainland. In March last year, he led a group of 30 young people from Taiwan to visit three universities on the mainland.

In July, Hao Ping, secretary of the Communist Party of China Peking University Committee, along with students from five mainland universities, reciprocated with a visit to Taiwan.

During a dialogue session between the young people from Taiwan and Peking University students, Ma expressed his pleasure

in seeing "many familiar faces" from their previous meeting in Taiwan last year.

"The last time we met in Taiwan, we promised each other that we would meet again," he said.

Ma said that facilitating cross-Strait student exchanges is the "primary purpose" of his visit as well as the "goal he has striven for".

The interactions among young people from both sides are "natural and warm" due to their similar ages and same language and cultural backgrounds, he said.

Highlighting Peking University's significant historical role in the Chinese nation's struggle against foreign oppression and efforts to seek rejuvenation, Ma expressed his hope for young people across the Strait to carry forward this spirit and strive for the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

He invited Peking University teachers and students to visit Tai-

wan again, to experience the diverse local culture and environment.

Before the session, Ma and members of the delegation toured several places in Peking University, which was established in 1898, including the Boya Tower and Weiming Lake, and engaged in discussions with the university's top scholars and experts.

Hao, Party secretary of Peking University, said he felt the "deep kinship" between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait during his visit to Taiwan with mainland students last year.

"Such cross-Strait educational and youth exchanges have become more frequent since our visit, positively influencing cross-Strait relations and peaceful development," he said.

He also said Ma's current visit with Taiwan youths would further promote deep exchanges between educational institutions and com-

munities on the mainland and in Taiwan.

During their visit to the prestigious university, the young people from Taiwan shared interesting aspects of their journey on the mainland with Peking University students.

Hsiao Sy-yuan, a member of the Taiwan youth group, said that the most impressive part of the trip was trying *biangbiang* noodles, a local dish in Shaanxi province.

"It's delicious and fun," he said, noting that many of his companions from Taiwan also enjoyed eating it.

He recalled that some of the students he met at Peking University had visited Taiwan in July last year.

"They told us that what they found particularly special was the Taiwan Rail *bento* (a popular boxed meal), which I also love," Hsiao said. "The sharing of culture and food brought us closer together and deepened our bond," he added.

## Chang'e 6 set to carry European science payloads

By ZHAO LEI  
zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn

China's upcoming lunar mission has garnered global attention for more reasons than one. The Chang'e 6 robotic probe will not only make an ambitious and unprecedented attempt to collect samples from the lunar far side, it will also carry three European science payloads to the site.

The mission holds great significance because the new samples will enable scientists to study and better understand the history and the physics of the moon.

According to the China National Space Administration, the three foreign science payloads include a radon measuring instrument from France's national space agency that will help study the movement of lunar dust and some volatile chemicals between the lunar regolith, a layer of unconsolidated rocky material, and the lunar exosphere.

The second foreign science payload is a passive laser retroreflector from Italy's National Institute for Nuclear Physics that will be used as a laser range-finder for the

Chang'e 6 lander.

The third payload, developed by the Swedish Institute of Space Physics with support from the European Space Agency, will be the first-ever dedicated negative ion instrument flown beyond Earth. It will seek to detect negative ions emitted from the lunar surface as a result of interaction with solar wind.

More than 20 proposals from foreign space agencies and research organizations contested for the golden opportunity to join the Chang'e 6 mission and touch down on the moon's little-known far side, which has so far been the subject of scientific speculation and wild imagination. The three from France, Italy and Sweden emerged as winners.

Yang Yuguang, a senior space industry observer and vice-chair of the International Astronautical Federation's Space Transportation Committee, said that opening a nation's spacecraft to other nations' science payloads has become a common practice among space powers because international cooperation can maximize a mission's scientific value.

"An opportunity to put your science devices on a spacecraft, especially a historic one like the Chang'e 6, is always enthusiastically sought by scientists globally," he said.

China and Europe have engaged in space industry cooperation for many years, and such collaborative projects have brought benefits to both sides, Yang said, citing the successful cooperation in data relay during China's Tianwen 1 Mars mission.

Wang Yanan, chief editor of Aerospace Knowledge magazine, said the Chang'e 6 mission will offer European scientists the first chance to deploy their instruments on the lunar far side, which will be a landmark moment for the planetary research community in Europe.

"Through this move, China has shown its sincerity and capability to bolster international space cooperation, and it will advance the collaboration in lunar exploration and development between China and Europe," Wang said.

A Long March 5 heavy-lift rocket, carrying the Chang'e 6 robotic probe, is scheduled to blast off from the Wenchang Space Launch Center on the east coast of Hainan province in

the coming weeks.

If everything goes according to plan, the spacecraft will make a series of flight maneuvers and finally land in the South Pole-Aitken Basin.

Like Chang'e 5, its predecessor, the Chang'e 6 spacecraft is a product of the China Academy of Space Technology in Beijing and also consists of four components — an orbiter, a lander, an ascender and a reentry module.

After collecting dust and rocks on the moon, the ascender will transport the samples to the lunar orbit for transfer into the reentry module, which will carry them to Earth.

Meanwhile, scientific instruments on the lander will continue to perform their operations as long as they have sufficient power.

The United States, the former Soviet Union and China have brought lunar samples to Earth, but none has ever obtained soil from the far side of the moon.

Although the far side had been previously photographed by spacecraft, no probe had ever touched down on it until China's Chang'e 4 mission, which landed in the South Pole-Aitken Basin in January 2019.

## China and Micronesia to bolster ties

Xi says Beijing willing to continue support for Pacific island countries' development

By XU WEI  
xuweix@chinadaily.com.cn

China and the Federated States of Micronesia underlined their shared commitment to bolstering cooperation on building of the Belt and Road, climate response, infrastructure and healthcare, as President Xi Jinping hosted the island country's President Wesley W. Simina on Tuesday.

During their talks at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, Xi stressed Beijing's readiness to use the 35th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties with Micronesia this year as a new starting point to continue bilateral exchanges and dialogue at various levels, enhance win-win cooperation across different sectors, and elevate ties to a new level.

He pledged support to Micronesia in safeguarding its national sovereignty and independence, following a path of development that suits its national conditions, invigorating its economy and enhancing public well-being.

Simina, making his first state visit to China since taking office last year, said his country stands ready to strengthen collaboration with China on agriculture, fisheries, economy, trade, investment, tourism, the digital economy and response to climate change.

The two presidents witnessed the signing of multiple cooperation documents covering the joint building of the Belt and Road, green development, healthcare and infrastructure development.

Xi told his guest that the two sides should foster even closer people-to-people exchanges, including in culture, health and education, and at subnational levels.

He extended a welcoming message to more young people from the Pacific island country to study in China, adding that more projects should be conducted to deliver Chinese healthcare services and cultural shows to the country's islands.

China stands ready to offer assistance to Micronesia in addressing climate change and conducting capacity-building training within the framework of South-South cooperation, Xi said.

He also called for closer bilateral coordination and cooperation within multilateral frameworks, such as the United Nations and the Pacific Islands

Forum, to jointly practice multilateralism and uphold fairness and justice.

As for China's relations with Pacific island countries, Xi stressed that Beijing's effort to build up ties with the countries are within the framework of South-South cooperation, which is based on mutual help and support, without targeting any third party, and such cooperation should not face interference from any third party.

Beijing advocates that in developing relations with Pacific island nations, countries should adhere to the principles of island nations' autonomy, prioritize development and maintain openness and inclusiveness, he said.

Xi added that China is willing to continue providing as much support as possible for the development of island nations and to conduct trilateral or multilateral cooperation.

Simina reiterated his country's adherence to the one-China principle. He lauded the major initiatives proposed by Xi for helping the common development of developing countries and advancing global peace, stability and prosperity.

China's effort to advance cooperation with Pacific island countries is conducive to regional peace and development, and Micronesia will work actively to promote regional cooperation with China, he said.

Zhou Fangyin, vice-president of the Guangdong Institute for International Strategies, said that Simina's decision to visit China shortly after he took office showcases the resolve of the island country to pursue cooperation with China regardless of influences from competition between major countries in the region.

"China has undertaken projects that have been widely popular among residents of the island country, which is the cornerstone of the robust bilateral relations," he said.

Liang Jiarui, a researcher at the China-Pacific Island Countries Climate Action Cooperation Center, said the support from China could be crucial to Pacific island countries, including Micronesia, in their response to climate change, both in terms of adaptation and mitigation.

"Climate change is the most acute challenge for countries like Micronesia, and the assistance from China will help the nations both in capacity building and expertise," he said.

## Song of culture



Girls dressed as living goddess Kumari participate in a community music festival on Monday in Bhaktapur, Nepal. The festival was organized to highlight the rich heritage of traditional dance and music. NIRANJAN SHRESTHA / AP

## Global South: Transformations provide optimism

From page 1

In the past two decades, the intra-South growth in aid, investment and economic cooperation has demonstrated the limitations of the Western developmental model, especially since China has shared its successful poverty-reduction

experiences with other parts of the Global South through the Belt and Road Initiative.

As an important aid provider, China has also been instrumental in unleashing the structural transformation underway in many parts of the Global South, partly because of the growing South-South

development aid and cooperation. Furthermore, India launched a "Digital India" program in 2015, and the country has witnessed a digital revolution that is now being exported to other parts of the Global South.

Such transformational changes provide optimism to re-imagine

the Global South not as a site of what a commentator once described as "coups and earthquakes", but of robust economic progress and the reduction of poverty.

The author is a professor of international communication at Hong Kong Baptist University. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## Recovery: Key fiscal spending urged by expert

From page 1

"I think exports are the primary positive factor." To further bolster China's economic recovery, Simpfendorfer said policymakers should increase fiscal spending in key fields such as health and education.

His views were echoed by Denis Depoux, global managing director of market consultancy Roland Ber-

ger, who said boosting consumption will be key for China's economic growth this year.

Depoux suggested that the country take further steps to boost confidence among businesses and consumers, including increasing spending on the healthcare system and supporting the development of the private sector.

Looking ahead, he expressed optimism about China's economic prospects, saying "the fundamentals of the Chinese economy are very strong".

"I would not say that all the hurdles and difficulties are gone. However, we see a bit more vitality and also investment that start to power the year," he added.

CHINA DAILY USA  
NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS  
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,  
New York, NY 10036  
Telephone: 212-512-8888  
Fax: 212-512-9898  
editor@chinadailyusa.com  
readers@chinadailyusa.com  
Subscription: 212-512-8899

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National Press Bldg, Suite 1108 529 14th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20045  
Tel: 202-662-7449  
Fax: 202-662-7447  
SAN FRANCISCO  
235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900  
San Francisco, CA 94104  
Tel: 415-348-6388  
Fax: 415-348-6388  
SEATTLE

800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100  
Seattle, WA 98104  
Tel: 206-922-2888  
HOUSTON  
1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100  
Houston, TX 77077  
Tel: 713-595-7660  
CANADA | TORONTO  
4711 Yonge Street, 10th Floor  
Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6B3  
Tel: 416-481-3700

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## CHINA

## Homework circuit breaker sparks debate

By ZHAO YIMENG  
zhaoyimeng@chinadaily.com.cn

The introduction of a homework circuit breaker by a primary school in southern China, which told students to stop working on assignments after 9:30 pm to ensure they have enough sleep, has sparked debate on the best way to reduce academic pressure.

The school in Nanning, capital of the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, announced recently that students would not be criticized for homework left unfinished after 9:30 pm.

It is not the first school or local education authority in the country to adopt such methods to implement the national "double reduction" policy, which aims to reduce students' homework and extracurricular tutoring during their nine years of compulsory education.

While some said the regulation could ensure children get more sleep, many others doubted it was the best way to fundamentally reduce their academic burden.

Xiong Bingqi, director of the 21st Century Education Research Institute, said cooperation from parents will be needed if the measure is to work, because some ask their children to do extra assignments.

"After finishing homework assigned by schools, some students have to continue doing assignments arranged by their parents or extracurricular institutions until 10 pm or 11 pm, so it's not a problem solely decided by schools," Xiong said.

And even though schools may allow students to stop doing homework at 9:30 pm, many parents will be concerned that the unfinished assignments may affect their children's scores or academic rankings, he said.

Since the "double reduction" policy was launched in 2021, most primary and secondary schools in China have reduced students' workloads to some extent.

According to a notice issued by the Ministry of Education in 2021, primary school students should have 10 hours of sleep a night, with middle school students expected to sleep for 9 hours.

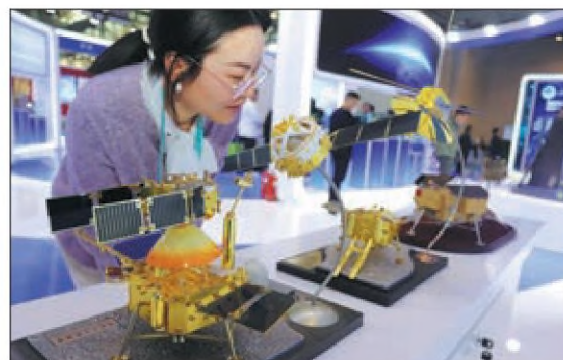
"The proportion of children having reached the standard isn't high, because parents may focus more on children's academic performances than the cultivation of their time-management habits," Xiong said.

He said the fundamental reason for the academic burden placed on students is the country's education evaluation system. The middle school and college entrance examinations still rely on single scores to assess students, and parents are keen for their children to gain a competitive advantage.

Without changes to the evaluation system, it will be difficult to alleviate the academic burden on students, Xiong said.

"We must promote deep-seated reforms in education evaluation," he said. "Otherwise, these measures to reduce the burden are merely superficial actions rather than substantive relief."

## Lunar miniatures



A woman views a model of the three parts of the Chang'e 5 lunar probe in the exhibition area at the 2nd National Advanced Technology Achievements Commercialization Conference in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, on Tuesday. WANG JIANKANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Xizang sees strong growth in economy

By PALDEN NYIMA  
and DAQIONG in Lhasa

The Xizang autonomous region has witnessed a strong economic recovery in recent years, especially through a dramatic increase in foreign trade since the beginning of this year, according to the regional economic planner.

The growth rates of key economic indicators in Xizang — GDP, fixed-asset investment, total retail sales of consumer goods, per capita disposable income of urban and rural residents, and import and export volume — all ranked top in the country last year, according to the region's development and reform commission.

In the first two months of this year, the total value of imports and exports in the region was nearly 1.75 billion yuan (\$250 million), up from about 480 million yuan in the same period last year, according to Lhasa Customs.

Export value reached 1.65 billion yuan, up from about 425 million yuan in 2023, while, imports reached 98 million yuan, up 75 percent year-on-year.

"A high-quality development model featuring innovation, coordination, green development, openness and sharing has been further promoted in the region, leading to a continuous reduction in the urban-rural income gap," said Wang Guanjie, deputy director of the region's development and reform commission.

"In 2024, Xizang put forward more than 40 key tasks, including promoting technological growth,

and the development plan for the hydrogen and oxygen industries, to ensure new progress in the high-quality development of the plateau economy."

Per capita GDP soared to over 65,000 yuan last year.

Tian Guanghua, head of the regional statistics bureau, said rapid social changes in the region date back to the democratic reforms in Xizang that started in 1959, after which the region's economic and social development underwent earthshaking changes.

"The main highlights of the changes and development over the past few decades reflect comprehensive economic growth, with its economic growth rates ranking top nationwide, as well as the improvement in population quality and urbanization, the improvement in people's livelihoods, and overall social prosperity," Tian said.

Statistics from the bureau show that from 1993 to 2017, Xizang's economy sustained double-digit growth for 25 consecutive years.

In addition, people's livelihoods have been continuously improving, with the average life span in the region increasing from 35.5 years before 1959 to 72.19 years, she said.

"The region established a 15-year publicly funded education system," Tian added. "The government pays for children's school meals, lodging and tuition from kindergarten through senior high school."

Contact the writers at  
palden\_nyima  
@chinadaily.com.cn

## Planting plan



Volunteers carry saplings to a tree planting site in Gaozhai village in Zhangye, Gansu province, on Tuesday. A thousand cadres and volunteers from Zhangye participated in the tree planting activity as part of a plan to plant 3.5 million saplings this year to complete the afforestation of 23,560 hectares of land. WANG JIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## UN says China has role to play in fighting world hunger

Country's efforts to step up investment in farming technologies have paid off

By LI LEI  
lilei@chinadaily.com.cn

The World Food Programme is closely following China's food policymaking and global aid initiatives, according to the United Nations agency's China Representative Zhao Bing, who praised the country's food supply situation as a bright spot against rising world hunger over the past decade.

Speaking in Beijing early last month on the sidelines of the annual meeting of the National People's Congress, the top legislature, Zhao said the world is "not on track" to hit the UN's sustainable development goal that aims to end global hunger by 2030.

"Hunger is currently a very grim challenge facing the international community," he said.

The second goal of the UN's sustainable development agenda is to create a hunger-free world by 2030.

However, hunger and food insecurity have been increasing since 2015 due to a mix of factors including the COVID-19 pandemic, regional conflicts, climate change and deepening inequalities.

China is a very important country not only in providing material aid but also in offering many solutions for other developing countries."

Zhao Bing, China representative of the World Food Programme

UN data showed that by 2022, around 735 million people — or 9.2 percent of the world's population — lived with chronic hunger, which the UN said was a "staggering rise" from the pre-pandemic level in 2019.

Another 2.4 billion people faced moderate to severe food insecurity, meaning they lacked sufficient nourishment, up 391 million from 2019, the UN said.

Zhao said Chinese aid programs have been a major source of funding

and personnel for his agency, which has been providing humanitarian aid at the forefront of nearly all crises ranging from those in Yemen and Afghanistan to Syria and the Gaza Strip.

He cited the South-South Cooperation Fund as an example. China created the fund in 2015 with initial spending of \$2 billion to support South-South cooperation and assist developing countries in implementing their agendas. Two years later, the Chinese government provided another \$1 billion to the fund.

WFP's extensive partnerships with the private sector, such as agricultural companies and research institutes, are also helping build resilience against emerging challenges such as climate change.

"China is a very important country not only in providing material aid but also in offering many solutions for other developing countries," Zhao said. "In this regard, WFP and China have the potential to continue cooperation in many aspects."

He said his agency has valued China's food policies and antipoverty expertise by placing one of its two centers of excellence in China — with the other being in Brazil.

Zhao said the NPC meeting —

during which the central government work report was unveiled — offered a peep into China's approach to food production, rural revitalization and even its intentions for international aid programs.

"We hope to understand the role that China plays as an important country in multilateralism, especially in an age of unprecedented and significant changes," he said.

Chinese grain output last year topped 650 million metric tons for the ninth consecutive year, which officials said was the country's 20th bumper harvest in a row.

"With the number of farmers decreasing, it is not an easy task to maintain farming areas and other agricultural resources, but that is what the Chinese government has managed to achieve," Zhao said.

He praised China's technology-driven approach to bolstering food security, noting that innovation now contributes to more than 60 percent of the growth in agricultural output value in the world's largest food consumer.

Efforts to step up investment in breeding technologies, roll out machines tailor-made for various geographies, increase the rate of mechanical farming and promote better farming techniques to farmers have paid off, Zhao added.

## Beverage grading system launched in Shanghai

By ZHENG ZHENG in Shanghai  
zhengzheng@chinadaily.com.cn

Shanghai recently introduced China's first grading system that evaluates the nutritional value of beverages, as part of efforts to guide residents toward more informed and healthier drink choices.

The Nutri-Grade system, guided by the Shanghai Center for Disease Control and Prevention, rates beverages from A to D based on their content of four key nutrients — added sugar, saturated fat, trans fat and non-sugar sweeteners. Beverages receiving a lower grade contain higher amounts of sugar, saturated fat and other unhealthy additives.

The overall grade is determined by whichever of the four nutrient classes receives the lowest score. For example, a drink with an A grade for trans fats but a C grade for added sugar would receive an overall C rating.

While plain unsweetened teas often qualify for the top grade, drinks with artificial sweeteners cannot achieve an A rating. Trials also show

that factors like container size and amount of added ice can have an impact on a beverage's final score.

The need for such a system is clear. According to the Shanghai CDC, 67 percent of adults and 90 percent of primary and secondary school students in the city regularly consume sugar-sweetened beverages.

Gao Boyan, a food science researcher at Shanghai Jiaotong University, said the grading criteria were likely selected based on China's dietary guidelines for preventing obesity, as added sugars and fats are the main contributing factors.

Zang Jiajie, head of Shanghai CDC's nutrition department, said the ratings aimed to "raise public awareness of what constitutes a balanced diet."

Major milk tea brands like Chagee and Naixue have already incorporated the Nutri-Grade system on their menus. Customers can easily see the drink's nutritional grade by clicking on the details in the corner of the image.

The Shanghai CDC previously analyzed 122 milk tea products from

13 brands. It found that under the new system, over 93 percent of those claiming "no added sugar" could receive a B grade or better, while nearly half of those claiming "30 percent sugar" would score a C or better due to sugar content alone.

While only four beverage makers have adopted the labels so far, others are taking action. Local tea milk brand Auntie Jenny recently reformulated one of its products, reducing sugar by 31.5 percent ahead of the grading requirements.

Zang said that after the initial pilot brands, more companies including Starbucks are in discussions to adopt the labeling system. Shanghai also plans to explore the display of beverages grouped by Nutri-Grade rating in community canteens and chain stores to guide healthy consumption habits.

Health experts view the straightforward Nutri-Grade system as an important step toward empowering Shanghai residents to make smarter beverage choices and addressing the overconsumption of unhealthy sugary drinks.

The Nutri-Grade system's selection of key nutrients to evaluate is very important from a nutritional standpoint, especially regarding added sugars. Notably, it excludes naturally occurring lactose from dairy products while flagging saturated and trans fats — all meaningful factors, according to Gu Zhongyi, a nutritionist at the Beijing Dietetic Association.

"To my knowledge, no such non-business nutritional labeling policy has been fully implemented on the Chinese mainland before despite similar guidance from the World Health Organization and previous related research. Overall, I support Shanghai taking this pilot initiative," he added.

For average consumers unfamiliar with reading nutrition labels, the graded rating is easier to understand, Gu said.

"However, I would encourage people to learn general rules for nutrition labeling of prepackaged food so that they can properly read lists of ingredients and nutrition facts," he said.

## CHINA

## Famed Taiwan author, 100, dies

Chi Pang-yuan's *The Great Flowing River* a memoir of love, war during era of turmoil in China

By YANG YANG

yangyang@chinadaily.com.cn

Chi Pang-yuan, a renowned scholar and author of *The Great Flowing River: A Memoir of China, from Manchuria to Taiwan*, died on March 28. She was 100.

"She had a righteous spirit. She is a song of righteousness," Taiwan writer and literary critic Kenneth Pai said while discussing Chi's life.

Born on Feb 19, 1924, in what is now Tieling, of Liaoning province, Chi spent her early years in turmoil as war swept across China, enduring bombings that occurred during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45).

After graduating from Wuhan University in Hubei province in 1947, she went to Taiwan to take a teaching job. Though she had a return ticket to the mainland, she ended up spending the rest of her life on the island.

In 1968, Chi went to study at Indiana University in the United States.

The following year, she became the head of the department of foreign languages and literature at a university in Taichung, Taiwan.

She went on to work as a professor in a similar department at a university in Taipei and ultimately retired in 1988.

A promoter of literature, she edited, translated and published a variety of literary critiques, introducing a vast array of Western literature to Taiwan, and translating representative literary works from Taiwan into English. She also contributed significantly to cultural exchanges across the Taiwan Strait.

For readers across the Strait, Chi was most famous for her memoir, which she started writing when she turned 80 and spent four years completing.

The book — called *Juliu He* in Chinese, meaning *Juliu River* — was published in Taiwan in 2009 and on the Chinese mainland in 2010. It has been translated into English and Japanese.

Named after Liaoning's Liaohe River, which was called the *Juliu River* during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), the epic narrative spans a century, chronicling the tumultuous times from the *Juliu River* on the Chinese mainland to *Yakou* mountain pass in Taiwan.

This book follows two main plot-



Author and scholar Chi Pang-yuan, who passed away on March 28. ZHANG LIXIN / XINHUA

lines. One traces the experiences of her father, Qi Shiyang, who shows the resilience and dignity of a generation of Chinese people facing the Japanese invasion.

The other follows Chi's life, depicting the author's birth and childhood, her wartime evacuation to Chongqing, her education at Nankai Middle School and Wuhan University, and later her pursuit of an academic career in Taiwan.

Written in a gentle and restrained style, the book is not just a personal memory, but a historical testimony of 20th-century China, a memoir written to "commemorate a nation with a backbone", as she said at a book launch ceremony in 2010.

The book begins with Chi's birth as a sick baby girl who narrowly

escapes death. The doctor who saves her life gives her the name *Bangyuan*, which means "a woman with beauty, grace and dignity embodying the elegance of a nation".

During the first six years of her life, Chi lived in the countryside of Tieling with her mother. Her father, a young man who studied in Japan and Germany, had returned to China looking to help quash skirmishes between warlords and defend the country from military threats made by Japan and Russia.

He followed Guo Songling, a subordinate of Zhang Zuolin, a major warlord dominating northeastern China.

At the end of 1925, Guo turned against Zhang, but he failed and was killed. Subsequently, Qi

became one of the individuals Zhang sought to capture. This led Qi to flee to Nanjing.

When Chi was 6 years old, she and her mother left Tieling to join Qi. This was the beginning of 17 years of a displaced life.

"Since the 20th century, the Chinese people have been entangled in suffering... The living do not speak, the dead remain silent," Chi wrote in the book. Such history needs to be recorded because, as she said, "The best way to respond to the ruthlessness of the times and the vicissitudes of history is to write about people and events that transcend political success or failure."

For many people, the sad love story depicted in the book between Chi and a young man Zhang Dafei fully encapsulates this idea.

The cover of the mainland edition of Chi's memoir, *Juliu He*.

After the Sept 18 Incident in 1931, which marked the start of Japan's invasion of China, Qi secretly returned to the Northeast to engage in anti-Japanese activities, and the family moved to various places, including Beijing and Tianjin.

Qi eventually returned to Nanjing, where he set up a school for homeless students. One of them was 18-year-old Zhang Dafei.

Zhang Dafei spent a lot of time with the family, often dining with them, and over time he became like an older brother to Chi, bringing her a sense of comfort during a time when she felt panic, despair and loneliness amid the chaos of war.

Zhang Dafei's father, a government official in Northeast China, was burned alive by Japanese troops as a punishment for his role in assisting the resistance against the invaders, and the young man lost contact with his family after they fled.

After full-scale war broke out in July 1937, he applied to a military school to better serve the country and avenge his father's death.

Before he departed for the school, he left Chi a small package, in which she found a new copy of the *Bible*. On the title page, Zhang wrote: "Wishing you a bright, lovely future, so that you will live in happiness forever."

She kept that book her entire life.

Zhang Dafei became a pilot and a member of the famed Flying Tigers, fighting the Japanese invaders in the skies. Although

they were seldom able to meet, the two kept writing to each other over the next six years.

From 1937 to 1945, Chi read a large number of literary works from home and abroad under the protection and guidance of many reputed scholars and teachers, including Zhang Boling and Zhu Guangqian.

In April 1943, Zhang Dafei went to visit Chi. Upon seeing her, he uttered a sentence that Chi said she never forgot: "You have grown up and become so beautiful." In heavy rain, they found shelter under eaves, where he held her against his chest for a moment and she could hear his heart pounding like a drum.

Chi wrote that she never saw him again after that.

On May 18, 1945, three months before Japan surrendered, Zhang Dafei was killed in aerial combat. Chi received a package from her older brother containing some of the young soldier's personal effects. She was so heartbroken that she didn't open the package for two years.

When she eventually did, she found more than 100 letters she had written to Zhang Dafei and learned that he had died with one of them in his pocket. There was also a letter he had written to her brother, in which he confessed a love for her that he had never revealed and expressed sorrow that they could not be together.

In 1995, Chi found Zhang Dafei's gravestone in Nanjing. Then 75 years old, she saw the gravestone and cried, as the memorials to the other more than 3,000 heroes on the mountain bore silent witness.

This timeless love story, pure and pristine, is the most touching chapter in the book and also serves as a testament to the blood and tears shed during of an era of conflict.

David Der-wei Wang, literary historian and Chinese literature professor at Harvard University, commented in a critique of the book that it is "so sorrowful, so joyful, so unique", emitting a "pure" sound, "a clear and emotional voice forged from a thousand years of tears, transcending history".

By March 2016, *The Great Flowing River* had sold 260,000 copies. In the days following Chi's passing, it has become a bestseller once again, ranking among the most searched titles on online shopping platforms such as JD and Dangdang.

## Guangxi student's bones brittle, but spirit strong

NANNING — Twelve years ago, Dong Qian, then a third grader, was found in her classroom lying on her stomach on a modified wheeled bed, her upper body supported by her elbows, struggling with a fractured leg in a cast.

Today, she remains steadfast in her determination to overcome life's challenges, having persevered through college using a wheeled bed, a wheelchair and crutches, with unwavering support from both her family and the schools she has attended.

Hailing from Lingchuan township, which is situated in Lingchuan county of Guilin city in South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, Dong suffers from congenital osteogenesis imperfecta, commonly known as brittle bone disease, a condition Chinese authorities classified as a rare in 2018.

She was diagnosed with the disease at age 3 after experiencing frequent bone fractures from minor falls. By the time she was 9, she had endured more than 10 fractures.

After undergoing bone surgery in 2012, her family constructed a trolley bed that they used to wheel her directly into the classroom whenever she sustained a fracture.

Since Dong began primary school, her mother, Li Guifang, has been by her side constantly, providing round-the-clock support. In those earlier years, whenever there were class breaks, she would protect her daughter from

"I believe that fortitude comes from unwavering convictions, and a brighter future is attainable for those with strong minds."

Dong Qian, student at Guilin Normal College in Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region who has brittle bone disease.

tripping or bumping into classmates.

Rather than risk Dong being potentially injured during the 5-kilometer journey between home and school, Li and Dong would stay overnight at school on weekdays. The school provided a teacher's dorm room, free of charge, for them to stay in.

In 2011, Dong's parents had to leave her to work at a railway construction site, so her 63-year-old grandmother took over as her constant caretaker.

Dong spent most of her primary school years in a wheelchair. From junior high school to college, she relied on crutches to get around. Despite these physical challenges, her academic performance remained unaffected.

"I didn't falter when hardships struck my family over the years, because I aimed to demonstrate

that my capabilities were equal to anyone else's, and I aspired for the day when my parents could rely on me," Dong said.

Speaking previously about his daughter, Dong Huiling expressed the happiness and solace Dong Qian brought them when he and his wife were away working.

"While we were busy working at the construction site, she sent us caring messages," he said.

However, when reflecting on her health, he couldn't shake off his feelings of helplessness and frustration. "We've sought treatment from every hospital in Guilin and explored options across the country, only to discover there is no cure," he said, tears welling up.

Tragedy befell the family in 2022 with Dong Huiling's untimely death at age 46. He left behind Dong Qian, her mother and her younger sister.

"My mother was left alone to bear all the heavy burdens, and considering my health condition, I have to exert extra efforts to shield her from any future storms," Dong Qian said.

In the fall that year, she enrolled at Guilin Normal College. Upon learning about her disease, the college outfitted a special dorm room for her.

Dong returns home every weekend to spend time with her mother and sister, hoping to bring more laughter and warmth into their lives.

Looking ahead, she said she is determined to confront life's challenges head-on.

"I believe that fortitude comes from unwavering convictions, and a brighter future is attainable for those with strong minds."

XINHUA

## Technology improves sugarcane production

NANNING — As heavy rain clouds gather over Shangtang village in Wuxuan county, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, drivers eye their buffalo herds in the distance and hasten their pace, while unmanned tractors maintain their steady advance across the sugarcane fields.

During this spring plowing season, farmers sitting behind driverless sugarcane tractors, guided by the Beidou Navigation Satellite System, drop sugarcane seeds at regular intervals. With the help of the automated tractors, the process of planting, fertilizing and mulching can be completed in one go.

Modern agricultural technology and mechanization were a real game changer for Wuxuan, one of China's major sugarcane planting areas. Today, the seeding of sugarcane is 10 times more efficient than before.

Tractors now follow a pre-de-

signed route planned by the Beidou.

"With the help of Beidou, we can control the deviation of the straight lines within 2 centimeters, as well as control the distance within 5 centimeters between each line, which can benefit photosynthesis and the absorption of nutrients and oxygen in sugarcane," said Wu Qihui, director of Wuxuan Bosheng Agricultural Machinery Specialized Cooperative. "Also, the favorable ventilation is crucial to achieving high yield."

In 2020, local farmer Lu Ruwen joined the cooperative, which hires out agricultural machinery and equipment. He said it used to take him a week to plant his 1.33 hectares of farmland by hand.

"Now it takes just one day to finish all the work," said Lu, who has been planting sugarcane in southern China for more than 10 years.

In addition to the efficient equip-

ment, quality sugarcane seeds are also crucial to boosting yields.

In the cooperative's breeding base, rows of tall, bushy sugarcane ready for harvest are the early-maturing, high-sugar variety introduced from the regional branch of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. "Later, they will be cut into 20-centimeter-long stalks and then disinfected in our processing workshop," said Wu, adding that their standardized sugarcane seeds are popular because of their higher yield, which can produce 120 metric tons per hectare.

With better policy support for agricultural production, local villagers are increasingly willing to participate in the development of modern agriculture. "The government also has corresponding subsidies for those who adopt mechanized farming methods or disinfected and healthy sugarcane varieties," explained Mo Tingjin, director of the Agricultural Mechanization Service Center of Labin, a city in Guangxi. "Many farmers can even plant sugarcane at no cost with these subsidies."

XINHUA



A farmer drives an agricultural machine to cover newly planted sugarcane seeds with mulching film in Rongnan county, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, on Feb 27. TAN KAIKING / XINHUA

## WORLD

# Stronger dollar takes a toll on Asian currencies

Trend likely to continue as Fed may not cut interest rates anytime soon: Analysts

By PRIME SARMIENTO  
in Hong Kong  
prime@chinadaily.com

A stronger US dollar following high US interest rates has been weighing on Asian currencies, sparking inflationary pressures across the region for the past few weeks.

Analysts expect Asian currencies to remain weaker against the greenback as upbeat economic data have spurred speculation that the US Federal Reserve may not cut interest rates anytime soon. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics said on Friday that nonfarm payrolls in the nation increased by 303,000 in March, indicating a stronger labor market and positive economic outlook.

"The devaluation of Asian currencies is intricately linked to the tightening of global monetary policies," said Deniz Istikbal, an economic researcher at the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research, or SETA, a think tank based in Ankara, Turkey.

He noted that both the Fed and the European Central Bank had hiked interest rates to "levels unseen in the past 25 years," leading to capital outflows from developing Asian economies and pulling down currencies in the region.

Sanjay Mathur, chief economist for Southeast Asia and India at ANZ Research, said the weakness in Asian currencies is "broadly being driven by the strength of the US economy which has resulted in delayed rate cut expectations and a stronger dollar by implication."

The Malaysian ringgit and the Thai baht are among the hardest hit, falling to historic lows in the past few weeks. The ringgit slid to 4.7965 against the dollar on Feb 20, its weakest level since the 1998 Asian financial crisis. The Thai baht has depreciated by 7 percent since January.

The Indonesian rupiah fell to a four-year low of 15,963 against the dollar on April 1, pushing the central bank to intervene in the currency market. The Reserve Bank of India, India's central bank, likewise stepped

in when the rupee hit a record low on March 27 owing to higher demand for imported crude oil.

Mathur said the weaker currencies are boosting inflation levels in the Asian region, as a stronger dollar means that imported food and fuel will cost more. But he said that prices overall will be reined in by subdued domestic demand in Asia. "It is unlikely that corporates can pass on increases in input costs to end consumers," he said.

A stronger dollar usually bodes well for commodity-exporting countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. But such gains will be limited by a decline in global demand, according to Istikbal of SETA.

## Disrupting price stability

"Moreover, currency depreciation negatively affects both society and government by disrupting price stability. Currencies losing value wield significant influence across various domains, ranging from elections to bureaucratic procedures," he said.

Saktiandi Supaat, head of forex research at Kuala Lumpur-based Maybank, said the weaker ringgit is boosting prices of imported goods and services and affecting the purchasing power of Malaysians when traveling. But he said the weaker local currency will ensure that Malaysian exports are cheaper than other countries' domestically priced exports and "ensures our export outlook remains supported."

Malaysia's inflation rose by 1.8 percent in February on higher housing, utilities and transportation costs. Indonesia's inflation rose to 3.05 percent in March, while India's inflation increased by 5.09 percent in February due to higher food prices.

Saktiandi said the ringgit is among the "most undervalued regionally" and as such the Malaysian currency can "potentially see good gains upon a turn in the external environment."

He is likewise sanguine on the prospects of the South Korean won, citing the recovery of the chip cycle and electronics demand as a key driver for the currency in 2024.



United Nations staff members on Monday inspect the grounds of Al Shifa hospital, Gaza's largest hospital, which was reduced to ashes by a two-week Israeli raid. AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE

## Israel bent on Rafah plan despite criticism

GAZA/JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has escalated his pledge to invade the southern Gaza city of Rafah, which is filled with about 1.4 million Palestinians, most of whom are displaced from other parts of the Gaza Strip.

Israel will complete the elimination of Hamas' brigades, including in Rafah, and nothing will prevent this, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Tuesday.

"There is no force in the world that will stop us," Netanyahu said. Netanyahu spoke as Israeli negotiators were in Cairo discussing international efforts to broker a cease-fire deal with Hamas.

Hamas said on Tuesday it was considering a new framework for a truce proposed during the latest round of negotiations in Cairo, as Palestinians returning to southern Gaza confronted the extent of destruction left after the withdrawal of Israeli troops.

Six months into the bloodiest Gaza conflict, Qatari, Egyptian and US mediators have proposed another temporary cease-fire, according to a Hamas source.

The three-part proposal would halt fighting for six weeks to facilitate an exchange of hostages held by Hamas for Palestinian prisoners in Israel.

Saying it "appreciates" the

mediators' efforts, Hamas on Tuesday accused Israel of not responding to any of its demands during the talks.

The United States, Israel's closest ally, has said a ground operation into Rafah would be a mistake and has demanded to see a credible plan to protect civilians.

The leaders of France, Egypt and Jordan warned Israel on Monday against a threatened offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, urging an "immediate" cease-fire in its fighting against Hamas.

## 'Dangerous consequences'

"We warn against the dangerous consequences of an Israeli offensive on Rafah, where more than 1.5 million Palestinian civilians have sought refuge," they said in a joint editorial published in several newspapers.

The editorial was signed by France's President Emmanuel Macron, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Jordan's King Abdullah II.

The three leaders urged that a UN Security Council resolution calling for an "immediate cease-fire... be fully implemented without further delay" and that all hostages held by Hamas be released, also in line with the council's demands.

They called for a "massive

increase" in aid to be allowed in.

Turkiye said it would restrict exports of a wide range of products to Israel, including steel and jet fuel, until a cease-fire is declared in Gaza, the Turkish Trade Ministry said on Tuesday, in a significant measure against Israel after six months of conflict.

The Palestinian death toll from the conflict has crossed 33,200, Gaza's Health Ministry said. The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its tally, but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead.

The conflict began on Oct 7 when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 people hostage.

On Monday, forensic experts from Gaza's Health Ministry were still removing bodies from the yard of Al Shifa hospital, where the main buildings were left as burned-out shattered husks. Workers lifted body parts out of the dirt and put them into plastic sacks.

It was not clear how many were recently dead and how many came from a mass grave that was dug in the hospital in November to bury casualties.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Iran FM accuses US of role in consulate attack

Iran's Foreign Minister on Monday accused the United States of giving Israel the "green light" for a strike on its consulate building in Syria that killed seven Iranian military officials including two generals. Hossein Amir Abdollahian reiterated Teheran's vows that it would respond to the attack, widely blamed on Israel, that appeared to

signify an escalation of Israel's targeting of military officials from Iran. "I'd like to say with a very loud voice from here in Damascus that America has a responsibility in what happened and must be held responsible," Amir Abdollahian told reporters in Damascus during a visit where he met his Syrian counterpart, Faisal Mekdad, who condemned both the

strike and Israel's offensive in Gaza. Amir Abdollahian earlier on that day inaugurated a new site for Iranian consular services in the Syrian capital Damascus, Syrian state media reported, in a building near the previous consulate flattened in a suspected Israeli airstrike last week.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Rwanda seeks Washington's clear position on genocide

By OTIATO OPALI in Nairobi, Kenya  
otiato@chinadaily.com.cn

Rwanda's President Paul Kagame has said he is concerned over the failure of the United States to characterize his country's 1994 massacre as a genocide against the country's minority Tutsi people.

While speaking during a televised news conference in the capital Kigali on Monday, Kagame said the issue was part of the discussions during his talks with former US president Bill Clinton, who led a delegation to a ceremony on Sunday to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the genocide.

"Rwandans will never understand why any country would remain intentionally vague about who was targeted in the genocide. I do not understand that. Such ambiguity is, in fact, a form of denial, which is a crime in and of itself, and Rwanda will always challenge it," Kagame said.

Kagame's comments came after Antony Blinken, US secretary of state, released a statement on Sunday commemorating the massacre but failed to specify that the genocide targeted the Tutsis.

"We mourn the many thousands of Tutsis, Hutus, Twas and others whose lives were lost during 100 days of unspeakable violence," Blinken said in his message posted on social media platform X.

Kagame asserted that the US, together with any other government, had the right to blame Rwanda on any other day but not the commemoration day.

Kagame said he believed he had reached an understanding with US authorities around 2014 for them to avoid any criticism on the genocide anniversary.

"There are 365 days in a year. Give us that day, April 7, and then you can have the rest 364 days to blame us every day for everything you do not like about us," Kagame said.



President of Rwanda Paul Kagame (center left) and his wife Jeannette Kagame (center right) light a remembrance flame surrounded by heads of state and other dignitaries as part of the commemorations of the 30th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide at the Kigali Genocide Memorial in Kigali on Sunday. LUIS TATO / AFP

Rwanda began observing a week of national mourning and commemoration on Sunday to mark the 30th anniversary of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, during which more than 1 million people were killed, according to the Rwandan government.

This year's commemoration will run under the theme Remember-United-Renew and also focuses on Rwanda's transformational jour-

## S. Korea's youth say government failing them

SEOUL — Outnumbered by older voters, underrepresented in parliament, ignored on the campaign trail: South Korea's young say the political system is failing them, and some are fighting back before Wednesday's election.

The poll to choose the National Assembly's 300 lawmakers will be the first vote in South Korean history, where voters aged 60 and older will outnumber those in both their 20s and 30s, official data showed.

This is partly demographics. South Korea has the world's lowest birth-rate and is a rapidly aging society, with the number of marriages in free fall for decades and single-person households now the norm.

Politics is also dominated by older men. Male MPs aged over 50 account for more than 75 percent of the current National Assembly. Just 5.6 percent of candidates for Wednesday's election are under 40.

Lee Min-ji, a 23-year-old student at Seoul's Hankyong University of Foreign Studies, has spent the weeks before the election making handwritten posters trying to get young people to vote.

Like many young South Koreans, she points to a string of recent scandals as evidence that the government is failing the young. That includes the 2022 Halloween crowd crush in Itaewon, which killed more than 150 mostly young people and was blamed on a litany of official oversights.

## Demographic crisis

"Young people are dying every day, while it's considered a problem that (we are) not getting married and not having children," one of her posters said, claiming that officials unfairly hold young people responsible for a demographic crisis that has been decades of bad policy in the making.

Just like many countries, voter turnout in South Korea is lower among the young. Just 57.9 percent of eligible voters in their 20s and 30s cast ballots in the last general election in 2020, compared with 79.3 percent for voters in their 60s and 70s, official statistics showed.

Only slightly more than 50 percent of voters between 18 and 29 said they planned to vote in Wednesday's election "no matter what," according to the latest Gallup Korea poll.

Experts said this is linked to growing dissatisfaction among young people.

While South Korea is seen as a global cultural powerhouse and known for strong semiconductor exports, domestically the younger generation is struggling, with cut-throat competition in education, fewer job opportunities and sky-high housing costs.

Suicide is the leading cause of death for South Koreans aged between 10 and 39, according to official statistics.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Reaping grains



A worker collects salt during the annual harvest in Phetchaburi, Thailand, on Sunday. Salt is a significant export for Thailand, with exports accounting for \$32.4 million in 2022, making it the 31st largest exporter of salt worldwide. MATT HUNT / GETTY IMAGES

## Briefly

### IRELAND

#### Parliament votes in Harris as new PM

Ireland's parliament on Tuesday voted in Simon Harris as the country's new prime minister, replacing Leo Varadkar after he abruptly quit last month citing personal and political reasons. Harris, 37, will become Ireland's youngest-ever prime minister when he is formally installed in the role at a meeting with President Michael D. Higgins later on Tuesday. Harris became prime minister in waiting late last month after his unopposed election to succeed Varadkar as leader of the governing Fine Gael party.

### EUROPE

#### March sees historic heat again: Monitor

Europe's climate monitor said on Tuesday that March was the hottest on record and the 10th straight month of historic heat, with sea surface temperatures also hitting a "shocking" new high. Every month since June 2023 has beaten its own "hottest ever" tag, and March 2024 was no exception. The European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service said March globally was 1.68 C hotter than an average March between the years 1850-1900, the reference period for the preindustrial era.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Xinhua contributed to this story.

## WORLD US

## China, US in bid to boost education ties

Academics, officials push for more efforts to promote understanding

By MAY ZHOU in Houston  
mayzhou@chinadailyusa.com

A push to have more US students study in China is coming from academics and others in the United States and China following President Xi Jinping's initiative last November in San Francisco of inviting 50,000 US students to visit and study in China in the next five years.

One month later, in a speech in Washington, US Ambassador to

China Nicholas Burns called for more US students to study in China, warning that a next generation of leaders "that is cut off from China, that hasn't had an experience there, that doesn't speak Mandarin" is not in the national interest.

In an online discussion last week, Shen Xuesong, minister counselor of education for the Chinese embassy in the US, said numerous programs have been set up for US students.

President Xi and US President Joe Biden reiterated their support and encouraged both sides to further expand people-to-people exchanges during a phone call on April 2, Shen said in a discussion organized by the US Heartland China Association and the nonprofit

China Institute.

The youth leadership program of China Institute will send about 50 US students to China this summer, said Shenzhen Liao, senior vice-president and head of the School of Chinese Studies at the institute.

Shen said China has set up many programs for student exchanges, and many more long-term and short-term programs are being planned to "welcome more American youth to observe China with their own eyes, measure China with their own feet through inter-school exchanges, short-term visits, summer schools, winter camps and other forms, and to be the new generation of envoys of US-China friendship".

The programs offer opportunities

for US high school and college students in a wide range of fields from artificial intelligence and architecture to cultural tours and research projects.

Although education exchanges have witnessed a decline especially in the number of US students studying in China, new exchange programs are still developing, James Smith, president of Eastern Michigan University, said in the online discussion.

Eastern Michigan University has had an education partnership with Tianjin University of Commerce for 20 years.

#### New partnership

Three years ago, it formed a new partnership with Beibu Gulf

University in Qinzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

The program offers an undergraduate degree program to Chinese students at Beibu Gulf University, Smith said. US faculty travel to China to teach students who have the option to come to the US to study at Eastern Michigan University in their final year.

About 30 Chinese students are set to come, he said, and by fall, there will be about 800 students in the program.

"It is by far the largest international initiative that we've done at Eastern Michigan University, not just in the eight years that I've been president, in literally the 175 years of our existence to have 800 students enrolled with us," Smith said.

Kim Norton, mayor of Rochester, Minnesota, who visited China at the end of last year, said in the discussion that the trip made her rethink all she had learned and how it can be applied in her community and throughout the state.

In a recent visit by sister city Xianyang, Shaanxi province, the chancellor of a local university that focuses on healthcare was invited to join the discussion in which Chinese medicine came up, Norton said. It turned out that some students would like to learn more about it.

"So, I think there is such an opportunity here to increase and improve the relationship," she said. "I really look forward to what can happen in the future."

## School-shooter's parents given prison sentences

The mother and father of a Michigan teenager who shot and killed four classmates were each sentenced to between 10 and 15 years in prison on Tuesday after a jury convicted them of manslaughter in a rare case of parents being held responsible in a school shooting.

Jennifer and James Crumbley, Ethan Crumbley's parents, were sentenced immediately after several parents of the victims gave emotional statements in an Oakland County courtroom in Pontiac, Michigan.

"Not only did your son kill my daughter, but you both did as well," Nicole Beausoleil, 17-year-old Madisyn Baldwin's mother, told the court as she wept. James Crumbley sat impassively while his wife, Jennifer, hung her head.

His son was 15 at the time of the shooting at Oxford High School in 2021, in which four students were killed and six other students and a teacher were wounded. Ethan pleaded guilty the following year to four counts of first-degree murder and other charges and was sentenced to life in prison without parole in December.

In remarks to the court before sentencing, Jennifer Crumbley, 46, expressed her "deepest sorrow" and said she had had no inkling her son was capable of killing.

"My husband and I used to say we have the perfect kid. I truly believed that," she said. "I didn't have a reason to do anything different. This is not something I foresaw."

"I will be in my own internal prison for the rest of my life," she said, naming her son's victims several times. "If there's anything the general public can take away from this, it's that this could happen to you, too."

Addressing the court, her 47-year-old husband said, "I am sorry for your loss as a result of what my son did. My heart pours out to every single one of you."

In handing down the sentences, Circuit Court Judge Cheryl Matthews said the convictions were not about poor parenting. She said James Crumbley was responsible for his son's "unfettered access" to the murder weapon and that Jennifer

Crumbley glorified guns.

"These convictions confirm repeated acts or lack of acts that could have halted an oncoming runaway train, about repeatedly ignoring things that make a reasonable person feel the hair on the back of their neck stand up," the judge said.

Prosecutors in the trials of both Crumbleys said the parents were criminally negligent for giving their child a 9mm semi-automatic pistol as a Christmas present and for ignoring signs his mental health had deteriorated and that he was potentially violent.

The parents' defense teams argued, among other points, that it was impossible for the mother and the father to envision their son would carry out a mass shooting.

There is little precedent for the criminal charges faced by the Crumbleys, who are the first parents known to be charged with manslaughter in a school shooting carried out by one of their children.

Experts and gun safety advocates have said their trials were an important step in holding gun-owning parents more accountable for school violence carried out by their children. Studies by the US Department of Homeland Security have shown that around 75 percent of all school shooters obtained their weapons at home.

James Crumbley purchased the handgun as a Christmas present for Ethan just four days before the Nov 30, 2021, shooting.

On the morning of the rampage, both parents were summoned to their son's school after teachers discovered violent messages and drawings on his schoolwork, prosecutors said during the trials.

The Crumbleys were told Ethan needed immediate counseling. But prosecutors said the couple resisted taking the teen home that day and didn't search his backpack or ask him about the gun they knew he could access.

Ethan Crumbley was returned to class. He later walked out of a bathroom with the gun and began firing, according to prosecutors.

REUTERS



Boeing employees assemble 787s inside their main assembly building on their campus in North Charleston, South Carolina, on May 30, 2023.

GAVIN MCINTYRE / REUTERS

## Boeing facing new whistleblower claims

By AI HEPING in New York  
aiheping@chinadailyusa.com

Federal aviation authorities said Tuesday they are investigating claims by a Boeing engineer that the aircraft maker knew of safety flaws in its 787 Dreamliner plane but covered them up to speed production.

The Federal Aviation Administration confirmed the investigation of allegations outlined in articles on Tuesday by The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal describing charges by the whistleblower, who has been at Boeing more than 10 years.

Sam Salehpour, who worked on the Dreamliner, said there were "shortcuts" in Boeing's assembly processes leading to excessively large gaps between different plane parts that could "ultimately cause a premature fatigue failure without any warning, thus creating unsafe conditions for the aircraft with potentially catastrophic accidents", according to an FAA complaint released by Salehpour's attorneys and published by the Journal.

Sam Salehpour, who worked on the Dreamliner plane, said there were "shortcuts" in Boeing's assembly processes.

A lawyer for Salehpour told the Times that the FAA had interviewed him on Friday.

Reuters reported that Salehpour's lawyers wrote to the FAA's head, Michael Whitaker, in January stating that Salehpour had made observations working on the 787 manufacturing line in 2021.

Boeing released a statement defending the aircraft, saying it is "fully confident" in the Dreamliner. The company said the issues raised by the engineer "have been subject to rigorous engineering examination under FAA oversight".

Boeing said it incorporated "join verification" into production processes after slowing output and

halting deliveries for nearly two years in response to employees who identified "conformance" issues on the 787.

The company also denied charges it retaliated against the worker.

Another whistleblower, John Barnett, a former Boeing employee who had reportedly raised concerns about the company's production issues, was found dead on March 9 of an apparent suicide, according to authorities in South Carolina, Reuters reported.

Whitaker told the Times that Boeing was taking a hard line against Boeing after the Alaska Airlines episode in January, when there was an in-flight blowout of a large fuselage panel of an Alaskan Airlines 737 MAX 9 aircraft. Pressure on Boeing grew this week when an engine cowling fell from a Southwest Airlines 737-800 jet taking off from Denver airport.

Whitaker didn't address Salehpour's claims against Boeing but told the Times that the company "must commit to real and profound improvements".

"This won't be back to business as usual for Boeing," he said in a statement. "Making foundational change will require a sustained effort from Boeing's leadership, and we are going to hold them accountable every step of the way."

Dave Calhoun, who has been Boeing's CEO for four years, announced last month that he plans to step down at the end of this year.

Also on Tuesday, Boeing said that its airplane deliveries dropped in the first quarter to the lowest number since mid-2021 as the company faces increased scrutiny after a door plug blew out from one of its 737 MAX 9 planes midair in January.

The company handed over 83 planes in the three months ended March 31, most of them 737s, compared with 157 in the prior quarter and 130 planes in the year-earlier period, Reuters reported. In March, Boeing delivered 29 planes. Rival Airbus said Tuesday that it delivered 142 planes in the first three months of the year, 63 of them in March.

## Norfolk Southern to pay \$600 million in Ohio derailment

By MAY ZHOU in Houston

Railroad company Norfolk Southern agreed to pay \$600 million to settle lawsuits related to a fiery train derailment with toxic materials in February 2023 in eastern Ohio.

If approved by the US District Court in Ohio, the settlement would cover lawsuits within 20 miles of the derailment, which released toxic smokes into the air and forced many residents and business to leave the area. The settlement also will cover personal injury claims within a

10-mile radius of the derailment.

Norfolk Southern said the settlement doesn't mean an admission of liability, wrongdoing or fault.

"Individuals and businesses will be able to use compensation from the settlement in any manner they see fit to address potential adverse impacts from the derailment," the company said in a statement Tuesday. "This could include healthcare needs and medical monitoring, property restoration and diminution, and compensation for any net business loss."

The 2023 derailment of cars containing hazardous materials occurred outside East Palestine, Ohio. It sent fumes and chemicals into the air, which led to roughly 2,000 out of 4,700 local residents to evacuate temporarily.

Some businesses were closed, and residents with homes close to the derailment site and nearby creeks said they were still exposed to chemicals after they returned.

They complained of health problems from the exposure, including burning sensations in their eyes,

tingling in their lips, heaviness in their chest and swelling of lymph nodes in their necks and groins, according to CNN.

Since the derailment, Norfolk Southern said in its statement that it has spent \$104 million in community assistance to East Palestine and the surrounding areas, including \$21 million in direct payments to residents. Another \$4.3 million was spent to upgrade the area's drinking water infrastructure, \$2 million for community-directed projects, and \$500,000 for economic

development.

The company estimated in January that the total cost related to the derailment would top \$1.1 billion and will continue to grow because of continuing cleanup work and lawsuits. Norfolk Southern's profit for the last quarter of 2023 had fallen 33 percent.

In a court filing Tuesday, the plaintiffs said they expected to file a motion for the judge to approve the settlement within 10 days. Attorneys representing the claimants said they hope to make the claims process easy

and efficient and to begin sending out payments by the end of 2024.

"We believe this is a fair, reasonable and adequate result for the community on a number of levels, not the least of which is the speed of the resolution, and the overall amount of the awards residents can expect, which will be significant for those most impacted by the derailment," representatives from four different law firms said in a joint statement.

The National Transportation Safety Board hasn't finished investigating the accident, but its preliminary report said that a wheel bearing in the final stage of overhaul was observed from a surveillance video from a local residence.

# BUSINESS

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## Ant Group simplifies payment experience for foreigners, elderly

By FAN FEIFEI  
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

Ant Group plans to expand mobile payment methods and build more international consumer-friendly zones across major tourist hot spots and commercial cities in China, as part of a broader push by the financial technology company to simplify payment services for foreigners in the country.

The company will improve payment services at locations most frequented by foreign visitors, including key transportation hubs like entry and exit ports, high-speed railway stations, ride-hailing areas, as well as tourist attractions, hotels, and shopping districts, said Xue Hongyan, general manager of global business services at Ant Group.

Xue said the company aims to expand cooperation with more international bank cards organizations and overseas e-wallets, further enrich both the online and offline consumption scenarios for foreigners in China, and ensure that foreigners in China can use mobile payments without any hurdles.

Ant Group launched an initiative to build the country's first international consumer-friendly zone at the Solana shopping complex in Chaoyang district of Beijing on Monday, and hopes to expand such zones in 16 cities nationwide in the next six months.

Working with local merchants, tourism sites and commercial districts, the initiative is expected to significantly enhance the accessibility and convenience of mobile payments for international visitors and drive business growth for local merchants.

Currently, the company offers two mobile payment alternatives for overseas visitors.

Foreigners can choose to bind major international bank cards, including Visa and Mastercard, to its mobile payment app Alipay to access an array of local services from shopping, dining, ride-hailing to public transportation, without a local bank account or phone number.

Alipay+, a suite of cross-border

mobile payment and digitalization technology solutions developed by the international business unit of Ant Group, has enabled overseas e-wallet users from countries including South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Mongolia, to pay with their home e-wallets across the nation.

The company has said that users of NayaPay, Pakistan's leading fintech platform, have been allowed to make payments with their e-money accounts at its extensive network of 80 million merchants nationwide as bilateral trade and visits increase. This brings the total number of overseas e-wallets accepted on the Chinese mainland to 11.

The State Council, China's Cabinet, published a guideline on improving payment services and enhancing payment convenience in March, in order to better meet the diversified payment needs of the elderly and foreign visitors.

The intensified efforts to build up international consumer-friendly zones will help remove the various inconveniences and confusion encountered by overseas visitors in China, and lay a solid foundation for improving their mobile payment experiences and enrich consumption scenarios, said Wang Pengbo, a senior analyst at market consultancy Botong Analysis.

He said providing convenient payment services for foreigners is not only part of the deepened opening-up of China's payment sector, but is also conducive to bolstering the internationalization of the country's financial sector.

Rana, a tourist from Pakistan, said he just needs to complete payments by using NayaPay, the familiar home e-wallet on his mobile phone, without downloading new apps or using cash.

Chao Zhan, vice-president of NetsUnion Clearing Corp, said the Chinese online payment clearing house will actively provide inter-connection clearing support for mobile payment services both at home and abroad, and support the two payment services: binding international cards to domestic payment apps and the use of overseas e-wallets in China.



Pernod Ricard products on display during an expo in Shanghai. ZHANG HENGWEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## More potential for Sino-French biz ties

Economic, trade relations between two nations highly complementary

By ZHONG NAN  
zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

Strengthened economic and trade relations between China and France will not only benefit both countries, but also contribute to the sustainable growth of global supply chains, said government officials and business leaders.

As this year marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Beijing and Paris, they said the two sides share huge trade complementarity, intertwined interests and substantial potential for economic cooperation.

During his meetings with a number of French government officials, senior executives of French firms and industry associations in Paris from Sunday to Monday, Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao stressed that prospects for Sino-French economic and trade cooperation are wide-ranging. The Chinese government is dedicated to optimizing the business environment and providing service guarantees for foreign companies to invest and operate in its market, said Wang's ministry on Tuesday.

"As the Chinese economy continues to show signs of improvement and recovery, there is a focus on accelerating the emergence of new economic growth drivers and persistently exploring new development areas," said Wang, adding that this presents multinational companies with expanded market opportunities.

With China launching anti-dumping investigations into brandy imported from the European Union in early January, Wang told French business leaders that the country will conduct the investigations transparently and openly in accordance with its laws and World Trade Organization rules, fully ensuring the rights of all stakeholders.

The investigations were initiated at the request of the domestic industry and are not targeted at any specific EU country. The queries will not presuppose any conclusions, he added.

At these meetings, business leaders from French companies, including BNP Paribas and Danone SA, said they remain optimistic about the prospects of China's economic growth and business environment. They will continue to commit to long-term development in China.

Thanks to China's massive market, sophisticated industrial system, strong supply chain competitiveness and the improving business environment, foreign direct investment from France soared 586 percent year-on-year in China in the first two months of this year, Wang's ministry said.

After achieving a 6 percent year-on-year growth in the Chinese market in its 2023 fiscal year, Pernod Ricard, a French wine and spirits group, said it will focus on premium and diversified products in the years ahead.

"China stands as Pernod Ricard's second-largest market, where we

have established a presence for over 30 years. We will respond promptly to ever-evolving market and consumer demands in the country," said Jerome Cottin-Bizzone, CEO of Pernod Ricard China.

Sharing similar views, Barbara Coppola, CEO of French sporting goods retailer Decathlon, said China is one of the group's key markets and the company will continue investing in the country.

"China stands out as one of the key global markets possessing comprehensive capabilities, including industrial, logistical, product design and retail strengths," she said, adding that Decathlon benefits from a fully integrated supply chain within China.

France is identified as another country with similar capabilities. China's importance to Decathlon is both significant and multifaceted, she said.

With China entering a new era of green and innovation-led growth, it will continue to export industrial and consumer goods in return for France's high-tech products, including passenger aircraft, medical equipment and green products, said Gao Lingyun, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics.

The total trade value between China and France reached 555.11 billion yuan (\$76.74 billion) in 2023, up 3.1 percent year-on-year. Among the total, China's imports from France stood at 262.42 billion yuan, surging 10.9 percent on a yearly basis, said China's General Administration of Customs.

## Jan-Feb container exports surge 115%

By ZHONG NAN

China saw a substantial rise in exports of shipping containers in the first two months, driven by heightened security concerns in the Red Sea maritime passage and considerable growth in shipping capacity prompted by the arrival of new vessels, said container manufacturers and freight forwarders.

Exports of newly made containers at Ningbo-Zhoushan Port in East China's Zhejiang province amounted to 831 million yuan (\$115 million) in the first two months, soaring nearly 400 percent year-on-year, while Foshan, another shipping container manufacturing hub in South China's Guangdong province, saw the export of containers exceed 40,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) during the period, jumping 460 percent, statistics from Ningbo and Guangzhou Customs showed.

Containers are the chief form of conveyance for the long-distance seaborne transport of goods. Over 90 percent of the world's containers are produced in China, said the Beijing-based China Container Industry Association.

Zhang Zhuohui, assistant president of Ningbo Xinhua International Containers Co Ltd, said that after the explosive growth of the market in 2021, there was a short-term surplus of containers, leading to a relatively sluggish order situation in 2023. Since the beginning of this year, demand has been recovering.

China's container export volume amounted to 2.31 million units in 2023, down 27.9 percent year-on-year. The latest data showed that in January and February of this year, the country's container export volume reached 640,000 units, surging 114.7 percent on a yearly basis, said a report by the Shenzhen Zhongshang Industry Research Institute Co Ltd, an industry consulting service provider based in Shenzhen, Guangdong province.

"We are hiring workers on a daily basis to meet surging overseas demand," said Zhang, adding that the ongoing tensions in the Red Sea region have escalated the risks for shipping companies transporting goods through one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world, leading to a spike in rates and resulting in a shortage of available shipping containers in ports of many countries.

In addition to arranging ships to carry newly made containers to ports in North America and Europe, shipping companies such as Switzerland-based Mediterranean Shipping Co SA and France's CMA CGM have deployed ships specifically to load newly made containers and supply them to overseas ports, said Yu Shuai, assistant manager of the shipping department at Ningbo Huangang International Shipping Agency Co Ltd.

Since last year, a large number of container ships have been delivered across the world, creating more demand for containers. At the same time, the Red Sea tensions have affected parts of the supply chain, causing a temporary structural shortage of containers, said Yu.

Moreover, new containers are increasingly being exported along with goods. China's total export value reached 3.75 trillion yuan in the first two months, a year-on-year increase of 10.3 percent. The country's growing trade volume has also boosted demand for containers.

"Empty containers at our terminals stood at 158,000 TEUs at the peak period in February. The number has dropped to 80,000 TEUs in late March," said Wu Guangji, deputy manager at the operation unit of Ningbo Beilun Third Container Terminal Co Ltd.

Zhou Zhicheng, director of the research department at the Beijing-based China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing, said that the ongoing tensions in the Red Sea are likely to lead to increased costs across the global supply chain in the second half.

This situation has resulted in rising expenses related to international transportation, overseas warehousing and management of supply chains. It has also amplified other risks through knock-on effects, said Zhou.



A foreign tourist pays via Alipay at a store in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

### Briefly

#### Container handling hits record in Tianjin

North China's Tianjin Port handled over 5.41 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) of containers in the first quarter of this year, up 7.2 percent year-on-year, setting a record, the port authorities said. The port saw its cargo throughput reach 118 million metric tons in the first three months, up 3.2 percent year-on-year, according to the Tianjin Port Group.

#### Renminbi weakens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, weakened 9 pips to 7.0956 against the US dollar on Tuesday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. In China's spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

## DHL Express: China's policy moves to aid growth

By ZHENG XIN  
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

China's recent efforts to strengthen foreign trade through a raft of policy measures offer new opportunities for international logistics corporations like DHL Express to further grow their businesses in the country, according to a senior executive.

China has been opening up its market to the rest of the world to unleash the large potential of its megamarket and has put in place favorable policies to support foreign firms in expanding their operations in the country, said Wu Dongming, CEO of DHL Express China.

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

"The action plan comprising 24 specific pro-foreign investment measures unveiled by the State Council, for example, is one of the very supportive policies that aims at improving the environment for foreign investment and attracting more global capital," Wu said.

"China's resolve for further and wider openness benefits China and the world, as China is crucial to the world's economic growth prospects. We always welcome and support the openness because it drives global trade."

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

Wu said DHL Express is optimistic about China's economic development, which boasts the world's largest middle-income group and the world's largest logistics market.

As one of the most favorable investment destinations in the world, China's total trade in goods has ranked first globally for the past

six consecutive years. It is also a powerhouse of technology and innovation, leading the world in energy consumption reduction, he said.

Since entering the Chinese market in 1980, the company has invested over 10 billion yuan (\$1.38 billion) to build network facilities around China, providing thousands of jobs, while it vows to continue investing in business, operations and technology to keep growing in the country, one of the most important markets for DHL Express.

The massive market demand and growth opportunities in China, especially in sectors such as new energy, digital transformation, intelligent manufacturing and e-commerce, are prompting an increasing number of multinational companies to enhance their investments in trade in services-related businesses within the country, said Chu Xiangyin, a professor of supply chain management at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing.

Wu said DHL Express will have invested more than 2 billion yuan in

building, upgrading and expanding its gateways in Wuxi, Chengdu, Shenzhen, and other Chinese cities by 2025.

The logistics giant has also invested in lower-tier cities in China, including several service centers in cities like Jiujiang in Jiangxi province, Taifan in Shandong province and Yinchuan in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region in recent years.

"The Shenzhen super gateway, in particular, will launch more cargo routes from the city to major destinations around the world after it becomes operational as planned in 2025, offering more efficiency and convenience to cross-border and intercontinental air transport for our customers in the southern parts of China," he said.

"We've seen that China has been taking a series of effective economic policies and structural reforms to drive higher-quality and further development. As a logistics company for the world, we continue to connect China with the world and the world with China in a sustainable way."

## BUSINESS

# Nation ranks 2nd for new unicorns in '23

Smart tech, chips and biotech among sectors driving billion-dollar startups

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou  
qiuquanlin@chinadaily.com.cn

Led mainly by artificial intelligence, semiconductors and new energy, China developed 56 new unicorns in 2023, following the United States' 70 such firms, according to a global unicorn index released on Tuesday.

The world has minted one unicorn — privately held startups with valuations of \$1 billion or more — every two days over the past year to take the total of known unicorns in the world to a new record, according to the index, which was released by the Hurun Research Institute in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province.

Since 2019, the number of unicorns has tripled from 494 to 1,453. They are based in 53 countries and 291 cities, ushering in an explosion of new technologies to the market, according to the index.

The index is a ranking of such startups founded in the 2000s that have yet to be listed on a public exchange.

"The world's unicorns on the ranking list are disrupting financial services, business management solutions and healthcare," said Rupert Hoogewerf, chairman and chief researcher of the Hurun report.

AI has become one of the fastest-growing sectors in 2023. In China, one-year-old Beijing-based Moonshot AI and two-year-old Shanghai-based MiniMax are leading the way for ChatGPT-like products, according to the index.

TikTok owner ByteDance, based in Beijing, has become the world's most valuable unicorn for three consecutive years, running with a value of \$220 billion, the index indicated.

Founded in 2012, ByteDance's

revenue hit \$110 billion in 2023, surpassing Tencent in the process and highlighting its e-commerce capabilities.

Despite China's poor recent stock market performance, the country nevertheless has proven a trailblazer when it comes to taking unicorns public, with 18 of the 29 unicorns issuing IPOs in 2023, far ahead of the US at five, the index said.

The index was released during the Guangzhou Annual Investment Conference held on Tuesday. The conference, which focused on promoting the city's business and investment environment, attracted more than 1,000 government officials and business representatives from 18 countries and regions.

Additionally, a large number of domestic and foreign investment projects were signed during the conference.

In the city's Huadu district, 45 new investment projects worth 75 billion yuan (\$10.37 billion) were inked, involving industries such as low-altitude economy, modern logistics, vehicles, intelligent manufacturing, new energy and digital economy.

Of the projects, 10 are involved in the low-altitude economy, as Huadu, in the northern part of Guangzhou, has been promoting strategic and geographical positions in emerging industries.

Guangzhou, along with Hefei of Anhui province, Hangzhou of Zhejiang province as well as Jiangsu province's Suzhou and Nanjing, have become the fastest-growing cities in China in terms of new unicorns.

Guangzhou has 24 unicorns — almost equal to that of Israel or Canada. In the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the number of unicorns now stands at 70, according to the Hurun report.



State Grid employees check power lines in Suqian, Jiangsu province. WANG SONGZHU / FOR CHINA DAILY

## It's 'protect power lines, love birds' for State Grid's Jiangsu company

By ZHUANG QIANG and PANG BO

The Hongze Lake Wetland, spanning some 50,000 hectares in the prefecture-level city of Suqian in Jiangsu province, draws nearly 1 million migratory birds to breed and winter every year, making it a veritable avian paradise.

The birds, comprising some 234 species, include eight first-class nationally protected species, such as Oriental white storks and red-crowned cranes, and 32 second-class nationally protected feathered friends like reed parrotbills and baikal teals.

Zhang Xiumin, chief of the Natural Ecology Division at the Suqian Ecological Environment Bureau, said the settlement of Oriental white storks shows the ecological environment is getting better in Suqian — one of the country's first national innovation bases for practicing the concept that "green mountains and clear water are equal to mountains of gold and silver".

"In early March, we found a couple of Oriental white storks nesting on an iron tower connecting 220 kilovolt transmission lines. Last year, they gave birth to five baby birds here," said Zhang Jie, a staffer from State Grid Suqian Power Supply Co.

As beautiful as the birds are, they are sometimes a potential threat to local energy security, as their droppings and nesting materials can fall on high-voltage power lines, leading to short circuits and other malfunctions.

Zhang Jie said that the Oriental white storks and other rare birds like to nest on "isolated trees," for which they likely take the towers, and local power transmission structures have become their preferred abodes.

He added that the birds' nesting materials are diverse, and include branches, wires and woven bags, which are prone to fall on high-voltage lines. Meanwhile, droppings landing on insulated porcelain caps can cause discharges, leading to power failures. Short circuits or other failures along the lines can also be fatal to birds.

To solve the problem of "birds competing with power lines", Suqian Power Supply Co of the State Grid — which shoulders a dual task of safeguarding the nation's energy security and being an economic lifeline — has installed more than 300 protective barriers on nesting towers to prevent droppings and nesting debris from falling onto electrical wires and causing shorts.

To help better protect these birds, Suqian Power Supply Co also set up the first migratory bird rescue station in the wetland, together with the establishment of a "Protect Transmission Lines and Love Birds" volunteer team.

The station is located under an artificial bird nest of two square meters, and is equipped with first aid materials such as iodine, bandages and scissors, as well as sufficient food and water supplies.

Li Mofeng, captain of the volun-

teer team, said that so far, they have identified three suitable habitats to build "standalone villas" for birds with 18-meter-high concrete poles, attracting Oriental white storks to make nests there.

"Once injured birds are found, our rescue station can play a role similar to that of an ambulance, providing rapid medical treatment and ensuring their safety," Li said.

This is a green mode of friendly coexistence between rare bird species and power transmission lines, and also a standardized rescue process of "patrol-protect-rescue", Li said.

He said the volunteer team consists of 30 people who are mainly power line inspectors, monitoring power supply lines and the surrounding environment through manual inspection or by using cloud platforms. Once they find injured or endangered birds, they can initiate emergency assistance.

Wang Songzhu, Li's colleague, said they are very happy to begin the work, and it was a great thing to see the birds grow in number.

Wang said that since 2022, three Oriental white stork couples have nested on transmission towers, giving birth to 11 chicks.

Wang stressed that they will fully leverage the role of the rescue station and work with local authorities, promoting the job of protecting transmission lines and birds alongside biodiversity protection.

Contact the writers at zhuangqiang@chinadaily.com.cn



An aerial view of Canton Tower in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province. YANG HE / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Transmission project hits operational milestone

By ZHENG XIN  
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

The world's highest-altitude direct current transmission project has operated safely for over 12 years, with a cumulative power transmission of more than 20.3 billion kilowatt-hours, said its operator, State Grid Corp of China.

The Qinghai-Xizang grid interconnection project, linking Xining, the capital of Northwest China's Qinghai province, with Lhasa, capital of neighboring Xizang autonomous region, is also the longest transmission line crossing permafrost.

Since it began operation in 2011, over 11.3 billion kWh of electricity has been transmitted to Xizang from Qinghai, while 9 billion kWh has been sent to Qinghai from Xizang, said State Grid, the world's largest utility company.

By integrating the power grid in Xizang with the national grid, the Qinghai-Xizang grid interconnection project could transfer electricity to Xizang to alleviate its power shortages during the dry season in winter and spring. During the rainy season in summer and fall, the project is able to transmit surplus hydroelectric power from Xizang to Qinghai for consumption.

For a considerable period of time, hindered by geographical constraints and other factors, power supply shortage was a prominent bottleneck restricting the economic and social development of Xizang.

The upgrade and rapid development of the power grid have, however, fundamentally solved the region's long-standing power shortage problem, improving the quality of life of a large number of farmers and herdsmen in Xizang.

At the same time, it has laid the foundation for the transformation of the plateau's resource advantages into economic strengths, serving as a strong support for local high-quality development and rural revitalization.

State Grid plans to further expand the grid network this year by setting up an additional 600 megawatts of direct current capacity based on the existing 600 MW capacity, significantly enhancing the bidirectional transmission capability of the project.

The company has been stepping up efforts to foster new quality productive forces in recent years, with widespread innovations such as ultrahigh-voltage (UHV) power transmission networks, as the country forges ahead in cutting coal consumption and increasing the

use of renewable energy in its power mix amid its energy transition.

The widespread application of such innovations will generate a significant pull effect on the industrial chains, further driving the development of new quality productive forces in the country, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

With China entering a new era of green and innovation-led growth, Chinese companies have already achieved breakthroughs in new technologies, including UHV transmission lines, and the country should accelerate independent innovation in the power system, concentrating efforts on breakthroughs in core technologies to ensure the steady operation of new power systems, Lin said.

Transformation of the power sector plays a critical role in facilitating the government's ambition of achieving carbon neutrality before 2060, he added.

Compared with traditional transmission lines, UHV lines not only increase transmission capacity and extend transmission distances, but also reduce transmission losses. These technologies have the advantages of high efficiency, energy saving, environment protection and

high reliability, and are the foundation for large-scale application and promotion.

China's continuous construction of UHV transmission lines, which usually transmit energy at more than 800,000 volts, doubling the voltage of conventional high-voltage lines and allowing them to transmit up to five times more electricity at minimal energy loss along the way, is considered an answer to the nation's energy imbalance, said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

The high speed of construction of China's domestic grid network in recent years, with a focus on UHV power transmission networks, ensures a more robust grid-network structure and greater use of the transmission channels, he said.

China has been at the forefront of UHV technology for over a decade, with its first such line going into operation in 2009 and a current network of more than 30 lines.

As a result, consumption of clean energy in the country's western regions, where solar and wind resources are abundant, kept climbing as State Grid keeps innovating in environmentally protective power grid technology, which

effectively boosts green and high-quality development of China's power grid construction.

Latest data show that the installed capacity of new energy in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region's power grid has reached 66.11 million kilowatts, accounting for 46.3 percent of the total, while that of Qinghai province touched 38.67 million kW, 69.46 percent of the total.

According to State Grid, the electricity transmitted by the Qinghai-Xizang grid interconnection project has shown consistent growth over the years, surging from 650 million kWh in 2012 to 2.8 billion kWh in 2023.

The growth rates of electricity consumption in Xizang have been among the highest in China for years. The region's electricity consumption volume increased from 2.89 billion kWh in 2012 to 11.98 billion kWh in 2022, it said.

State Grid has vowed to continue investing in grid network construction, focusing on the construction of UHV power transmission projects, to ensure power supply stability and boost green power consumption.

The company has also committed to stepping up construction of clean energy power transmission, intelligent power distribution systems, new energy storage regulations and vehicle network interaction, among others.

## AI's role key, but firms need more time

By SHI JING in Shanghai  
shijing@chinadaily.com.cn

While C-suite executives across the world agree that artificial intelligence is key to increased productivity, most workforces are not yet ready to embrace the transformation, a report by international human resources service provider Mercer showed.

In a poll covering over 12,200 company executives and industry insiders across 17 geographies and 16 industries, 40 percent of the executives said AI is expected to increase workforce productivity by 30 percent, according to Mercer's 2024 Global Talent Trends Study unveiled to Chinese audiences on Monday.

Under closer scrutiny, the 30 percent increase either stands for replacing 30 percent of the company's human staff, or increasing productivity by 30 percent with the headcount remaining unchanged, Ilya Bonic, Mercer's global career leader and head of strategy, explained at a news briefing in Shanghai on Monday.

However, 58 percent of the surveyed executives believe that technology is advancing faster than their firms' pace in retraining workers. Only one-third of the companies believe they are able to realize growth this year under the current talent model.

Therefore, 44 percent of the interviewees globally said they will redesign work to incorporate AI into automation, while the ratio was slightly lower in China, with 36 percent of the respondents entertaining this option.

According to Peta Latimer, president of Mercer Asia, blue-collar workers were the most vulnerable group over the past few rounds of technology revolution. However, white-collar workers and professionals will be the most affected by AI, the first time in history.

Mercer found that 45 percent of the interviewed Chinese employees are confident that their companies will provide AI-related skills training, while the global average is only 30 percent.

When asked if they were willing to give up 10 percent of their salaries in exchange for something, 29 percent of the Chinese employees said they wanted to learn new things during work hours, while the ratio was 20 percent in neighboring markets such as Southeast Asia, said Eric Lu, career product leader at Mercer China.

The Chinese employees' ideal of learning something new during the course of their work may be realized by the adoption of AI, as people will have extra time as machines take over repetitive and transactional work, Bonic said.

In general, risks weigh higher on executives' minds this year, including inflation, shifting economic interests, extreme weather or natural disasters accelerated by climate change, and digital acceleration including AI, according to Bonic.

The Chinese job market also faces some pressure in terms of the unemployment rate. But this can be interpreted as "a compounding effect", said Catherine Li, president of Mercer China.

While there are some cyclical reasons, the expanding labor force in China should not be overlooked. On the one hand, more younger candidates, especially fresh university graduates, are entering the job market every year. On the other, the senior groups have not retired from their current posts. The expanding base will affect employment figures, said Li.

More importantly, technological advancement such as generative AI exerts the biggest influence.

Low-level jobs that can be replaced by AI will no longer be needed. Traditional industries such as real estate are seeing their employment rates declining.

In general, industries are upgrading as China calls for the development of new quality productive forces. However, candidates' reskilling and upskilling are still under way, resulting in a mismatch of talent demand and supply.

However, this can be considered structural unemployment, which can be termed as a positive signal as it reflects the economy's upgrading and transformation, she said.

# BUSINESSFOCUS

## CHINA UP-CLOSE

# Visitors to benefit from payments revamp

Promoting acceptance of foreign bank cards, cash, mobile spending also intended to better protect consumer rights

By LIU ZHIHUA  
and ZHOU LANXU

China is expected to intensify efforts to facilitate a seamless payment mechanism for foreigners and the elderly, and create a more friendly, inclusive and multichannel payment environment, said experts and business leaders.

This is not only part of the country's continued opening-up endeavor, but is also conducive to improving the payment infrastructure so as to accelerate the building of a unified domestic market, as well as boosting consumption and people's livelihoods, they said.

The People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, and the Beijing municipal government jointly held a meeting on March 28 to enhance payment services, as part of the country's strong push to simplify the payment process for foreign visitors and improve the business climate.

This came after the State Council, China's Cabinet, released a guideline that coordinated the efforts of various authorities on improving payment services and enhancing payment convenience on March 7, in order to better meet the diversified payment needs of the elderly and foreign visitors.

The guideline, approved by the State Council executive meeting on Feb 23, called for coordinated efforts among authorities to promote the acceptance of foreign bank cards, guarantee the use of cash, improve mobile payment convenience, and further protect consumer rights while choosing payment methods and optimizing account services.

The PBOC has outlined a timetable and roadmap for putting in place the relevant measures since then.

On March 14, the PBOC released a payment guide, which provides foreigners with text and graphic instructions on using bank cards, cash, mobile payment and e-CNY in China.

No identification is required for transactions below a certain amount when foreigners use mobile payments such as Alipay, Weixin Pay and UnionPay. Some international e-wallets, such as Thailand's TrueMoney, and Naver Pay, which are used frequently in South Korea, will be directly accepted by many merchants in China. Foreigners can also open bank accounts with passports or other valid IDs at major banks such as Industrial and Commercial Bank of China.

During a meeting on March 15, the PBOC also called on financial institutions in Shanghai to accelerate efforts and amplify resources to achieve more progress in facilitating foreign bank card acceptance, cash usage, mobile payments and bank account services.

### Competitive market

Liu Chunsheng, an associate professor at the Central University of



Visitors purchase cashmere products through mobile payment methods during the 20th China-ASEAN Expo in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, in September. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Finance and Economics' School of International Trade and Economics, said the issue of payments is closely related to China's image and competitiveness in the international financial market.

Recent efforts by the authorities and financial institutions will help remove various inconveniences and confusion encountered by foreigners staying in China. This is increasingly important as more foreigners will work or live in China amid the country's rapid economic development and deepened internationalization, he said.

This is also a sign that China is devoted to promoting high-level opening up after the COVID-19 pandemic. The country is providing the world with more business opportunities and is ready to further open its market, Liu said.

China Construction Bank said it has always adhered to the principle of "payment for the people" and attaches great importance to the construction of a payment infrastructure. The bank said it has been customizing services for the elderly, bridging the digital divide, and it also supports various valid identification documents for card issuance and usage by foreigners in China. Its ATMs accept foreign cards for cash withdrawals, and branches offer cash exchange services.



A foreign buyer (right) places orders at the Yiwu International Trade Market in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, in February 2023. YANG MEIQING / FOR CHINA DAILY

The bank said it will continue to enhance foreign currency exchange capabilities, strengthen the acceptance environment for foreign card payments, and collaborate with UnionPay and international card organizations to set up innovative payment solutions and provide a more convenient con-

sumer experience for foreigners in China.

The State-owned lender said it aims to promote the development and complementary use of various payment methods, including mobile payments, bank cards, and cash, to build a compatible and synergistic payment service system.

Dong Ximiao, chief researcher at Merchants Union Consumer Finance, said financial institutions and local governments are expected to further raise awareness on the issue and create a more open, inclusive, and diverse payment system and environment for all groups of people.

"The choice of payment methods and the development of payment tools should fully consider the differences between urban and rural areas and among different groups. It should not only be measured by quantity or speed, but also should respect the usage habits and rights of different groups of people," Dong said.

The inconvenience experienced by some foreign visitors can be mainly attributed to the differences in payment habits between China and other countries, he added.

Dong called for China to further optimize the acceptance environment for foreign bank cards, and gradually increase the number of point-of-sale terminals accepting foreign cards in key cities and important business districts.

International card organizations should reduce foreign card transaction fees and leave appropriate room for profitability for merchants, he said.

Expanding foreign investors' access to domestic payment institutions and bank card clearing markets steadily will further enhance the competitive landscape in China's payment sector and help provide better payment experiences for both Chinese people and foreign visitors, he added.

Ling Hai, president for the Asia-Pacific region, Europe, the Middle East and Africa at Mastercard, also emphasized the importance of improving multiple payment channels to enhance payment convenience for inbound travelers.

"The ecosystem in China has evolved into more digital wallet and QR-based, but that's not how the rest of the world works. For any inbound traveler, behaviors are very difficult to change, and that's a huge area still worth investment and development," Ling said.

"We are getting a lot of support from the Chinese government and will work with other private players as well as banks in China to foster an ecosystem that's really friendly to inbound travelers."

The service provider has enabled inbound acceptance via Alipay and Tencent wallets earlier this year, allowing international cardholders to pay like local people at QR code payment points while traveling across China.

Mastercard NUCC Information Technology (Beijing) Co Ltd, a joint venture between Mastercard and NetsUnion Clearing Corp, also received formal approval from the PBOC late last year for domestic bank card clearing activity in the country, and commenced the business recently.

The development allows Mastercard cardholders in China to enjoy payment services provided by the company both at home and abroad.

Contact the writers at  
liuzhihua@chinadaily.com.cn

# Apps simplify expense steps for foreign users

By FAN FEIFEI and CHENG YU

Chinese mobile payment service providers are making it easier for overseas visitors to pay for their daily purchases online, as part of a broader drive by the nation to improve the payment experiences of foreigners.

Alipay, the digital payment arm of Chinese financial technology company Ant Group, has boosted resources to ensure foreigners in China can use mobile payments without any hurdles by rolling out translation services for 16 languages recently.

Data from Alipay showed that the transaction volume of foreign visitors who pay through the mobile payment app surged nearly 10 times year-on-year in March, with the number of active users skyrocketing nearly six-fold during this period from a year earlier.

Alipay allows foreigners in China to link their international bank cards, including Visa, Mastercard, JCB and Discover Global Network, to its mobile payment tool, greatly streamlining the payment process, said Zhu Xugang, director of cross-border business at Ant Group.

The newly launched multilingual

app includes English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Japanese, Thai, and Vietnamese, he added. Users can leave voice messages or input texts to translate between different languages.

Users of 11 overseas e-wallets will also be able to use their familiar home e-wallets on their own phones by scanning Alipay QR codes, to enjoy a seamless mobile payment experience across Alipay's vast merchant network.

According to Alipay, foreigners can use the app to complete payments at restaurants, hotels, scenic spots, convenience stores and supermarkets, as well as for ride-hailing, shared bikes, buses and other public transportation services in China.

The State Council, China's Cabinet, published in March a guideline on improving payment services and enhancing payment convenience, so as to better meet the diversified payment needs of the elderly and foreign visitors.

The People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, has released a payment guide that provides foreigners with text and graphic instructions on using bank cards, cash, mobile payments and e-CNY

in China, the latest step in the country's push to optimize the payment experience for foreigners.

According to the payment guide, no IDs are required for transactions below a certain threshold when foreign visitors use mobile payment services such as Alipay, Weixin Pay and UnionPay, and some international e-wallets will be accepted by merchants in China.

Both Alipay and Weixin Pay, a mobile payment service within the Weixin app designed for users on the Chinese mainland, have raised the limit of single mobile payment transactions for foreigners in China from \$1,000 to \$5,000 and lifted the annual cumulative transaction limit to \$50,000 from \$10,000 earlier.

Tech giant Tencent Holdings is working to help foreign visitors make small-ticket payments through Weixin Pay without the need to link their international bank cards. Users can also try Weixin Pay first without submitting full identity information after binding a bank card.

Tencent said the foreign card transaction volume has grown quickly. Compared with the trial period, transactions with foreign cards increased by nearly five times

a day in February. More efforts will be made to further simplify the payment process for foreigners in the future, the company said.

Jennifer Anzora from El Salvador, who is in China for higher studies, said she just needs to download the Alipay app and bind it with her international cards.

She said the procedure is simple and that she uses Alipay on her mobile phone and Apple Watch for payments. Anzora also said she is able to buy products, book hotels, use ride-hailing services and order takeouts via Alipay.

"The latest moves to provide convenient payment services will not only significantly improve foreigners' living and consumption experiences in China, and attract more visitors, but also promote the healthy and sustainable development of the payment industry," said Wang Pengbo, a senior analyst at market consultancy Botong Analysis.

Wang said a series of measures, aimed at optimizing mobile payments for foreigners, demonstrate the country's resolve to expand high-standard opening-up.

He said the scope of binding foreign bank cards should be expanded



A foreign resident uses a mobile payment app at a restaurant in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

and that the authentication of new users must be improved and simplified, in order to provide more convenient payment services for foreign visitors.

Dong Ximiao, chief researcher at Merchants Union Consumer Finance, said the inconvenience experienced by some foreign visitors can be mainly attributed to the differences in payment habits between China and other countries.

People in Europe, the United States and other developed econo-

mies are accustomed to using bank cards and cash for payments, and are not familiar with mobile payments, he said.

Dong said greater efforts are needed to expand the various types of payment methods at tourist attractions, sporting events, transportation hubs, healthcare and beauty centers and other daily consumption sites.

Contact the writers at  
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Asia-Pacific countries should uphold their consensus on unity of purpose

As was recognized and reaffirmed by all the participants at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Leaders' Meeting in San Francisco in November, a shared commitment to inclusiveness has been fundamental to Asia-Pacific's dynamic development, which has seen it become the powerhouse for the global economy.

If the enormous potential and tremendous dynamism across the region are to be fully unleashed, it is crucial, as the gathered leaders stated in their joint declaration, that fidelity to unity of purpose be upheld. It is disheartening therefore, if not alarming, that for some countries their pledges to the common undertaking of inclusive development are proving to be nothing more than lip service.

Instead of upholding inclusivity and peace in the region, Australia, Japan and the United States, along with the US' loyal extra-regional follower, the United Kingdom, seem intent on stoking confrontation in the region and disrupting regional peace and stability to serve their own narrow interests.

This was made clear on Monday, when the defense chiefs of the US, the UK and Australia announced their plan to include Japan in their controversial trilateral security alliance. In a joint statement they released on Monday, the three AUKUS allies announced that they are considering bringing Japan into their grouping to participate in so-called Pillar II projects.

While the first pillar of AUKUS aims to help Australia acquire nuclear-powered submarines, as well as deepen cooperation on a range of other advanced defense technologies, the second pillar, peddled by US officials recently, has a clear strategic intention to involve more countries in the security pact, with a focus on delivering advanced capabilities and sharing technologies across a range of areas including quantum computing, artificial intelligence and cyber technologies.

Japan, widely deemed to be the most important US ally in the Asia-Pacific region and harboring the ill-intention of reviving its militarist past, has been an enthusiastic embracer of the US' divisive "Indo-Pacific" strategy, frequently making provocative moves or remarks over the maritime disputes in the East and South China seas. Like the US, its meddling in these issues has become a destabilizing factor in the region. It is irresponsible of the AUKUS countries to send a wrong message by endorsing Japan's militarist and troublemaking ambitions.

Since its establishment in September 2021, the AUKUS alliance has drawn wide criticism within the international community, with many countries in Asia voicing strong opposition to it promoting nuclear proliferation in the region and fanning bloc confrontation with its exclusive clique building.

In the short time since it was formed, the trilateral alliance has already undermined the denuclearization efforts in the region. Now it seems intent on sabotaging the APEC consensus and mission.

Driven by its stubbornly persistent Cold War zero-sum mentality, the US is encouraging other countries in the region to break faith with the APEC goals by fabricating false narratives. This imperils the very fabric of regional peace and stability.

Last week, US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell laid bare the destabilizing nature of AUKUS by telling a Washington-based think tank that AUKUS' submarine capabilities "have enormous implications in a variety of scenarios, including in cross-strait circumstances".

That the Taiwan question is strictly an internal affair of China is obviously immaterial to the US. As such, the world should exercise high vigilance toward the US' designs for an enlarged AUKUS, which, in heralding an Asia-Pacific NATO, presage catastrophe for all. Countries should join hands to try and get the misguided genie of AUKUS back in the bottle before it does any irredeemable mischief in the region.

## US election casts shadow over Yellen's visit

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's previous trip to China, nine months ago, helped break the ice that had formed in bilateral relations after the US side's hyping up of the so-called Chinese balloon incident and raised hopes of a lasting thaw.

Her latest visit has generated more modest expectations, as not only has the United States been intensifying its China containment moves since then but the upcoming US presidential election means the Democrat administration is wary of providing its Republican opponents any ammunition with which to attack it by appearing to be soft on China. Although Yellen maintains long-term sound working and personal relations with the economic policy circles of China, thanks to her commitment to stabilizing Sino-US economic relations, the US Congress' continuous weaponization of economic policies and the politicizing of economic issues related to China have made it increasingly difficult for her to do that.

The US Treasury chief's packed schedule during her six-day stay in China that ended on Tuesday speaks volumes about her desire to make the most of her visit to the country. Her interactions with Chinese policymakers, businesspeople from both China and the US and people from all walks of life should have helped her gain an improved understanding of their concerns regarding Sino-US economic ties, the priorities of China's economic policies, and "how the Chinese government views their current economic and financial situation and the steps that they have and are contemplating taking". All these should help better inform the US administration's own economic decision-making, as she said in a news conference in Beijing on Monday. Yet, how much that informativeness can improve the fraught Sino-US economic relations depends on the extent to which senior technocrats like Yellen holding key policymaking posts regarding economic, financial, trade, industrial and technological sectors are allowed to prescribe their solutions independent of interference from the domestic partisan struggle.

"President Biden and I are clear-eyed about the complexities of this relationship," Yellen said. A veteran economist such as herself will know that the "complexities" do not originate from the structure of the ties themselves but the influence of the overall anti-China political climate in Washington. The series of intensifying US attacks on Chinese companies, institutes, universities, individuals, investments, industries and technology have only become more systematic since Yellen's last visit, making Beijing more realistic about the US' stated commitment to managing China relations "in a responsible way". The comprehensive restrictive measures the US has taken against Chinese entities have not only affected the interests of those being targeted, but also entities of the US and other countries.

Despite saying that "the United States does not seek to decouple from China" and the two economies are "deeply integrated, and a wholesale separation would be disastrous for both of our economies", Yellen will know that the US claims of "protecting our national security and that of our allies" are nothing but an excuse to try and replace the law of the market with the will of the US government to create "a level playing field for American workers and firms". With that excuse, the US administration is attempting to eliminate competitive foreign companies and technologies.

However, that does not mean the US is in a position to dictate China which are the fields for bilateral cooperation, as it seems wont to do. The US has no legitimacy for trying to curtail normal Sino-Russian economic relations, for example.

Those on the US side making a meal of the founding and operation of the economic and financial working group mechanism with China as their contribution to stabilize bilateral economic ties should know that it is the US that dismantled the exchange and communication channels that had long existed between the two sides. These were not only more extensive but also functioned better than the current talk-for-talk's-sake design.

Sino-US economic relations should be of a win-win nature. US policymakers with their eyes on votes should recognize that promoting the interests of US workers would be best served by strengthening cooperation with China in as many areas as possible.

Luo Jie



## Opinion Line

## China's new energy industry helping global carbon emissions reduction

An International Energy Agency report pointed out that in 2023, China contributed more than half of the global renewable energy installed capacity of 510 million kilowatts, making it a major contributor to the growth of global renewable energy power generation. China's wind power and photovoltaic products have been exported to more than 200 countries and regions around the world, helping many of them obtain clean, reliable and affordable energy. In 2022, China's renewable energy generation helped reduce domestic carbon dioxide emissions by about 2.26 billion metric tons, and its exports of wind power and photovoltaic products helped reduce carbon dioxide emissions by about 573 million tons for other countries.

China has built the world's largest clean power supply system and the swift

development of its new energy vehicles, lithium batteries and photovoltaic products have injected new hope into the global response to climate change. From the world's first 16 megawatt offshore wind turbine for electricity generation, to the world's first fourth-generation nuclear power plant officially put into commercial operation, from a new type of battery that has a range of 1,000 kilometers per charge to the intelligent vehicle cabin that introduces artificial intelligence, China's new energy sector has contributed to global energy transition with innovative advantages and excellent quality. The International Renewable Energy Agency points out that in the past 10 years, the average kilowatt-hour cost of global wind power and photovoltaic power generation have decreased by more than 60 percent and 80 percent respectively, a large part of

which is attributed to China's innovation, manufacturing and engineering.

China has been promoting international cooperation in the new energy industry chain in an orderly manner and building a new win-win model of green and low-carbon energy transformation. Overseas clean energy projects by Chinese companies have helped other countries meet their carbon reduction targets, create new industries and jobs and promote common development and prosperity.

Facts prove that China's new energy industry has provided high-quality production capacity that is conducive to implementing the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change, from which all can benefit.

— PEOPLES DAILY

## Prosecution of juveniles sends a clear message

Weeks after three middle school students allegedly murdered their classmate in Handan, Hebei province, the Supreme People's Procuratorate has decided to approve the prosecution of the three juveniles, aged 12 to 14.

That's in accordance with the law. Amendment XI to the Criminal Law, which came into effect on March 1, 2021, added a paragraph saying a person aged 12 to 14 who causes intentional homicide or intentional injury, resulting in death or causing serious disability to another person by particularly cruel means, and the circumstances are heinous, shall be held criminally responsible upon approval of prosecution by the procuratorate.

Based on information previously disclosed by the police, the three underage perpetrators plotted the crime before committing it and tried to hide the body afterwards. By holding the three juveniles criminally responsible, the procuratorate addressed public concerns, while setting an important example for similar cases in the future.

In recent years, there have been frequent cases of juvenile delinquency, necessitating Amendment XI, which lowered the age of criminal culpability from the earlier 14 years to 12 years. Strengthening the prevention and control of juvenile delinquency demon-

strates the determination to protect minors from harm.

It should be noted that criminal culpability and punishment alone cannot completely solve the problem of juvenile delinquency. In dealing with juvenile delinquency, it's necessary to not only adhere to a zero-tolerance attitude, but also improve the graded intervention mechanism for juvenile offenders and increase educational correction efforts.

Not just in the Handan middle school student's murder case, but also in many other similar ones, lax education and supervision by families or guardians may have played a role.

— THE PAPER.CN

## What They Say

## Food security action plan goes with the grain

China has initiated a new round of action to significantly increase its grain output in the coming years, in its latest effort to ensure food security.

According to an action plan published by the State Council, China's Cabinet, the country aims to boost its grain production capacity by over 50 million tonnes by 2030. At that time, the grain growing area should total about 1.75 billion *mu*, or 117 million hectares, and the grain yield per *mu* should reach 420 kilograms.

China has seen a grain harvest of over 650 million tonnes for nine consecutive years, with the per capita share of grain at 493 kilograms. However, there is still a "tight balance" between the grain supply and demand and the gap may expand in the future.

Corn and soybeans will be the major contributors to the grain output increase, according to the plan. In terms of rice and wheat, the emphasis is on improving

the quality. The growing of other types of grain, along with potatoes and beans, will also be promoted based on local conditions.

At the same time, the plan also focuses on key areas and weak links in grain production, and the planning and implementation of some key projects in 720 crucial grain producing counties, including agricultural water saving, high-standard farmland construction, seed industry revitalization, increased grain yield, sustainable farming, agricultural mechanization enhancement, improvement of the agricultural disaster prevention and reduction mechanisms, comprehensive utilization of saline-alkali land and the bolstering of grain processing, warehousing and logistics capabilities.

Policymakers expect to drive the effective implementation of key grain varieties and production capacity improvement tasks through their focus on these key sectors, key counties and key tasks. By raising funds through multiple channels and rationally implementing the plan, the country is

expected to effectively improve farmland water conservancy and the nation's agricultural infrastructure conditions, speed up the remedying of shortcomings such as technological innovation in the seed industry, and enhance its comprehensive grain production capacity.

It is the pressure from the external development environment that has prompted the central government to unveil the plan during the annual spring plowing season. Although China has been trying to diversify the sources of its imports of food, the rising protectionism in many major grain exporting countries, the bloc confrontation some major countries are instigating targeting China, the influences of such regional hotspot issues as the Ukraine crisis and the tensions in the Red Sea, as well as the increasing impacts of extreme weather are all practical factors spurring the country to strive to increase its own grain output to ensure national food security.

— LIYANG, CHINA DAILY

## CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

## Contact us at:

**China Daily**  
15 HuiXin Dongjie Chaoyang District,  
Beijing 100029  
News: +86 (0)10 6491-8366  
editor@chinadaily.com.cn  
Advertisement: +86 (0)10 6491-8631  
ads@chinadaily.com.cn  
Subscription: +86 400-699-0203  
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn  
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/moblie/daily.html

**China Daily UK**  
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK  
+44 (0) 207 398 8270  
editor@chinadailyuk.com

**China Daily Asia Pacific**  
**China Daily Hong Kong**  
Unit 1818, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan  
Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong  
+852 2518 5111  
editor@chinadailyhk.com  
editor@chinadailyasia.com

**China Daily USA**  
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,  
New York, NY 10036  
+1 212 537 8988  
editor@chinadailyusa.com

**China Daily Africa**  
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya  
+254 (0)20 242 8589 (Nairobi)  
editor@chinadailyafrica.com  
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com  
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

## COMMENT

Xiang Haoyu

## Kishida's US visit spells trouble for Asia-Pacific

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's visit to the United States from Monday, the first state visit by a Japanese prime minister since the late Shinzo Abe paid a state visit to the US in 2015, is widely seen as a step toward further strengthening the US-Japan alliance. The move, however, could upset the security situation in the Asia-Pacific region given the current geopolitical situation.

According to media reports, Kishida and US President Joe Biden are expected to reach an agreement on a major upgrading of the 1960 US-Japan Security Treaty during their meeting on Wednesday. The agreement may include restructuring of the US military command in Japan, in order to strengthen US-Japan joint operational planning and exercises.

Kishida will also join a first-ever US-Japanese-Philippine summit in Washington on Thursday to deepen cooperation among the three countries so as to check the peaceful rise of China. Biden, Kishida and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. will discuss how to consolidate their supply chains and strengthen cooperation in emerging technologies apart from bolstering their trilateral defense and security cooperation.

Although the official announcement about Kishida's visit to the US and the trilateral summit did not directly mention China, some observers say the aim of upgrading the US-Japan defense alliance and the deepening of the US-Japanese-Philippine security cooperation are aimed at containing China.

First, the upgrading of the US-Japan defense alliance will disturb the strategic stability in the Asia-Pacific, as Kishida intends to integrate Japan Self-Defense Forces' operational command systems, and boost the coordination among the country's air, ground and

As such, Asia-Pacific countries should remain vigilant against the actions of the US, Japan and the Philippines, and make efforts to prevent them from raising geopolitical tensions and creating divisions.

maritime forces by bringing them under a joint operations command this year. The US, on its part, is considering granting more authority to its military command in Japan to integrate its system with that of Japan's.

An "upgraded" US-Japan security relationship far exceeds the original purpose of "defending Japan", as it will transform their defensive alliance into one that combines both offense and defense, marking a "qualitative change" in the nature of their alliance. It is obvious that the integration of the joint operational command systems of the two countries is targeted at third parties, meaning they are more likely to jointly intervene in geopolitical hotspots such as the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait.

Second, security cooperation among the US, Japan and the Philippines will further exacerbate geopolitical tensions in the region, with the deepening trilateral relationship having already become a matter of grave concern over the past year. Since their first defense policy dialogue in September 2022, the three countries have deepened their security cooperation to a large extent. In early 2023, the Philippines allowed the US to consolidate four new military bases, signed a Mutual Defense Treaty with the

US and agreed to the US boosting its military deployment in the country.

Besides, Japan and the Philippines agreed to sign a reciprocal security access agreement, and Japan SDF personnel have participated in several US-Philippine joint drills as observers. The US and Japan have also helped the Philippines improve its maritime surveillance, with Japan supplying coastal surveillance radars to the Philippines in accordance with the "official security assistance" plan, which was implemented last year.

That the three sides are holding a trilateral summit in Washington shows they intend to institutionalize their defense alliance so they can jointly intervene in the South China Sea issue and the Taiwan question. Aside from making provocative moves in the South China Sea, the Philippines also participated in the first joint military exercise with the US, Japan and Australia on Sunday. As a matter of fact, the US, Japan and Australia have been encouraging the Philippines to confront China on the South China Sea issue, upsetting the security situation in the region and violating the norms of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations on regional integration.

And third, Japan's push for remilitarization has become a new regional security hazard. Japan has been desperately trying to upgrade the US-Japan alliance and strengthening cooperation with the US and the Philippines. In the past, the US used to coerce Japan to join it in checking the rise of China in order to advance its "Indo-Pacific" strategy. But now Japan is making joint efforts with the US to further strengthen the bilateral alliance.

Japan has been following the US' lead for decades, but their alliance is changing in nature due to Japan's ambition to develop into a military power. With the

support of the US, Japan has been violating one principle after another of its pacifist constitution while pursuing militarization.

The Kishida administration approved three new strategic documents in 2022, proposing to develop offensive military capability and doubling its defense budget, marking the largest-scale military expansion since the end of World War II, indicating Japan's defense-oriented security policy is practically dead.

Japan has cooperated with the US in pushing the latter's "Indo-Pacific" strategy forward in an attempt to realize its ambition of becoming a "normal" country, by deviating from the track of post-war peaceful development.

Japan has been leaning to the right in recent years. The militaristic rhetoric, once advocated only by right-wing forces, has now become a major policy of the Japanese government, with Japan desperate to participate in geopolitical competitions with other countries, posing a serious threat to peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific.

And the US has been tacitly supporting Japan's rearmament in an attempt to reshape the strategy of the "island chain" and maintain American hegemony in the Asia-Pacific. This is like opening a Pandora's box, because Japan has adopted a hostile stance toward its neighbors and no one can guarantee that history will not be repeated. As such, Asia-Pacific countries should remain vigilant against the actions of the US, Japan and the Philippines, and make efforts to prevent them from raising geopolitical tensions and creating divisions.

The author is a specially appointed research fellow in the Department for Asia-Pacific Studies, China Institute of International Studies. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Kang Bing

The author is former deputy editor-in-chief of China Daily. kangbing@chinadaily.com.cn

## Foreign countries must take steps to attract more Chinese tourists

When China lifted its pandemic prevention and control measures at the end of 2022, many expected Chinese tourists, having been confined to the country for almost three years, to swarm to foreign destinations, with some reputable research institutes saying 2023 could see the outbound tourism market recover to 90 percent of the pre-pandemic level in 2019 when 155 million Chinese people traveled abroad.

That prediction didn't come true.

Statistics released by the China Tourism Academy in March show Chinese people made only 87 million trips abroad last year, which is a mere 56 percent of the 2019 level. However, the CTA said the number could reach 130 million in 2024, and I hope the experts are right this time, though I am a bit pessimistic.

Traveling abroad seems to have become more difficult than before for the Chinese people because of the rising requirements by some embassies, shortage of international flights and high ticket prices. Many embassies still require visa applicants to make online appointments three months in advance. And even after following all the procedures and fulfilling all the requirements, one may still have to spend some sleepless nights waiting for the visa, and get it, if at all, just a couple of days before departure.

Some embassies attribute the delay to a shortage of workers, many of whom were dismissed during the pandemic. The excuse sounds reasonable, because we don't have much say in convincing a host to extend an invitation to visit his or her home. All we can do is either fulfill the host's requirements or abandon the idea of paying a visit. Many people may choose the latter.

Being confined within the country for the past few years, many potential outbound tourists have turned their eyes to domestic attractions.

A Chinese person planning to visit another country may find airline tickets cost much more than before, not least because international airlines stopped all normal passenger flights during the almost three-year pandemic and are still on way to recovery. According to authorities, only 4,782 international flights operated between China and other countries and regions a week last year, making up only 62.8 percent of the pre-pandemic level, with less than one-third being operated by foreign airlines.

The shortage of flights means travelers can no longer avail of discount tickets. And while tourists complain about expensive tickets, airlines argue there are not enough travelers to operate more flights.

Since my wife and I decided to make an overseas trip next month, we looked at all the possible destinations including Nordic, Eastern European or African countries, or the United States or Australia. We realized that almost all travel packages cost 30-40 percent more than in 2019, and higher airfare and rising consumer prices are responsible for the drastic increase in travel costs. Ultimately, we booked tickets and hotels for a 20-day tour of Turkey largely because we got a good price for return flights.

Given the above reasons, a potential Chinese tourist may think twice before embarking on a tour.

Being confined within the country for the past few years, many potential outbound tourists have turned their eyes to domestic attractions. The Chinese people made nearly 5 billion domestic tourist trips last year, helping the country's aviation industry to recover to its peak level. The number is expected to exceed 6 billion this year.

Another factor that may prevent the outbound tourist market from fully recovering is probably people's changing attitude toward spending money. With both the domestic and global economies yet to recover to their pre-pandemic peak levels, people have become cautious about lightening their wallets, with overseas tours being the first to be deleted from a family's budget.

This makes it important for foreign countries to take measures to attract more tourists from China — the world's biggest source of tourists. In fact, an increasing number of countries are offering Chinese nationals visa-free travel, and some have simplified procedures, offering visa on arrival or e-visas. And countries such as Thailand, Vietnam and Singapore are attracting lots of Chinese tourists thanks to their special promotions.

Tourists, be they Chinese or foreign nationals, tend to visit destinations that offer magnificent sights, reasonable prices, convenience of travel, and safety and security. More importantly, tourists visit places where they feel they are welcome.

John Gong

## Hypotheses about economic decay simply fake news

Three false theories, of late, are being bandied about China's economy in the West. The "stagnation theory" makes an analogy between China's present economic situation and the "lost decade" in Japan. The claim is that China will go down the same path as Japan did in the 1990s, and enter an extended period of stagnation in the coming years.

However, China's economic performance in the first two months of the year tells a story totally different from the "stagnation theory".

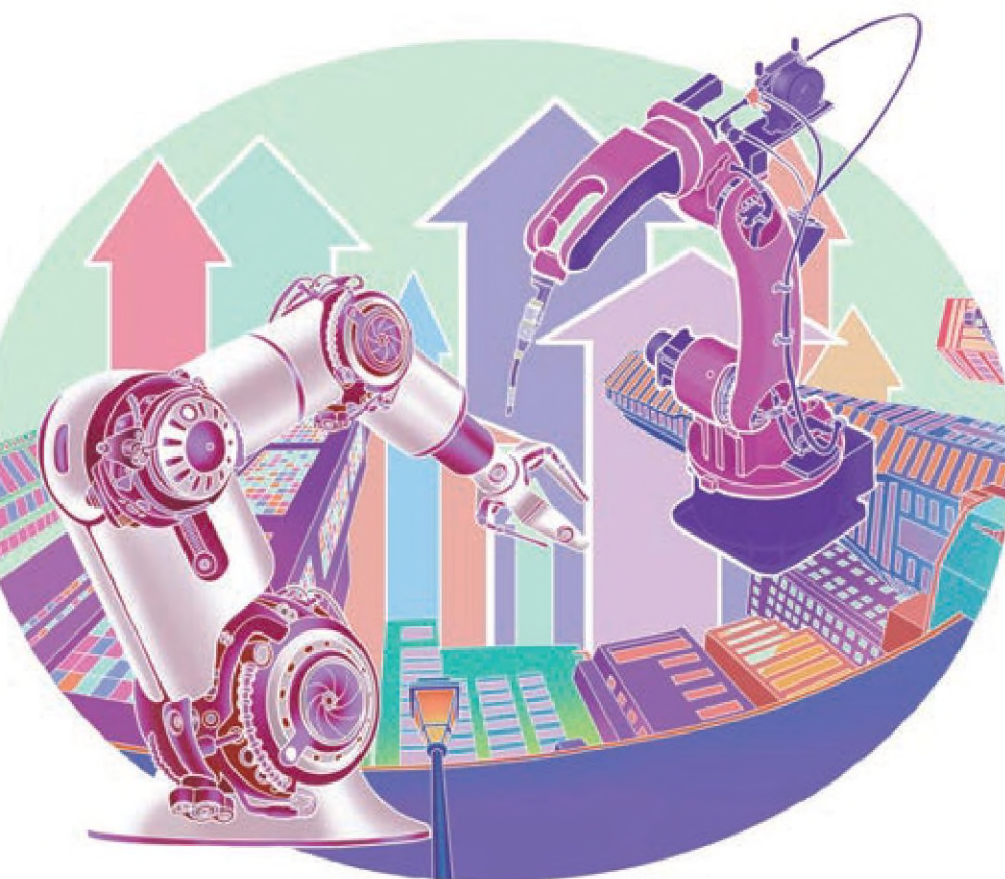
The three most important industrial sectors — mining, manufacturing and public utilities — grew by 2.3 percent, 7.7 percent and 7.9 percent, respectively. And the four types of enterprises — State-owned enterprises, joint venture companies, foreign companies and domestic companies — grew by 5.8 percent, 7.3 percent, 6.2 percent and 6.5 percent, respectively.

In fact, sectors and enterprises across the board have registered growth, with non-SOEs growing faster than the SOEs. The service sector, too, has registered robust growth as indicated by the National Bureau of Statistics' service activity index — which grew by 5.8 percent.

The consumer price index (CPI) has not shown any movement in the first two months of the year, with the CPI dropping by 0.8 percent in January and increasing by 0.7 percent in February. However, if food and energy prices are excluded, core CPI increased by 0.8 percent in the first two months. These data project anything but a picture of an economy in stagnation, thus consigning the "lost decade" theory to the dustbin of the times.

The second false narrative about the Chinese economy is the "peaking" theory, which postulates that China's GDP growth rate has already peaked and hence it can only slide down now. But China's GDP growth rate has been declining for the past decade — the slide didn't start now.

In economics, there is a "convergence theory" that developed economies' growth rate will eventually drop to a fairly low rate, as it gets increasingly difficult to grow at a fast pace like in the past due to their already huge size and diminishing returns. Very few developed countries can grow consistently above 3 percent for an extended period of time.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

This is exactly what has been happening to China's economy since it became the world's second-largest economy and, more importantly, and subsequently more like a developed country. Today, for the Chinese economy to grow at close to a double-digit rate, like it did for three decades since the launch of reform and opening-up, would mean adding \$1.5 trillion of GDP every year, which is tantamount to creating an economy almost the size of Australia every year.

How is this possible?

The third narrative is what I call the "export glut" theory, as typified by an article in The New York Times recently that warned that Chinese goods are going to flood global markets after stealing local jobs.

What this theory is aimed at is essen-

tially stoking hatred toward Chinese exports worldwide. China's exports have been subject to much badmouthing and cursing over the years. Earlier, there used to be a theory about Chinese exports running out of steam. But after China's exports grew by a small but still significant rate of 0.6 percent last year amid a slump in global trade, the naysayers started switching gear to warn against the opposite, that is, Chinese exports glut.

The United States played the leading role in establishing the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (which later became the World Trade Organization) about 75 years ago. It was the world's largest trading country for decades. It also used to be a champion of free trade.

But today very few politicians in the Beltway talk about free trade. Nor do

the traditional Republican ideologues. Instead, they are talking about fair trade and safe trade. Concepts like national security, supply chain resilience and economic sovereignty have gained traction in the US, with some people even promoting ideologically correct or politically correct trade.

This is nothing but hypocrisy on the part of these US politicians. Perhaps they should learn from former president Donald Trump: just say hundreds of billions of dollars were stolen by the Chinese, and then let's have a "civilized debate" on it.

The author is a professor at the University of International Business and Economics and vice-president Research and Strategy at UIBE-Israel. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## GLOBAL VIEWS

MWANGI WACHIRA

## Where China, Africa can go next

The partnership should focus on modernizing the continent's agriculture and using the experience to create job opportunities

In January 2024, a shipload of containers left South Africa with goods bound for African ports. South Africa became the 31st country trading under the African Continental Free Trade Area since its launch in 2021. So far 47 countries have ratified the agreement.



The increasing intra-African trade creates value chains, the essence of development. It is happening now thanks to Africa's growing infrastructure — roads, railroads, ports and power grids. The infrastructure built by China through the Belt and Road Initiative is a historic "win" for Africa.

In the process, China has gained access to commodities and minerals as well as markets for consumer goods targeting Africa's growing middle class. Taken together, the inbound and outbound flows on Africa's new infrastructure are helping fuel the rise of China as a modern industrial giant and a global economic power — a major "win" for China.

China and African countries have both won by focusing almost single-mindedly on infrastructure. They have weathered years of criticism depicting the infrastructure projects as "debt traps", "thinly-veiled colonization" and, of course, "African gullibility and Chinese deviousness".

Still, there are glaring deficits in infrastructure on the continent. Therefore, the China-Africa partnership should stay the course and build more roads, ports, power stations and railroads. Infrastructure will be the number one priority for at least another generation.

What should be the second, third

or fourth priority for the partnership during that generation? In 2024, the Forum on China and Africa Cooperation might consider the following areas as priorities.

The leading contender for second priority for the partnership is food insecurity.

Perennial dependence on food aid undermines all aspects of any country. Inability to produce or buy enough food is the Achilles' Heel of many African countries. It hobbles modernization and opens African countries to interference and manipulation. Yet some African countries have swathes of land that can produce enough food to meet local demand with excess for export. In some African countries, food aid now distorts prices and discourages local production, thereby making more food aid necessary.

In our time, climate change is aggravating food insecurity as time-tested hardy crops of the African Savanna are becoming a distant memory. Unless major and perhaps radical steps are taken, climate change will deepen and widen food insecurity, leading to unprecedented social crises.

Just three generations ago, analysts painted a similar grim picture about China, warning of an impending nightmare caused by food insecurity. Yet, China has successfully lifted millions of people out of extreme poverty, by, among other things, producing enough food for the population.

Many African policymakers and analysts desperately want to replicate China's success. Thus, the China-Africa partnership should focus on modernizing African agriculture and food production to help Africa avert what could be a calamity for the continent.

The third priority is employment, especially for Africa's youth.

Africa's youth can be seen as an ally in the drive for modernization, a huge actual or potential market for consumer goods, a wellspring of creativity or a receptive window through which to redesign African values. But in country after country, a high proportion of college and technical training school graduates are finding no opportunities to better their lives. These dashed hopes pose a threat that is probably as grave as food insecurity in some African countries.

The extraction of commodities and minerals out of Africa creates employment opportunities and a skilled workforce. But more value addition — production of finished goods in Africa — to create thousands of meaningful opportunities is urgently needed.

This is precisely what has happened thanks to the partnerships between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations members. Chinese companies have created more than 660,000 jobs in total (2022) in Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam and other ASEAN countries. A similar pool of jobs is urgently needed in Africa.

With suitable arrangements such as those in ASEAN countries, some of the 10,000 Chinese companies that have gained experience in Africa could be encouraged to undertake local manufacturing to create employment and build a skilled and technical workforce. Like ASEAN, Africa wants to become a small manufacturing hub for the world.

The fourth priority area is the transition from fossil fuels.

They do not have a monopoly but African countries hold significant quantities of commodities and minerals such as rare earth metals, which are playing a central part in

the transition away from fossil fuels as a source of energy. With the exception of South Africa, these minerals are sent outside Africa for processing to produce goods, some of which are sold back to Africa.

It would be a catastrophe if within two or three generations Africa sold and exhausted its minerals and commodities, leaving a legacy of roads, railroads and ports. Africa will have missed its opportunity to modernize. To avoid this outcome, the natural resources that are facilitating the transition away from fossil fuels must be increasingly processed and used in the manufacture of finished products in Africa. This leapfrogging to make and use products for a post-fossil fuel era must become the new measure of development and modernization for African countries.

For example, the experience that Chinese companies have gained in South Africa can be used to manufacture electric vehicles, solar panels, wind turbines and storage, or create wind farms in eastern Africa given the availability of minerals, rare earth metals and oil in the sub-region. The assembly of electric vehicles in Kenya by Associated Vehicle Assemblers in a joint venture with Chinese car manufacturer BYD can be replicated elsewhere.

China has shown a willingness to listen to and support African aspirations and agency. In return, Afri-



STARLET WANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

ca has supported China's priorities. In this spirit, in 2024, the Forum on China and Africa Cooperation can assess the suitability of focusing on the transition from fossil fuels, manufacturing to create meaningful opportunities especially for Africa's young population, and banishing food insecurity as priorities for the next generation without downgrading infrastructure. If any of the three areas are deemed to be suitable additions to infrastructure,

then clear targets should also be established to guide the China-Africa partnership for a generation and beyond.

*The author is a former economist with the World Bank and advisor for the Kenyan government. The author contributed this article to China Daily, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

CHEN HUIYI

## Harnessing those who 'hold up half the sky'

With remarkable work already carried out, women's empowerment commitments within the FOCAC could be expanded to make China-Africa cooperation more gender-responsive

During the First World Conference on Women in 1975, the then secretary-general Helvi Sipilä,

opened the NGO Women's Forum with a keynote speech in which she quoted Chairman Mao Zedong's famous words, arguing that recognizing that "women hold up half the sky" is no less important than the discovery of a new world by Columbus. The recently-concluded 68th annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68), the United Nations' largest annual event dedicated



to gender equality and women's empowerment, again prompts recurring questions about how far we are from achieving gender equality and how we can unlock the potential for those who hold up half the sky in a way that is not overshadowed anymore as a crucial avenue for poverty reduction.

Despite progress highlighted in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, indicating a 68.4 percent narrowing of the gender gap by 2023, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely halted advancements, particularly impacting women and girls in education and employment. Another report by the International Monetary Fund highlighted that increasing female workforce participation by 5.9 percent could potentially boost the economies of emerging markets by approximately 8 percent. Empowering women goes beyond social justice, but is a strategic imperative for sustainable development.

The partnership between China and Africa is recognized as one of the most vibrant and dynamic in international development, and the Forum on China-Africa Coopera-

tion — as the most important coordination mechanism — has recognized women as vital agents for poverty reduction and long-term development since the 2006 Beijing Summit. Notably, the Forum has consistently focused on enhancing experience-sharing and supporting capacity-building projects like skills training and employment opportunities.

For example, the 2015 Johannesburg Declaration underscored poverty reduction programs in Africa, particularly focusing on women and children through programs such as vocational training. Similarly, the 2018 Beijing Declaration pledged to increase exchanges among institutions on governance and socioeconomic development to improve gender equality and women's welfare. Women such as Lin Dongmei, deputy director of the China National Engineering Research Center of Juncao Technology, have been at the forefront of such initiatives. Lin's work in agricultural technology transfer programs in Africa, spanning over two decades, has yielded tangible results, such as the "10-square-meter mushroom farm" model introduced in South Africa and Lesotho, enhancing women's production capabilities and entrepreneurial skills.

Interestingly, although the FOCAC declaration for commitments related to women's empowerment often falls under the "cultural and people-to-people exchange category", progress is often made from the spillovers of investment from China, especially through job creation, which to some extent resonates with "invest in women"; the thematic priority of this year's International Women's Day. For example, a Sisal farm spanning 1,400 hectares and invested in



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

Tanzania by China-Africa Agriculture Investment Corporation has cumulatively hired more than 10,000 residents by 2020, and women in the communities can walk out of their homes to earn additional income. The investment in the Dazhong Industrial Park in Ondo, Nigeria, has employed over 6,000 individuals, with 40 percent of the workforce females, and contributed to lifting more than 30,000 people out of poverty within the community.

By saying the improvements in women's well-being are a "spillover" (instead of a direct result) of investment, it means somehow, paradoxically, the investments by

Chinese companies in most cases did not set gender equality as a core objective or fundamental incentive. Policymakers and development practitioners also face challenges in assessing gaps and planning future projects, as achievements in women's empowerment receive minimal coverage in media and official reports, and data tracking on outcomes, such as women's employment, is scarce. This highlights the lack of a comprehensive gender equity agenda and detailed action plan between China and Africa at the policy level that sufficiently addresses women's vulnerabilities and limited resource access.

Here comes the next profound

question — what more could be done? Last December, we co-hosted a public dialogue with Cheung Kong Graduate Business School featuring three female African ambassadors to China — Maria Gustava (ambassador of the Republic of Mozambique), Oliver Wonekha (ambassador of the Republic of Uganda), and Isabel Domingos (ambassador of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe) — on forging a China-Africa Partnership in women's empowerment. The dialogue offered several practical insights on gender-responsive development initiatives in terms of facilitating effective resource allocation in targeted programs:

First, despite women constituting over half of the agricultural workforce in Africa, limited access to agricultural machines to scale up production and being constrained in planting subsistence crops due to social norms for household sustenance resulted in lower returns in product markets. Agricultural modernization programs that deliver the needed machinery, skills and financing can make agricultural production more efficient and conducive for women.

Second, in Africa, it is typical for women to operate small businesses and enterprises as a means to supplement household income. However, a notable portion of women-owned SMEs face financial constraints due to the absence of appropriate financial products and distrust in lending practices within formal credit sources. Although supporting SME funding is part of the previous FOCAC commitment, integrating gender-conscious designs is crucial. Financial tools can empower women to expand their businesses, thereby fostering a virtuous cycle

and bolstering their resilience. Third, digital technologies have emerged as a pivotal pathway for poverty reduction. Access to information allows women to explore innovative business ideas, as evidenced by women in China who have seized opportunities through e-commerce and other digital services. While enhancing information and communications technology infrastructure — a collaborative effort to secure internet access — is imperative, there are additional programs such as training initiatives aimed at enhancing digital literacy and entrepreneurship skills among girls and women. These initiatives present opportunities for collaboration among Chinese and African NGOs, as well as the private sector.

All these suggestions underscore a fundamental belief in the capacity of women. The latest Dakar Action Plan of 2021 has added elements aligning with the AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2018-28). The forthcoming summit scheduled for this autumn offers African countries a valuable opportunity to assert their agency by articulating their perspectives to Chinese partners, paving the way for a clear road map. The potential of those who "hold up half the sky" has always been present and does not require re-discovery. What's crucial is removing barriers that hinder women from tapping into their inherent power and wisdom.

*The author is the Research and Coordination Analyst at Development Reimagined, an independent international development consultancy headquartered in Beijing. The author contributed this article to China Daily, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## LIFE

All about Gen Z

Z  
WEEKLY

## Social Media Digest

## Spring's fresh beat

As spring arrives, are you ready to shake off the drab hues of winter? You're not alone. On Xiaohongshu, a Chinese lifestyle-sharing platform, over 40,000 posts are buzzing about this season's fashion craze among China's youth: the "Mint Mambo" style.

"Mint" signifies the fresh, invigorating shade of mint green, echoing nature's vitality and setting the stage for a springtime palette dominated by green hues. "Mambo," a lively South American dance, captures a sense of liberation and joy. This fashion trend combines the freshness of mint green with the energy of the Mambo, creating a look that brings relaxation and cheerfulness.

The Mint Mambo trend has expanded beyond fashion to influence various aspects of lifestyle.

Literature enthusiasts are highlighting vibrant, life-affirming works as "Mint Mambo literature," while florists create light green arrangements inspired by the same theme. The trend also extends to makeup, culinary arts, and even stationery, reflecting its airy and radiant essence.

Embodying the excitement of spring, this new cultural phenomenon represents freedom, self-expression, and a deep connection with nature.

"This is the vibe of spring," wrote a young Chinese netizen online, showcasing her Mint Mambo outfit and underscoring the trend's role in celebrating the spirit of the season.



The "Mint Mambo" style is the new fashion trend of this spring. TUCHONG

## Rocky companions

More and more young people in big cities are finding solace in pets. While many choose traditional companions like cats and dogs, or even more exotic ones such as lizards, the latest trend among South Korea's youth is quite unconventional: pet rock.

Yes, you read that correctly — a rock. This quirky choice is gaining traction on TikTok, where users showcase their rocks wearing mini hats and sunglasses, or even resting in tiny beds with face masks. Even some South Korean celebrities are embracing the trend, sharing their own pet rocks with fans on social media.

The pet rock, which first gained popularity in the 1970s in the US, has made a comeback in South Korea. However, this time around, it's less about novelty and more about providing a sense of tranquility to the country's stressed-out youth.

Unlike pets such as cats or dogs, pet rocks require minimal care, making them particularly appealing to those seeking companionship.

"I'd occasionally complain to my rock about what a tiresome day I had at work," Lee So-hee told The Wall Street Journal. Lee is a 30-year-old woman who lived alone in Seoul until November 2023, when a friend gave her a pet rock as a gift, which she affectionately refers to as a girl named "Hongduggae".

"It's kind of like talking to your dog, and it can feel relaxing in some ways," she said.

MENG WENJIE



Many young people in South Korea are keeping rocks as pets. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## A crash course in cultural exchanges

How one simple exchange program grew into a permanent wellspring of intercultural benefits, **Li Xinran** reports.



Students and faculty from Vaughn Next Century Learning Center posed for a photo on Qianmen Street in Beijing on March 25. LVU CAIHONG / CHINA DAILY

From March 24 to 31, a group of 15 students from Vaughn Next Century Learning Center, a charter school located in San Fernando, California, United States, embarked on an educational and cultural exchange journey in three cities in China: Beijing, Suzhou, and Shanghai.

For Ian Sierra, a 15-year-old 10th grader from Vaughn, this was his first time traveling abroad, and he was both nervous and excited.

"I felt that if I messed up a bit, it would greatly influence the image of the whole group," he said. "When I interacted with people in China, I acted as a representative of my school, California, and my country."

Despite his initial apprehensions, Sierra made a pact with his friends that they would broaden their horizons, try new things, and take the initiative to interact with people.

Michael Sosa, 17, a senior from Vaughn, also started the trip with an open mind. "I didn't have a specific image or expectations of China before my arrival. Instead, I saw myself as a blank canvas that I will paint on as I explore the country."

Both Sierra and Sosa discovered new culinary delights. In Beijing, Sierra bravely sampled *douzhi*, a fermented soybean milk known for challenging even the locals' taste buds, but he finished three bowls without flinching.

Sosa had hot pot for the first time. "One of the hot pot broths was spicy, but I really enjoyed it, probably due to my Mexican background. I could even eat spicier food than my homestay buddy, whose family is from Hunan province," Sosa said.

Sierra found the highlight of their trip in the exchange and homestay program at Beijing No.4 High School International Campus (BHSFIC), where they spent over two days.

"My homestay partner, his parents, fellow Chinese students, and everyone else were very welcoming and sociable. I

As a generation that has grown up with technology and media, we have access to information about other countries online. However, some things can only be grasped in person when you experience them yourself."

**Ian Chan**, 15, a student from Vaughn Next Century Learning Center

felt like I had become part of a tight-knit and interconnected community," he said.

Sierra was also excited to explore the differences between the educational systems of the two countries.

"I tried out table tennis after classes ended, and the Chinese students played like pros," he said. "In the States, students usually engage in sports through clubs and sports teams. Here at BHSFIC, they have a ping-pong table in the lobby, and students can squeeze in some time for table tennis during recess. Sports are more recreational here, which I found quite interesting."

The exchange of learning was mutual. Li Weiyou, a 15-year-old student from BHSFIC and Sosa's homestay partner, found himself pleasantly surprised by his American counterpart.

"Before I knew Michael, I thought American students were more focused on personal development than academics. But Michael proved otherwise; he thrives in both, as he has taken multiple AP courses (advanced high school courses that earn college credits) and also participated in a dozen activities and clubs," said Li.

Ian Chan, 15, a sophomore from Vaughn, was also impressed by his homestay partner, Fang Xinghe, a student at BHSFIC. "He didn't appear to be an outspoken person, but he opened up to me, sharing things about his life in China and was eager to learn about my

life and culture," said Chan. "I also discovered that Fang and his classmates are very good at learning independently and organizing clubs themselves."

Yvonne Chan, founder and principal of Vaughn, firmly believes in the importance of language acquisition. In fact, Vaughn has incorporated Mandarin into its curriculum.

"Languages are a basic requirement for good communication, which even includes sign language and body language," she said.

Hou Yuxuan, 15, a 10th grader from BHSFIC, agreed. "My dad can speak Japanese and so can my homestay partner Sammy. They would communicate in Japanese while I talked to Sammy in Chinese and English. I think having a shared language helped her adjust and bond with us more quickly," said Hou.

Looking back on their time in China, many Vaughn students felt that they still have a long way to go in learning Mandarin.

"I've taken classes at school, but it was mostly textbook Chinese. During my visit, I picked up so many expressions used in daily conversation contexts, like 'dui', which is similar to saying 'yeah' in English," said Sierra.

Both Vaughn and BHSFIC students benefited from the experience, realizing the limitations of virtual knowledge compared to firsthand experiences.

"As a generation that has grown up with technology and media, we have

access to information about other countries online. However, some things can only be grasped in person when you experience them yourself," said Ian Chan. "If I hadn't taken this trip, I wouldn't have learned about the high school life of Chinese students and how welcoming and open-minded Chinese people are."

For Sierra, the weeklong trip even impacted his future career aspirations. "I used to consider becoming a math teacher in the States. Now I'm thinking about teaching English in Beijing or Shanghai."

Gong Siyong, 16, a student at BHSFIC and Sierra's homestay partner, said that an immersive exchange experience is very different from simply touring a country.

"Through our time together, I've come to realize that students from both schools have their unique personalities and outstanding qualities. We have more similarities than differences, and those differences can be embraced and understood," said Gong.

Though Sierra has returned to the US, he and Gong still keep in touch through WeChat. "I gave Sierra a set of building blocks with traditional Chinese elements as a gift, and he sent me a photo of the finished product just a few days ago," said Gong.

"The students will stay in contact. You start with the young people who are equipped with the right disposition, and those kids who carry a good disposition toward collaboration may very well become world leaders someday," said Yvonne Chan.

Contact the writer at [lixinran@i21st.cn](mailto:lixinran@i21st.cn)



Online  
Watch the video  
by scanning  
the code.

## LIFE

# Unveiling the charm of Jiangsu

International youths explore the many wonders of Jiangsu's culture and innovation, sharing experiences as social media influencers and advocating for global exposure to the province's allure.



International social media influencers posed for a photo at the "Go Jiangsu" launch ceremony held at Suzhou Industrial Park in Suzhou, Jiangsu, on March 29. DONG MING / FOR CHINA DAILY

By GUI QIAN  
guiqian@121st.cn

More than 10 international youths gathered in Jiangsu to explore the province and its culture from March 28 to 30.

The event, "Go Jiangsu — Footsteps in Jiangsu: Foreign Youth's Travelogue", was jointly organized by China Daily and the Press Office of the Jiangsu government.

The participants are students, musicians, engineers, and other young professionals from nine countries — Russia, Germany, the United States, France, Cameroon, Uzbekistan, Bulgaria, Turkmenistan, and Iran.

All of them are social media influencers who run personal accounts across global platforms including Facebook, TikTok, and WeChat, of which two of them have over a million followers.

"Economic prosperity and ecological beauty will become the new overseas symbols representing Jiangsu. I sincerely hope that the young friends will become storytellers of the beautiful stories of Jiangsu and ambassadors of Chinese culture, actively sharing their experiences and insights on domestic

Combining traditional calligraphy with modern printing technology to create such a souvenir is truly meaningful. When I return home, I'll use it as a bookmark in my Chinese study books."

Melina Weber, a German fitness vlogger

and international social media platforms, letting more people around the world appreciate the charm of new Jiangsu," said Wang Hao, deputy editor-in-chief of China Daily, at the launch ceremony held at Suzhou Industrial Park in Suzhou, Jiangsu,

on March 29.

Located in the developed coastal region of eastern China, at the intersection of the Belt and Road Initiative, Jiangsu is known as the "land of fish and rice".

Meanwhile, Suzhou is a city with a history of over 2,500 years and a major hub for foreign trade and cultural exchanges.

"Marco Polo referred to Suzhou as the 'Venice of the East' in his travel diaries," Zhao Jinsong, deputy chief of Jiangsu's publicity and director of the provincial government's press office, said at the ceremony.

Zhu Jiang, a member of the Party Working Committee of Suzhou Industrial Park, also invited international guests to visit the park, listening to stories of innovation and entrepreneurship from Jiangsu enterprises, experiencing cutting-edge technologies such as intelligent driving, and feeling the modern scientific allure of Suzhou.

During a round table held at the ceremony, six international young guests shared their admiration and expectations for the province.

Shirin Abdullaeva, from Uzbekistan, is a student at Tsinghua University. She said that during her first trip to Jiangsu, she was surprised by

many things, among which Kunqu Opera impressed her most.

"I have been learning singing since I was a kid, so I find Kunqu very interesting and pleasant to listen to," she said.

Benjamin Essomba, from Cameroon, also took an interest in local music. During the group's visit to the Wuxi Symphony Orchestra, Essomba — as a music producer proficient in multiple instruments — learned to play the Jiangsu folk song *Jasmine Flower* with his electronic guitar.

Later, while touring the historic Pingjiang Road in Suzhou, Abdullaeva and Essomba staged an impromptu "Jasmine Flower flash mob" with Abdullaeva singing and Essomba playing the guitar to accompany her. Their performance drew the attention of the crowds, as other foreign youths joined in the singing as well.

French Gen Zer Alexandre Guery was most impressed by the Suzhou-style architecture along the Pingjiang Road.

As a vlogger who has been to Suzhou multiple times, he had previously visited the Suzhou Museum and learned that it was designed by the famous Chinese American

architect Ieoh Ming Pei (1917-2019). This reminded him of the glass pyramid in front of the Louvre in Paris, also designed by Pei.

The young influencers visited spaces featuring traditional Chinese culture, such as the Caoxieshan Archaeological Site Park and the Yao Jianping Embroidery Art Gallery. They also toured industrial parks and zones where they experienced Jiangsu's modernity.

Abalfazl Delkhasteh, from Iran, noticed the rapid development of Suzhou's economy after learning about the massive import and export volume of Suzhou Industrial Park in 2023. He hopes that Iran can also have industrial parks like those of Suzhou in the future.

Vepayev Babajan, from Turkmenistan, was also amazed that Suzhou Industrial Park could attract so many companies from different countries around the world to invest in the city. It is his wish that Suzhou can establish a sister city agreement with a city in Turkmenistan so that more Turkoman people would come here for exchanges, studies, and cooperation.

The young guests also visited the Yuanhetang High-tech Zone in Suzhou, which was once a production

site for imperial kiln bricks in ancient times. It now introduces and incubates a series of independent yet interconnected industrial chains, including film, animation, esports, and live-streaming e-commerce.

In the zone, the young influencers experimented with Chinese calligraphy using interactive screens.

Melina Weber, a German fitness vlogger, chose to replicate one of the works of renowned Chinese painter and calligrapher Qi Baishi (1864-1957). Within five minutes, her handwriting was engraved onto a bamboo board by a laser printer.

"Combining traditional calligraphy with modern printing technology to create such a souvenir is truly meaningful. When I return home, I'll use it as a bookmark in my Chinese study books," Weber said.

As Zhao pointed out, the "Go Jiangsu" program strives to present "a new Jiangsu of strength, prosperity, beauty, and high standards".

"Friends from home and abroad have always actively recommended and showcased the beauty of Jiangsu to people around the world, steadily broadening Jiangsu's international network and enhancing its global reputation," he said.

## Suzhou: a Chinese-German student's travelogue of discovery

As a Chinese-German student at Tsinghua University, I thought I had a good grasp of both Chinese culture and modernization.

Yet, Suzhou presented a fresh perspective, showing me how tradition and modernity coexist harmoniously in this city.

As one of the destinations of the "Go Jiangsu" program, we visited the Yao Jianping Embroidery Art Gallery. Before this encounter, my interaction with Suzhou embroidery was limited to online images, which is why, at the art gallery, I marveled at the unbelievable preci-

sion that I had assumed was machine-made.

Seeking a hands-on experience, I realized the immense patience and skill behind every stitch, weaving stories with threads that are a millennia-old cultural heritage. It struck me that this isn't just handicraft; it's an art form and a slice of history.

Wandering through Suzhou at night was a different kind of magic. The streetlights, bustling markets, and street food transported me to another dimension. Walking down the Pingjiang Road, where ancient

buildings meet modern lighting, I felt the unique charm of Suzhou. It dawned on me that modernization doesn't have to mean abandoning tradition; they can exist side by side.

The visit to the Caoxieshan Archaeological Site Park was even more striking. Standing amid ancient relics, I tried to picture the lives of those who dwelt here thousands of years ago. This direct touch with history deepened my respect for our ancestors and their legacy.

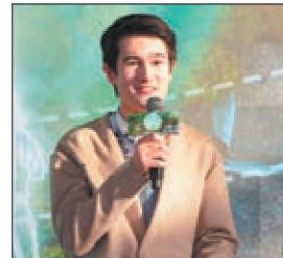
Exploring Suzhou Industrial Park, I witnessed another facet of China's modernization. These tow-

ering buildings and cutting-edge companies showcased the rapid pace of China's modern development. The transition from ancient culture to modern technology was nothing short of astonishing.

Visiting the Suzhou Museum of Imperial Kiln Brick rounded out my journey, offering a comprehensive view of China's history. Each exhibit narrated a story, spanning from ancient artifacts to modern achievements, enriching my understanding of China's developmental trajectory.

Suzhou truly lives up to its repu-

lation as "the city of museums, the city of parks, and the city of theater". This trip was much more than a simple travel experience; it was an enlightening exploration of China's unique blend of tradition and modernity. Through personal encounters, I gained not just knowledge but a deeper connection and appreciation for China's culture and progress. This journey wasn't just a physical one; it was an enriching experience for the soul.



Leopold Lind spoke during a round table at the "Go Jiangsu" launch ceremony. DONG MING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Written by Leopold Lind, a German student at Tsinghua University.

## LIFE

## A detective's pursuit of justice

Zhang Hui, a dedicated female police officer, recounts her journey as a criminal investigation specialist.

By MENG WENJIE and LIU KUN  
mengwenjie@21st.cn

"Someone has fallen off the bridge!"

Upon receiving the call, personnel at the police office in Jianshi county, Enshi Tujia and Miao autonomous prefecture in Central China's Hubei province, immediately sprang into action.

As the leader of the technical squadron of the criminal investigation brigade of the police office, Zhang Hui, 34, rushed to the scene.

She observed that bloodstains were scattered across a set of stairs and among the weeds at the location. However, the body was not found near the area where there would have been the most blood; instead, it had plunged into the river. Zhang also noticed that the deceased had a blackened right eye, suggesting possible internal bleeding due to head trauma.

"This case requires serious attention," Zhang said.

According to her observation, this wasn't a typical abnormal death resulting from a fall accident as described by the caller but potentially a homicide.

The incident occurred in a forest, presenting a vast area for investigation, and piecing together evidence from various traces proved particularly challenging. However, Zhang managed to notice a strip-like mark at the stairs, indicating it might be where the suspect struck the victim's head.

During the examination of the head injury, the medical examiner also discovered on the victim's skin a substance similar to the weeds found at the scene. This finding further supported Zhang's hypothesis that the deceased might have been murdered.

Following a thorough analysis, Zhang and her colleagues confirmed it as a homicide, marking a significant breakthrough in the case.

This intense crime scene investigation ultimately led to the capture of the suspect. It also underscored Zhang's dedication as an experienced criminal investigation expert since 2015 — someone who has encountered various crime scenes, unraveling clues to ensure that criminals are held accountable and victims receive justice.

According to Zhang, unlike the portrayal in detective novels and films, which often emphasize protagonists solving cases through meticulous deduction, real-life

criminal cases require a comprehensive analysis, including on-site inspections, interviews, forensic examinations, and more.

"The process of inspecting, fixing, and testing physical evidence challenges an investigator's patience and skills," said Zhang. "Every aspect, from arriving at the scene and forming an initial understanding to analyzing traces and physical evidence during the inspection, is interconnected."

Zhang's exceptional expertise

didn't develop overnight. Her keen perception and advanced investigative skills are the result of years of unwavering dedication.

When she first joined the police force, she started with the basics, often struggling to apply the knowledge gained in police school to real-world situations. While carrying out routine tasks like sketching scenes, she would observe her mentor conducting investigations, analyzing scenes, and gathering physical evidence, acquiring inval-

uable skills in the process.

Upon returning from a call, Zhang not only digitized her hand-drawn sketches but also managed additional daily tasks such as organizing the investigation dossier, arranging collected specimens for inspection, and scanning fingerprint cards for storage.

Zhang patiently progresses through the basic tasks of daily police work, steadily gaining independence.

"At that time, my mentor told me

that it takes five years to train a criminal investigation technician, and becoming an outstanding technician takes even longer," she said.

As a female detective, Zhang faces greater challenges in her work than her male counterparts.

According to her, there are few women involved in criminal investigations, with most occupying administrative roles. In Zhang's technical squadron, apart from one female administrative assistant,

she is the only female officer.

Working in a mountainous county abundant with rivers, conducting investigations often involves climbing mountains and wading through water, posing greater physical challenges for women.

"The standards for criminal investigation work are the same for everyone, regardless of gender," Zhang said. "It's essential for a police officer to approach their duties with courage and determination."

Zhang and her colleagues also handle many burglary cases. While many of these cases entail relatively small amounts of money and don't involve violent crimes, they often demand extra patience and attention to detail.

Zhang explained that in many theft cases, after the incident, the victim or their families would search the scene first, unconsciously destroying traces and physical evidence. With severe disturbances and many homes lacking surveillance cameras, resolving these cases becomes more challenging.

Zhang and her team have also come across some unique "theft" cases. In rural areas, older people tend not to use electronic payments and prefer to store their cash at home due to the distance from banks. Over time, they often forget where they put their money, leading to reports of "missing" belongings. When Zhang and her colleagues visit these homes, they typically locate the "missing" items right away.

Recalling one particular case in which Zhang's team found the "missing" cash for an old man, she said: "The man was overwhelmed with tears of joy, tightly grasping our hands and expressing gratitude repeatedly. I was deeply touched."

Whether it's major criminal cases or everyday incidents, Zhang and her colleagues tackle each one of them with seriousness and patience.

With nine years of experience as a senior criminal investigation technician, Zhang has examined over 1,200 crime scenes and directly resolved over a hundred criminal cases involving trace evidence.

"Reflecting on those cases, each one presents unique characteristics, tasks, and crucial inspection points. Police officers must demonstrate responsibility and meticulous attention to detail when handling each case to ensure their lasting reliability," she said.



Clockwise from top left: Zhang Hui hikes through the mountains to reach a crime scene. Zhang (left) and her colleague work on a case. Zhang takes photos of a crime scene. Zhang examines a shoe found at a crime scene. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## From poverty to philanthropy: an inspirational journey

By ZHANG LI in Nanning  
zhangli@chinadaily.com.cn

Although Chen Yuliang was not economically affluent, he decided to donate 1 million yuan (\$138,237) to the Guangxi Youth Development Foundation to support impoverished young people in pursuing their scientific dreams.

This donation took place on March 13 in Nanning, South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. This 37-year-old philanthropist plans to contribute 100,000 yuan annually for 10 years.

Chen, currently the vice dean of the School of Civil and Architectural Engineering at Guangxi University of Science and Technology, was born into a rural family in Guigang city, Guangxi.

Eleven years ago, he completed his doctoral degree with the help of the Project Hope scholarship.

"Ever since I received the grant-in-aid, I've pledged to give it back in the future," Chen said.

Throughout his time as a student, Chen's father battled severe ankylosing spondylitis and couldn't work. The family relied on his mother's odd jobs to make ends meet until his mother also fell ill.

In 2010, Chen was accepted into a graduate program at Hunan University in Central China's Hunan province, but due to financial constraints, he transferred to Guangxi University, where he received a tuition waiver. "Even with the waiver, I barely had 100 yuan left after covering accommodation expenses," Chen recalled.

Moreover, with his younger brother also in university and requiring financial assistance, Chen took on the responsibility of supporting himself while pursuing his studies.

During his graduate studies, in addition to attending classes, Chen also worked part-time teaching positions at vocational colleges.

In 2013, with the highest academic performance in his field, Chen gained admission to pursue his doctoral studies at Guangxi University.

However, he faced a challenging financial situation that made him hesitate to continue his academic pursuits. He felt torn between earning money to treat his parents' illnesses and realizing his dreams.

Upon learning about his situation, the secretary of the university's Youth League Committee informed him that he could apply for a schol-

arship from the Guangxi Youth Development Foundation.

With his outstanding academic performance, impressive research skills, and his family's financial struggles, Chen passed the rigorous selection process and received a scholarship of 20,000 yuan.

"I told myself to work doubly hard and share my progress with Project Hope in the future," he said.

Su Yu, the secretary-general of the Guangxi Youth Development Foundation, was moved by Chen's diligence.

"Of all the people I know, he's the one who gets the least sleep. He often replies to my messages at 3 am and is already up by 6 am, starting his research for the day."

Just before the 2024 Chinese New Year, Chen and his wife decided to donate 100,000 yuan from his annual scientific research performance award to the Guangxi Youth Development Foundation.

After receiving the donation, the foundation suggested that Chen use the funds to improve the scientific literacy of young people in Guangxi.

"I've noticed that scientific education has always been lacking in rural areas. In the future, the digital and cognitive gaps between rural and

urban children will likely widen," Chen explained.

According to him, the funds will be allocated toward organizing scientific activities in impoverished regions, particularly for the "left-behind" children whose parents migrate to urban areas in search of employment opportunities.

Since his days as a graduate student at Guangxi University back in 2010, Chen has provided support to 38 economically disadvantaged students.

Liu Zhihua, one of the graduate students whom Chen had mentored, also came from a financially challenged family.

Chen noticed Liu eating instant noodles while her peers dined in the cafeteria. Liu told him that her younger brother was still in school, her mother was working in domestic service, and her family had recently lost its source of income due to her mother's sudden illness.

"After understanding my situation, Mr Chen told me that the research group had arranged for me to take minutes at meetings and handle other tasks, which would earn me 400 yuan per month. In addition, upon publishing papers, I would receive research rewards.



Chen Yuliang (right) donated 1 million yuan to support impoverished young people in Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. XIE YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Thanks to this support, I managed to make it through that difficult time," Liu said.

Chen's assistance didn't weigh on the students mentally. Instead, it provided them with dignified financial support through labor.

However, the donation placed financial strain on Chen. "I have a mortgage to pay at home, money is needed for my parents' medical treatment, and my wife is pursuing

her doctorate," he said. "But the support from school leaders, my colleagues, students, and the understanding of my wife put me at ease as I fulfill my commitment to public welfare."

Chen hopes that by setting an example, he can inspire more businesses, organizations, and individuals to join public welfare initiatives, thereby pooling resources for the growth and success of young people.