

'Panda of the sea'

Coastal 'sound wall' among steps to protect white dolphins

GOING GREEN, PAGE 5



Farmers reap sweet gains from lychees

BUSINESS, PAGE 6



Forged in friendship

Beijing exhibition celebrates six decades of Sino-French relations

CULTURE, PAGES 8-9

# CHINA DAILY

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## Xi: The Strait cannot sever kinship

He says mainland capable of creating bright future with Taiwan compatriots

By XU WEI and JIANG CHENGLONG

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, underlined on Wednesday the stronger engagement, better understanding and mutual trust across the Taiwan Strait based on the recognition that both sides of the Strait belong to one nation.

Meeting with a Taiwan delegation led by Ma Ying-jeou, former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party, in Beijing, Xi said that "external interference cannot stop the historical trend of reunion of the family and the country."

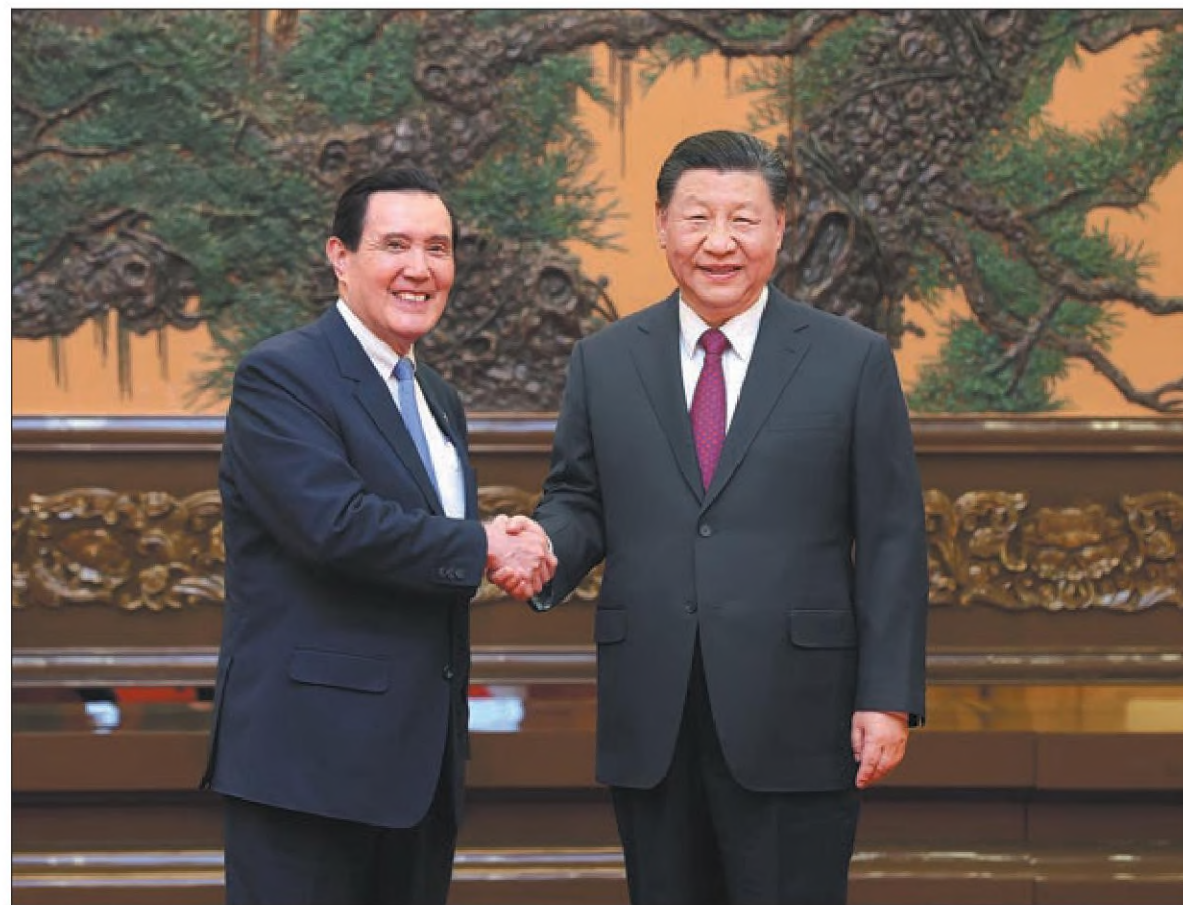
"Compatriots on both sides of the Strait are all Chinese people. There are no knots that cannot be, no issues that cannot be discussed, and no forces that can separate us," he told the delegation, mainly comprising young students from the island.

He emphasized that the distance of the Strait cannot sever the kinship and affection between compatriots on both sides, while the difference in systems cannot change the objective fact that both sides belong to one country and one nation.

Xi reiterated that adhering to the 1992 Consensus, which embodies the one-China principle, is the key to promoting peaceful development of cross-Strait relations.

As long as no separatist activities are performed and people on both sides realize that they are all Chinese people and part of one family, compatriots across the Strait can sit down, engage in interactions about family matters, enhance understanding, build mutual trust, resolve differences and seek consensus, he said.

The general secretary underlined



Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, meets with Ma Ying-jeou, former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party, in Beijing on Wednesday. JU PENG / XINHUA

the shared cultural roots of people across the Strait, saying that compatriots on both sides have always been of one lineage, hand in hand, heart to heart, watching over each other and helping each other.

He urged people across the Strait to resolutely oppose "Taiwan independence" separatist activities and interference from external forces,

steadfastly protect the common homeland of the Chinese nation, and jointly embrace a bright future of peaceful reunification.

This was the first meeting between Xi and Ma, who served as Taiwan leader from 2008 to 2016, since they last met in Singapore in 2015. Ma and the Taiwan youth delegation will wrap up their 11-day visit

to the Chinese mainland on Thursday, which follows a similar trip made last year.

Xi told his guests that enhancing the well-being of compatriots on both sides of the Strait is both the starting point and the purpose of the mainland in developing cross-Strait relations.

Emphasizing the overarching

goal of helping compatriots across the Strait realize their aspiration for living a better life, Xi said the mainland, with a proved capacity to lead 1.4 billion people toward a better life, is fully capable of creating "a bright future together with our Taiwan compatriots".

See *Ties*, page 3

### WORLD WATCH

By Ebrahim Hashem

## Rebalanced regional order emerging in Middle East

What is happening in the Gaza Strip and the whole of Palestine is reaffirming and accelerating the rise of a new Middle East order, in which the hegemony of one country or one bloc of countries is no longer viable.

The signs of a natural progression of the regional order have been there for more than 10 years, but now they are hard to miss. The once-dominant role of the West and the United States is making way for a post-hegemony era.

As has been shown at the UN, Israel and its key patrons have become isolated, and their credibility has been tarnished. They have already strategically lost this war; they have turned most of the world against them. They have lost the global public opinion, and Israel has been taken to the International Court of Justice regarding allegations of genocide. Whatever military, territorial and political gains they may get now will be of little value compared with their strategic loss in the region and the world.

The US became dominant in the Middle East after the Cold War and the arrival of the unipolar world in the early 1990s. However, the world is now multipolar and the region is multialigned. Those two conditions are sufficient to prevent any attempt by any power to dominate the Palestine question and the future direction of the region.

Because of unconditional US support for Israel, and the US' vetoing of United Nations Security Council cease-fire resolutions four times, the US has demonstrated once again that it is not an impartial broker, but Israel's partner in the war against Palestinians.

The US' mishandling and lack of leverage over the situation in Gaza is demonstrating the end of US hegemony in the Middle East, including in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process.

The current situation is reminiscent of the 1956 Suez Crisis, after which British influence in the region declined precipitously. The US and the West had already been losing influence in the region, but their unconditional support for Israel during the current Gaza atrocities is causing a faster erosion of their standing.

The worsening perception of the US in the Arab world was highlighted in a recent survey conducted in Tunisia by research firm Arab Barometer. Before Oct 7, around 55 percent of those interviewed had an unfavorable view of the US. After Oct 7, that negative impression got even worse, at 87 percent.

See *Stability*, page 3

## Survey: German firms to invest more in China

By ZHONG NAN

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Nearly 80 percent of German companies that have a presence in China plan to continue with their investments in the country, considering it essential for maintaining competitiveness both in the Chinese market and globally, a survey published on Wednesday by the German Chamber of Commerce in China showed.

According to the survey, 5 percent of the respondents currently regard Chinese companies as innovation leaders in their respective industries, while 46 percent foresee them becoming leaders within the next five years.

The survey was conducted between Feb 22 and March 6, with responses from 150 member com-

panies of the chamber, which has more than 2,100 members, including Siemens, Mercedes-Benz Group, Covestro and Bayer Group.

German companies aim to leverage China's innovation system not only to seize growth opportunities but also to maintain their competitive edge, said Maximilian Butek, East China executive director of the German Chamber of Commerce in China.

Noting that Chinese and German companies are increasingly becoming close competitors both in the Chinese and global markets, Butek said this is the reality that German companies must prepare for. They have to strengthen their competitiveness by increasing investment in their China businesses and cooperation with partners and customer services, he said.

China offers substantial opportunities for future progress in sectors such as electric vehicle batteries and autonomous driving. This is why German companies are eager to deepen their market presence in the country, Butek added.

Such sentiments are in line with the latest data.

German investment in China surged 19.8 percent year-on-year in the first two months of this year, statistics from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

Highlighting China's big market, efficient supply chains and growing innovation prowess, Anna An, president for China unit at Henkel AG & Co, a German industrial and consumer goods manufacturer, said that China's pursuit of green development has created numerous growth points

for German companies including Henkel.

She said the group anticipates additional government measures to further boost consumption in the country in the coming years.

Henkel established a research and development center for its consumer business in Shanghai in January. Last year, it invested 900 million yuan (\$124.43 million) to build an adhesive plant in Yantai, Shandong province, to meet the growing demands of a diverse range of industries, from electronics and automotive to aerospace.

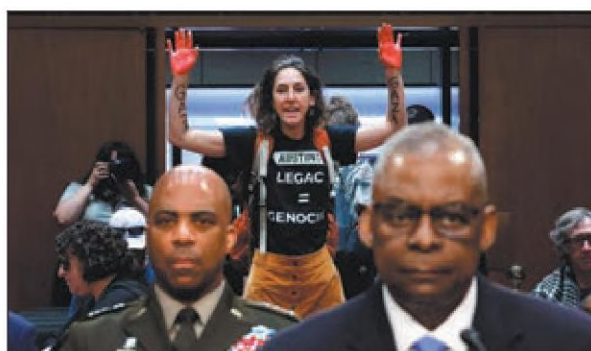
Ling Ji, vice-minister of commerce and China's deputy international trade representative, said that German companies have ample opportunities to leverage the expansion of China's digital economy and green transforma-

tion. He made the remark while meeting last week with senior executives of German companies, including BMW Group and Infineon Technologies in Munich.

Noting that China has transitioned from prioritizing the scale and speed of foreign investment to emphasizing quality in its approach, Wang Xiaosong, a professor at Renmin University of China's School of Economics in Beijing, said this shift has led to a surge in foreign investment in the high-tech manufacturing sector, aligning with the country's industrial restructuring efforts.

Germany has been China's largest trading partner in Europe for 49 consecutive years, while China has been Germany's largest global trading partner for eight consecutive years. German investment in China accounts for 30 percent of European Union's investments in China, according to information released by the Ministry of Commerce last week.

## Dissenting voice



Protesters interrupt the testimony of Lloyd Austin (right), secretary of defense of the United States, during a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, on Tuesday. The protesters were demonstrating against the war in Gaza, demanding that the US stop funding for Israel. CHIP SOMODEVILLA / AFP

## FRIENDLY TRAVEL POLICIES PUSH INBOUND TOURISM SURGE

Visitors from around the world welcomed, visa-free entry helps boost sector

By YANG FEIYUE

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Maximilian Klaus Puechler from Germany crammed in as much sightseeing as he could during his short trip to Beijing in late March.



In one day, Puechler, in his 20s, visited the Juyongguan section of the Great Wall and the royal gar-

dens at the Summer Palace as well as viewed the ancient architecture at the Temple of Heaven.

He was especially impressed by a culturally immersive experience at the temple, where he learned about traditional Chinese architectural oil painting, and tried techniques

such as the gilding and decorative application of gold powder to the surface of a painting.

At the end of the tour, he was given a dragon-shaped hat by a staff member at the temple as a gift.

See *Tourism*, page 2

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INSIDE BRICS' African ties can boost continent's growth Global Views, page 13



# PAGE TWO



Edouard Rebilly from Belgium tries decorative art at a museum in Beijing in April. YANG FEIYUE / CHINA DAILY

From page 1

"As a tourist, I felt everyone's hospitality. People would come up to me and strike up a conversation, and that's really nice," Puchler said.

Talina Hotz from Switzerland took a special shine to the exhibitions at the Temple of Heaven. She said they helped her gain a better appreciation of the temple's history and structure as well as cultural aspects, such as the Hall of Prayer for a Good Harvest, a magnificent triple-gabled circular building.

"I'm really interested in Chinese cultural heritage, and I really enjoyed it," she said. Hotz said she was also impressed that so many people on her tour had enjoyed the experience.

The two Europeans are among a growing number of international travelers who have benefited from China's recent visa-free entry policy.

### Opening doors

Since March 14, China has granted visa-free entry on a trial basis to visitors from Switzerland, Ireland, Hungary, Austria, Belgium, and Luxembourg.

According to the Foreign Ministry, from March 14 to Nov 30, passport holders from the six countries can enter China without a visa for up to 15 days for business, tourism, family visit, and transit purposes.

In November, visa-free policies were implemented for travelers holding passports from France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Malaysia.

More than 1,200 tourists, mostly from Germany, Switzerland and Austria, were on board the *MS Artania* cruise ship, when it docked in Shanghai from March 19 to March 21.

They qualified for unrestricted entry to the country under the visa-free policy, said Hu Jiyang from the Beijing-based CYTS Tours, which was in charge of arranging the tour.

The previous 15-day visa-free policy for cruise ship passengers entering Shanghai port would have restricted their stay to the Jiangsu-Zhejiang-Shanghai area, Hu said.

The new visa-free policy allows them to book tours to other destinations in the country such as Beijing. "Despite the tight schedule, passengers enthusiastically signed up for a trip to Beijing," Hu said.

In addition to the 350 guests who took tours in Beijing, other passengers also booked excursions in Shanghai and surrounding areas, she added.

### Numbers on the rise

As China's visa-free "circle of friends" has expanded, foreign tourists have shown increasing willingness to visit the country.



A group of foreign tourists takes in the Palace Museum in Beijing, on Sunday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Left: Tourists visit the Palace Museum in Beijing on Sunday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Right: Visitors take a selfie at Terracotta Warriors Pit No 1 at Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum in Xi'an, Shaanxi province. ZHANG TIANZHU / FOR CHINA DAILY



Tourists disembark from the *Zuiderdam* cruise ship after it arrives at Dalian port in Liaoning province on March 10. XINHUA

On March 10, more than 2,000 travelers from 47 countries and regions arrived in Dalian, Liaoning province, onboard the *Zuiderdam* cruise ship, operated by the Holland America Line, and took in the city's numerous attractions, ranging from its beautiful parks and beaches to its theaters and museums.

In January and February, nearly 2.95 million entries and exits of foreign nationals were recorded by the National Immigration Administration, according to statistics cited by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

During the Spring Festival holiday, the effects of China's visa-free policy became apparent, with a significant increase in visitors from countries newly added to the visa-free list, including France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Malaysia and Singapore.

The total volume of inbound tours booked on some online travel agency platforms was double that for the same period in 2019, the tourism ministry said.

Since the beginning of this year, inbound tourism orders have increased more than threefold compared with the same period last year, and 50 percent with 2019, said Qin Jing, vice-president of major online travel agency Trip.com Group based in Shanghai.

Inbound hotel bookings have increased more than threefold year-on-year, with a growth rate of over 70 percent compared with 2019. Inbound flight bookings have also seen a more than threefold increase year-on-year, representing a growth rate of over 60 percent compared with 2019, Qin said.

Yu Tong, product manager with CYTS Tours, said recently she has been receiving inbound travel groups in Beijing almost every day. The Palace Museum, the Great Wall, the Temple of Heaven, and the Ming Tombs Reservoir are the most popular destinations for inbound tourists, she said.

"Some of them have also opted for immersive cultural tours, like hiking the Jinshanling and Simatai sections of the Great Wall or exploring deep into hutongs," Yu said.

### German beer index

Restaurants that cater to overseas travel groups have been in contact with her, hoping to resume business cooperation. Yu cites this as clear evidence inbound tourism is recovering.

Eateries that have long-term agreements with travel agencies will tailor their menus according to the preferences of tourists from different countries, she said.

"For example, German tourists love beer, so the restaurant will provide two bottles of beer for them," Yu said.

Tourism operators have also launched a range of financial services to make the stay of inbound travelers more convenient.

A number of high-end hotels and restaurants in the capital not only accept international credit card payments, but also provide foreign-currency exchange services

as many overseas guests prefer to pay in cash.

"Due to the complexity of the process, we have specifically conducted training on manual foreign-currency exchanges," said Zhong Yong, deputy general manager of China World Summit Wing, a Shangri-La hotel in Beijing.

Guests can also use their bank cards to withdraw cash at the self-service foreign-currency exchange machines in the lobby, Zhong added.

However, a rising number of inbound guests want to use local electronic payment services while visiting China. Zhong's hotel guides them on how to link their international credit cards to Alipay and WeChat Pay and how to make payments through them.

Some hotels offer simpler ways for foreign visitors to get cash and also experience Beijing at a more local level. At Huajiantang hotel, tucked away in a Beijing hutong, a guide is available to take guests to nearby banks.

The hotel also provides a map highlighting public transportation as well as call services for emergencies, said Zhu Hailong, the hotel's general manager.

For guests who don't want to go far, Huajiantang gives recommendations on neighborhood sights, shops and restaurants. It also offers guests handicraft classes such as making dolls of Tu'er Ye (the Lord Rabbit).

At Hotel Jen Beijing, inbound travelers are given advice on how to use mobile phones to hail taxis, how to book and purchase tickets for popular attractions, and how to purchase domestic flights and train tickets, and select seats. The goal is to make their trips smoother, said Zhang Lize, a deputy manager at the Hotel Jen.

### Convenience key

To ensure the recovery continues, tourism officials will launch a series of targeted measures to remedy existing problems in the market.

On March 29, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism said at a news conference it will make it easier for

payments at various places such as tourist attractions, cultural and performance venues and star-rated hotels. Inbound tourism products and services will also be stepped up, along with overseas promotions, to better meet inbound travelers' needs.

Wu Kefeng, deputy head of the ministry's Department of Resource Development, said special emphasis was being placed on improving the convenience of payments at key tourist destinations.

This includes promoting the establishment of software and hardware facilities for accepting mobile payments, bank cards, and cash at all national 5A and 4A tourist attractions, national and provincial tourist resorts, and national-level tourist leisure districts, Wu said.

The ministry said it will cooperate with the relevant departments to promote the establishment of foreign-currency exchange service points at tourist resorts and national-level tourist leisure districts with a high number of inbound tourists. It will also encourage nearby bank branches to provide foreign-currency cash exchange services to meet the needs of inbound tourists.

All tourist attractions will retain staffed windows to offer ticket services for inbound travelers, while English-language online reservations will also be available.

"For reservations requiring real-name authentication, foreign passports, permanent residence identity cards, and travel permits for residents of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan to the Chinese mainland will be included in the recognized identification documents," Wu said.

Key tourist attractions will also be encouraged to improve multilingual signage and guide facilities, and to continue improving their foreign-language services.

### More to come

Edouard Rebilly from Belgium could not take advantage of the visa-free policy before he came to China in late March.

"I had to go to a center in London, and it was quite a long wait, which was a bit annoying," Rebilly said.

The Belgian, in his 20s, came to China to visit friends he met in 2019 during a six-month college exchange program in Hong Kong. On the latest trip he took tours to Guangzhou, Guangdong province, Xi'an, Shaanxi province, and Beijing and Shanghai over about two weeks.

Rebilly said he was drawn to the distinctive culture and food in those cities. "I think every city is very different, and it's very safe to travel here," he said.

As the beneficial travel policies have been unrolled, Rebilly says he's likely to visit again soon. "I will probably check out Zhangjiajie where they filmed the *Avatar* movie," he said, referring to the spectacular national forest in Hunan province.

Dou Junjie, who for two decades has arranged cycling tours to Beijing's historical and cultural areas such as the Central Axis and hutongs, believes the effects of the positive measures will be fully seen in autumn.

"The guests from abroad we have received have usually made their travel plans at least six to ten months in advance," said Dou, who has received a stream of orders for cycling tours since February.

"If past experience is any reference, September to early November is the peak season. That means if we can align the influence of the policies with the traditional cycle we can expect a very promising scenario," Dou said.



Tourists take photos of Terracotta Warriors in Xi'an, Shaanxi province. ZHANG TIANZHU / FOR CHINA DAILY

## TOP NEWS

## Sailing in



The polar icebreaker *Xuelong* docks in Qingdao, Shandong province, on Wednesday, marking the completion of China's 40th Antarctic expedition. The ship will be open to the public from Thursday to Saturday. ZHANG JIN'GANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## US narrative on energy tech seen as 'off the mark'

Experts hail China for offering cost-effective electric vehicles

By CHENG YU  
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China should not be blamed for offering cost-effective new energy technologies and products to the world amid rising accusations of so-called overcapacity concerns, industry experts said on Wednesday.

They made the comments after United States Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen reportedly cautioned that China's overcapacity in electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and solar products will distort global prices.

"In conflating overcapacity and the broader issues of the EV market, Washington's narrative is way off the mark," said Wang Xin, associate professor of China studies and director of Asian studies in the department of languages and culture at Baylor University in the US. "It is the US market's high prices, not Chinese overcapacity, that hinder widespread EV adoption, given that Chinese EVs are completely excluded from the US currently."



It is not reasonable to leverage political power to hinder the public's access to China's cost-effective new energy technologies and affect the prospects of global green transformation."

Zhang Xiang, auto sector researcher at North China University of Technology

Wang said that last year, the EV share of the total US vehicle market was only 7.6 percent, and that while US consumers have limited choices, with new EVs averaging around \$50,000, China's largest EV maker, BYD, offers the subcompact Seagull for less than \$10,000.

"In contrast, the US is lagging in realizing even its EV infrastructure ambitions. China has nothing to do with this slow rollout. Unlike the protectionist stance adopted by the US, China's approach prioritizes industry-wide growth rather than narrow corporate and political interests," Wang added.

Zhang Xiang, an auto sector researcher at North China University of Technology, said that the rise of China's new energy industry is fundamentally a result of its large-scale market, complete industrial system and abundant human resources.

"It is not reasonable to leverage political power to hinder the public's access to China's cost-effective new energy technologies and affect the prospects of global green transformation," he said.

Zhang added that China's overcapacity problem has been "exaggerated", as industrial overcapacity could happen in any sector in any country, and should not be politicized.

"Whether there is overcapacity should be based on global market demand and future development potential, and the market adjusts itself according to the law of value," he added.

Bloomberg also said in a recent report that from the rest of the world's perspective, overcapacity can be felt through lower prices, and China's automobile exports, which surged last year as the country overtook Japan as the world's top car exporter, actually became more expensive, which suggested their rising attractiveness isn't due to price cuts.

Lu Yan, an industry veteran and independent analyst, pointed out that China is indeed in the process of gradually optimizing the structure of the production capacity of traditional fuel vehicles and increasing the production capacity of new energy vehicles.

"Some regions are doing well and some are not doing well enough. But it is a structural and cyclical excess, and that is where strategies will need to be adjusted in some regions in the future," Lu said.

On the contrary, rising protectionism from Western economies like the US and Europe will not offer a fair competition market for green energy, and may lead to the penetration of NEVs in an unexpected way, he added.

The European Commission also announced earlier this week that it will launch an inquiry into alleged Chinese subsidies for suppliers of wind turbines.

## NetEase Inc renews game partnership with Blizzard Entertainment

By FAN FEIFEI  
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Chinese internet company NetEase Inc has renewed its partnership with United States-based online game company Blizzard Entertainment to bring the latter's popular game services back to China this summer. The move will provide high-quality games for Chinese internet users and bolster the domestic gaming industry's development and prosperity, industry experts said.

Following yearlong discussions, the two firms said in a statement on Wednesday that they were pleased to renew a partnership that would benefit players in China.

Blizzard had licensing agreements with NetEase since 2008, but suspended most of its game services on the Chinese mainland as a result of the expiry of the licensing agreements with NetEase on Jan 23, 2023.

Their renewed partnership will encompass games that Chinese players had access to under the previous one, including *World of Warcraft* and *Hearthstone*.

Building upon their more than 15 years of previous cooperation, the two companies are working on the relaunch plans, with further details to be unveiled at a later date, said the statement.

It added that a period of time was required to restart services and resolve technical issues such as restructuring server rooms and restoring data.

In a separate tie-up, US tech company Microsoft's gaming division and NetEase entered into an agreement to explore bringing new NetEase titles to Microsoft's Xbox consoles and other platforms.

In October, Microsoft acquired US game developer Activision Bliz-

zard, Blizzard Entertainment's parent company, in a \$69 billion deal, a record for a video game industry takeover.

Jiang Han, a senior analyst at market consultancy Pango, said that Blizzard, as a world-renowned game developer, has a large number of game players around the world, while NetEase has abundant experience and resources in game publishing and operations.

"The resumption of the Blizzard-NetEase partnership will allow the companies to give full play to their own advantages, jointly promote the development of Blizzard's games in the Chinese market, and achieve win-win results," Jiang said.

He noted that major game companies are currently actively seeking partners to expand their market share amid intensified competition, and the renewed partnership between NetEase and Blizzard also indicates that there will be more cooperation in the gaming industry.

Ding Lei, CEO of NetEase, said in a statement, "Our commitment to providing a more exhilarating and creative entertainment experience remains unwavering, and we are excited to see positive synergies fostered to encourage and empower collaboration to bring the joy of gaming to a broad community."

Revenue from China's gaming industry reached 302.96 billion yuan (\$41.9 billion) in 2023, up 14 percent year-on-year, with the number of Chinese game users reaching 668 million, according to a report from the Chinese gaming database Gamma Data Corp.

Industry experts also said the country has sent positive signals for a more supportive regulatory policy toward the gaming sector, bringing growth opportunities for gaming companies both at home and abroad.

## Making a splash



An elephant sprays water on a woman on Tuesday during the Songkran Water Festival celebrations in Ayutthaya, Thailand. The event was held to promote tourism in Thailand. CHAIWAT SUBPRASOM / SIPA USA

## Ties: Ma highlights need to further deepen cross-Strait exchanges

From page 1

The mainland has always kept the welfare of Taiwan compatriots in mind, sharing the opportunities from Chinese modernization and the achievements of development and progress of the mainland with them, he said.

The mainland is actively doing practical and good things for compa-

triot from Taiwan, solving their problems and ensuring that they have more benefits, more substantial welfare and a better future, Xi said.

To forge a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, the general secretary pledged more forceful measures to promote cross-Strait exchanges, interactions and integration, so that compatriots on both sides can develop mutual under-

standing and trust through interactions, and foster a spiritual connection.

He said the mainland sincerely invites more visits from Taiwan compatriots, adding that he will be happy to see more people from the mainland visiting Taiwan.

Xi also extended a welcoming message to the young people in Taiwan to come to the mainland to pur-

sue and fulfill their dreams, saying that mainland authorities will create better conditions and more opportunities for the development and success of young people from both sides of the Strait.

Ma told Xi that adhering to the 1992 Consensus and opposing "Taiwan independence" constitute the common political foundation for the peaceful development of cross-

Strait relations.

While highlighting the need to deepen cross-Strait exchanges and cooperation to jointly carry forward the Chinese culture and stay dedicated to the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, Ma noted that people on both sides of the Strait belong to the Chinese nation and are descendants of Emperor Yan and the Yellow Emperor

Lee Liang-yi, a student from Taiwan who spoke at the meeting, said she was impressed by the emphasis Xi placed on the role of young people in advancing the future of the nation, especially his advocacy of mutual help between youths across the Strait.

"In addition to events like this, I hope there can be more exchanges in sports, including baseball," she said.

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## Stability: Middle East to rebalance regional order, ensuring coordination

From page 1

It is misleading to say that the US is "leaving a vacuum" in the region. It is more accurate to say that there is a fundamental divergence of interests and worldviews between the region and the US. The region is becoming economically more integrated with Asia and the Global South.

The Middle Eastern nations are making concerted efforts to rebalance the regional order, ensuring high-level policy coordination among themselves, and deepening strategic partnerships with countries such as China, Russia and

India. Furthermore, this was demonstrated through the recent Arab-Islamic summit when the Arab and Muslim leaders showed rare unity in defending Palestine against Israel and its sponsors.

Some foreign analysts misinterpret the US importance in resolving one regional issue, namely the Palestine-Israel conflict, as a sign of the US' irreplaceability in the entire Middle East — despite contrary evidence that the US role in many other regional issues such as Syria and Libya has diminished.

The US role in addressing the question of Palestine is necessary, especially in the short term, not

**In the medium and long terms, if the Americans and Israelis continue to try to impose their will on the Palestinians and the Arabs without a permanent, just solution, the question of Palestine will be re-internationalized.**

because the US is an "indispensable" and unbiased mediator, but because the US is Israel's primary sponsor and arms supplier. Therefore, the US is, and is expected to remain, an integral part of the peace negotiation process for the time being.

Nonetheless, in the medium and long terms, if the Americans and Israelis continue to try to impose their will on the Palestinians and the Arabs without a permanent, just solution, the question of Palestine will be re-internationalized. The initial steps of this re-internationalization process have already been taken.

The Arabs are now more convinced than ever that their multialignment approach is wise and correct. They believe that no foreign power should be treated as indispensable, and that they must build indigenous capacity and cultivate diverse strategic partnerships based on their national interests.

The old paradigm about the Palestine question and regional order has been broken and a new thinking is emerging about how to guarantee stability and security in the region. The nations in the region are using their rising agency to solidify their sovereignty and cement their multialignment poli-

cy, keeping traditional partners in the West and expanding their list of friends in the Global South.

Reasonably, the Arabs are heading to peace and prosperity by working with the international community to terminate the cycle of violence and the regional order of chaos and implement the two-state solution based on international law, UN resolutions and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.

The author is former adviser to the chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Office, former head of the strategy division of Abu Dhabi National Oil Co, and an Asia global fellow at the Asia Global Institute of the University of Hong Kong. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## CHINA

# Regulations to protect environment

Mechanism provides assistance for carrying out ecological improvement

By HOU LIQIANG  
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The State Council has introduced new regulations governing a mechanism for ecological compensation, which aims to provide incentives for institutions and individuals that carry out environmental and ecological protection.

The new regulations, signed by Premier Li Qiang, will come into force on June 1.

Following Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization, the regulations uphold the idea that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets, a release from the State Council said on Wednesday.

It said the central government will encourage and guide regions to reach ecological compensation agreements between those rolling out environmental protection measures and those regions that benefit from those measures.

Regions that make remarkable achievements in promoting the mechanism may also enjoy preferential policies from the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Finance.

In addition, the central government and provincial-level governments will offer guidance funds to regions with important ecological functions that reach agreements with each other, it said.

For instance, the provinces of Henan and Shandong reached an agreement in 2021 about ecological compensation regarding the Yellow River, which runs through Henan

## 1 million yuan

The price Shandong province will pay to Henan province for every 1 percentage point decrease in the annual density of key pollutants in the Yellow River

and into neighboring Shandong.

Under the agreement, if Henan helps improve the water quality upstream, Shandong pays Henan for its efforts. If the water quality falls in Shandong, then Henan has to pay.

According to the deal, Shandong will pay Henan 60 million yuan (\$8.3 million) if the water quality in the Yellow River improves by one tier in a year, according to the country's five-tier quality rating system for surface water.

Shandong will also pay Henan 1 million yuan for every 1 percentage point decrease in the annual density of key pollutants, with a ceiling of 40 million yuan.

In return, Henan agreed to pay Shandong the same amount for a decrease in the water quality tier, and for every percentage point increase in pollutants.

The regulations also vow to make the market play its full role in promoting the ecological compensation mechanism.

The release said the central government will encourage the private sector and local governments to purchase ecological products and services to contribute to funding for ecological compensation.

# Fujian bridge to receive prestigious intl award

By LUO WANGSHU in Beijing and HU MEIDONG in Fuzhou

A bridge in Fujian province has won an international engineering award, demonstrating the nation's strength in building bridges and infrastructure, the provincial transport commission said.

The Shaxi Bridge, spanning 1,408 meters on a freeway linking Fujian with Hunan province, has six lanes for traffic traveling at 100 kilometers per hour. It opened in May 2022.

Fujian's transport commission said the bridge will receive the prestigious Eugene C. Figg Jr. Medal at the 2024 International Bridge Conference in San Antonio, United States, in June.

The conference, hosted by the Engineers' Society of Western Pennsylvania, is a renowned international academic conference in the field of bridge engineering.

The conference presents six major awards each year that are widely regarded as the most prestigious accolades in the field of bridge engineering, often being referred to as the industry's "Nobel Prize". The Eugene C. Figg Jr. Medal recognizes a single and recent outstanding achievement in bridge engineering that provides an icon to the community for which it was designed.

The China Highway and Trans-

portation Society recommended 13 domestic projects for consideration this year, the commission said.

It will be the sixth time a project from China has received the Eugene C. Figg Jr. Medal since the award's inception in 2002. Other award-winning bridges include Beijing's Xin Shougang Bridge and the Jiangyin Bridge in Jiangsu province.

The Shaxi Bridge, in Nanjing, crosses over a national highway, a railway, a river and a scenic area.

The upper structure of the main bridge employs a 176-meter steel truss composite continuous rigid frame — the world's largest span for such a bridge.

It was built as a non-prestressed structure, resulting in a lighter and more robust structure with enhanced spanning capabilities, effectively addressing the challenges of traditional large-span beam bridges, such as deflection and cracking.

The project also used Building Information Modeling technology throughout the entire process of construction, design and maintenance, demonstrating the application of digital technology in the building of bridges in China, the commission said.

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## Peace efforts rewarded

Bintou Keita (left), head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, shakes hands on Tuesday with a member of the Chinese peacekeeping force at the camp of the engineering company of the Chinese contingent on the outskirts of Bukavu, the capital of the country's eastern province of South Kivu. The 27th Chinese Peacekeeping Contingent to the MONUSCO was awarded the UN Peace Medal on Tuesday. XINHUA

# Meteorologist gets cold awakening to Antarctic beauty

By LI MENGHAN  
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"I felt as if I had landed on an alien planet," said 24-year-old Fan Rongfeng, the only meteorologist in the seventh China-Chile joint Antarctic expedition team.

"The air was unbelievably clean and fresh, the sea ice was so immaculate that a single grain of sand could hardly be found, and clusters of penguins gracefully waddled about."

But he found that the desolate and enigmatic continent was not that frigid, with red and yellow vegetation, such as moss and algae, a stark contrast to the barren landscape he had imagined.

Fan embarked on the mission early this year to advance the study of polar climate change amid dramatic global warming.

His primary objective was to set up two autonomous meteorological stations tailored for extreme low temperatures on the Antarctic Peninsula. This involved selecting sites, installing equipment and conducting trial operations.

The Antarctic Peninsula, the continent's largest peninsula, which extends the furthest north into the ocean, is among the areas most severely affected by global warming.

In 2020, Argentina registered a

staggeringly high temperature of 18.3 C at the Esperanza station on the peninsula, establishing a new high for the continent.

The autonomous meteorological stations developed by the Chinese

Academy of Meteorological Sciences will enable long-term observation in extremely low temperatures, providing more precise real-time data for studying polar climate change.

As a graduate student at the academy, Fan said he undertook the mission with "tension and expectation" as his undergraduate studies in atmospheric sciences leaned more toward theory than practical application.

"Ever since I learned about the project about six months earlier, I began my preparations, delving into literature and seeking guidance from seniors, despite uncertainty about eligibility," he said, adding that the academy attached great importance to the mission and organized specialized training.

He said the training was very comprehensive, covering everything from the construction process for a meteorological station, such as site selection, installation and the

use of tools, to fieldwork precautions in Antarctica, such as avoiding nighttime operations and leaving no litter behind.

"A prime location for a meteorological station should be a flat, open area distant from the coast, necessitating the transport of heavy components, several weighing tens of kilograms, to the specified site under sea conditions with less wind and waves," Fan said.

When choosing the sites, Fan also considered the need for them to be a considerable distance from China's Great Wall Station in Antarctica to make the data more representative. In addition, they needed to be in parts of the peninsula that were warming.

At D'Urville Island, one of the designated sites, the weather forecast indicated a window of just two hours for work that had been expected to take four.

Fan had made detailed plans on the research vessel, specifying the components each team member needed to transport and the support required during installation. He rehearsed the assembly process multiple times, and simulated potential emergency situations and appropriate responses.

"Thanks to my fellow team members, we were able to complete the work in just one and a half hours," he said.



Fan Rongfeng

The wind and waves started to pick up as they made their way back to the research vessel, giving him a greater appreciation of the significance of precise weather forecasts for scientific expeditions.

At the other installation site, James Ross Island, Fan experienced a thrilling Antarctic night.

When they arrived, the sky was already getting a little dark, so they planned to first transport the components to the island and assemble them the next day. However, the receding tide left their kayaks stranded on the way back. All the team members had to stand in the icy water and push the kayaks back into the sea.

"It was at that moment that I understood the gravity of freezing to death," Fan said. But, undeterred, they successfully set up the meteorological station.

"Given the extreme and unpredictable nature of polar regions, Antarctic expeditions are highly adventurous," he said.

"Yet the sense of accomplishment and the power of unity surpassed the feeling of fear."



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# HK youngsters in awe of nation's polar explorers

By XI TIANQI and STEPHY ZHANG in Hong Kong

Hong Kong students taking part in a video-call dialogue with polar scientists in Antarctica, 12,000 kilometers away, on Wednesday were captivated by the nation's polar scientific achievements and the scientists' perseverance during their work in the extremely harsh polar environment.

The exchanges with scientists at Zhongshan station — China's second polar research base, built in 1989 — also inspired them to enhance their understanding of science and technology, they said.

On Wednesday afternoon, over 250 students from more than 20 schools across Hong Kong gathered at the Hong Kong Science Museum to chat with Chinese mainland polar experts. More students attended the event online.

The session was one of the events held to mark the polar icebreaker *Xuelong 2's* five-day visit to Hong Kong, which will conclude on Friday.

During the session, students were given a chance to talk with three scientists at the station during a video call lasting about 25 minutes.



Hong Kong students present souvenirs to polar scientists Li Zhengyang (front second left) and Yang Huigen (front second right) during an exchange activity at the Hong Kong Science Museum on Wednesday. ANDY CHONG / CHINA DAILY

Ji Tuo, an astronomer at the Polar Research Institute of China, is responsible for astronomical observations at Zhongshan station. He explained the phenomenon of polar day and polar night in the video call.

The students were captivated when hearing that the Antarctic experiences 54 consecutive days of daylight from November to Decem-

ber, followed by 58 days of uninterrupted darkness from May onward.

A student asked about the utilization of artificial intelligence technology in Antarctic research. Wang Anliang, a senior engineer with expertise in sea ice mechanics and dynamics, responded that the extreme environment in Antarctica demands thorough observation to

ensure the reliability of data collected.

Hu Junze, the head of Zhongshan station and an expert in space physics, also took part in the video call.

Esme Sze, a student from HKUGA College, was moved by photos showcasing the mesmerizing starry skies of Antarctica that were shared by the researchers during the dialogue.

She reflected on the severe light pollution in Hong Kong, which often obscures such celestial spectacles. Inspired by the dialogue, Sze expressed her commitment to protecting the environment.

Helen Li and Ankie Sun, two other students from HKUGA College, marveled at the delectable cuisine available at the station and the fact it has a basketball court.

In a speech delivered before the dialogue, Hong Kong Secretary for Education Christine Choi Yuk-lin encouraged students to integrate their newfound knowledge with various academic disciplines.

Choi also urged the students to seize the valuable opportunity of communicating with the nation's top scientists, and to take them as role models in enriching knowledge.

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# National hero's legacy celebrated on 400th anniversary

By ZHANG YI  
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The history of Zheng Chenggong, a national hero who expelled the Dutch colonists in 1662 and recovered Taiwan, shows that the island is a part of China and the reunification of the two sides is a general trend, representatives from both sides said.

They made the remarks at a cross-strait youth book salon held in Beijing on Tuesday to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Zheng's birth. More than 70 representatives including Taiwan compatriots and Zheng's descendants from his ancestral home attended the event.

Jiang Liping, vice-chairman of the Central Committee of the Taiwan Democratic Self-Government

League, said that Taiwan has always been an integral part of China's territory, and the event could help everyone review history and promote peaceful and integrated development across the Strait.

Zheng Dongliang, president of the International Zheng Chenggong Cultural Exchange Association, said that Zheng Chenggong's deeds in recovering and developing Taiwan

were a magnificent undertaking.

Zheng Chenggong vigorously promoted political, economic and cultural development during his stay in Taiwan, Zheng Dongliang said.

"These deeds fully confirm that Taiwan is the sacred territory of China," he said. "He is a great hero in realizing the reunification of the motherland and promoting the prosperity of Taiwan."

Hsueh Ying-tung, who is from Taiwan and runs a video production company in Wuhan, Hubei province, said Zheng Chenggong was "a great defender of national interests in our history".

"As a young person from Taiwan, I came to the mainland to start a business," he said.

"I greatly admire Zheng Chenggong's entrepreneurial spirit and his struggles at sea.

"We have created an animated Zheng Chenggong character and, in the future, we hope to turn it into an

AI-animated product, allowing people to know this great hero who made contributions to the country 400 years ago."

Huang I-how, a young person from Taiwan who works on the Chinese mainland, said: "Zheng Chenggong refers to a pioneering spirit by expelling Dutch colonists and developing Taiwan. History also tells us that national reunification is a general trend."

Liu Shenshi contributed to this story.

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

# White dolphins protected off coast of Xiamen

Establishment of underwater 'sound wall' among measures guarding 'panda of the sea'



**Above:** A sculpture depicting the harmony between humans and Chinese white dolphins overlooks Huoshaoyu Island of Xiamen, Fujian province, in January. LIN SHANCHUAN / XINHUA  
**Inset:** A dolphin frolics off the coast of Huoshaoyu Island in Xiamen, Fujian province. ZHOU QING / FOR CHINA DAILY

By LI MENGHAN and HU MEIDONG in Xiamen, Fujian

In late January, a pod of Chinese white dolphins was seen jumping, swimming and generally frolicking near Huoshaoyu Island off the coast of Xiamen in Southeast China's Fujian province.

"In the cold months from December through February, dolphins are likely to seek inner bays and harbors with calm winds and waves to spend the winter," said Xu Jing, an official with the Xiamen Chinese White Dolphin Nature Reserve. She added that it has become more common to spot dolphins in the relatively calm western waters in recent years.

The Chinese white dolphin, or Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin, inhabits shallow coastal waters from Southeast China to East India, and garnered "Chinese" in its name after being observed in China in the 1600s. The cetacean, which is under first-class State protection in China, is regarded as an indicative species for marine ecological health, due to its sensitivity to water quality.

Owing to years of dedicated conservation efforts and support from local communities, Xiamen, one of just a handful of coastal Chinese cities where Chinese white dolphins can be observed from an urban setting, has witnessed a resurgence in the population.

"The Chinese white dolphin is a species at the top of the food chain. The continued sightings of the dolphins in the city's waters imply that our marine ecosystem and the entire food chain are well-preserved and supportive of their survival," said Xin Jianjun, former head of the Xiamen Fisheries Administration.

## Protection areas

Despite local fishermen fostering profound respect and a strong sense of guardianship and protection for Chinese white dolphins due to the long-standing belief that they symbolize tranquil seas and a bountiful

catch, coastal development projects in Xiamen at the end of the last century encroached upon their habitats.

"In the 1980s and 1990s, the development of ports, waterways, shipping and nearshore aquaculture, along with the deteriorating water quality, led to a significant decrease in the population of Chinese white dolphins, making it increasingly rare to observe these creatures playing in the city's waters," Xin said.

In response, Xiamen took steps to address the problem by introducing vital legal protections and issuing the country's inaugural regulation for the safeguarding of the Chinese white dolphin population and their habitats.

At the same time, the city set up China's first provincial-level nature reserve for the Chinese white dolphin in 1997, which served as a model for areas in Guangdong and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region to establish their own nature reserves for the mammal.

Drawing on previous efforts, the provincial-level nature reserve for the Chinese white dolphin, together with the existing nature reserves for lancelets and egrets, was upgraded and merged into the Rare Marine Species National Nature Reserve, dedicated to the conservation of the three species.

Extending to an area of 33,088 hectares, the nature reserve bans any activities that may directly or indirectly damage the marine environment, such as dumping waste, discharging toxic or harmful substances, throwing explosive items, unauthorized fishing, or construction.

## Breeding methods

Xu attributed the vulnerability of the Chinese white dolphin, nicknamed "the giant panda of the sea", partly to its demanding living habits. He said that the breeding and nurturing of this marine animal are even more challenging than that of the giant panda.

"When a panda is born, we can capture it and raise it through artificial breeding, but as for dolphin



**Top:** Chinese white dolphins swim beside a ship near Huoshaoyu Island. ZHOU QING / FOR CHINA DAILY  
**Above:** An animal worker from the White Dolphin Rescue and Breeding Base feeds a rescued dolphin in January. LIN SHANCHUAN / XINHUA

calves, it doesn't work. If a dolphin calf is taken out of the water, its skin cannot tolerate it, and then if you put it back in the water, it cannot breathe," Xu said.

As marine mammals, newborn dolphins are unable to eat fish or surface to breathe and have to rely on their mothers for the first three years to provide them with milk, constant-

ly bring them to the surface for air, and teach them how to swim, said Liu Wei, deputy director of the nature reserve.

The mortality rate of newborn dolphins in the wild exceeds 50 percent, Liu said.

To better understand their reproduction and protect the rare species, in 2002 Xiamen invested more than

58 million yuan (\$8 million) to build a targeted rescue and breeding base for the Chinese white dolphin.

Located on Huoshaoyu Island, the city's largest uninhabited island, the base was officially put into use in 2011 and consists of a rescue center, a breeding center and a Chinese white dolphin science museum.

Liu said natural breeding under artificial feeding conditions can optimize and increase the local population.

"Because of their extremely small population in Xiamen, recent experiments have indicated that Chinese white dolphins may suffer from genetic problems resulting from inbreeding. Under captive conditions, we are contemplating the introduction of some healthy Chinese white dolphins from regions with comparatively larger populations for breeding purposes," Liu said.

The reproductive process of the Chinese white dolphin closely resembles that of humans. They have a gestation period of 10 to 12 months and typically give birth to only one offspring at a time. When giving birth, it is crucial for the tails of the calves to come out first, otherwise they may suffocate and die, Xu said.

She added that the base is applying for funding to offer the dolphins a set of prenatal checkups akin to those provided for humans. Based on the changes in progesterone levels during pregnancy, the center can determine their pregnancy status and give them specialized prenatal care and birth services.

At present, four injured bottlenose dolphins are recuperating at the base, along with four injured sea turtles. Up to now, the base has been involved in rescuing more than 20 rare marine animal species.

## Auxiliary measures

Despite the challenges posed by the vastness of the sea and human's reliance on marine resources, efforts have been made to restore their habitats and population.

In response to the susceptibility of the Chinese white dolphin to underwater blasting, Xiamen has developed a process for reviewing and supervising underwater construction projects.

This includes establishing reference thresholds for the impact of underwater noise on the species, and determining the minimum safe distance for them during construction work.

Considering their sensitivity to sound, Xiamen employs an underwater "sound wall" before the construction to ward off Chinese white dolphins from the area.

In 2022, Xiamen introduced an advanced monitoring and control system, incorporating intelligent monitoring with early warning capabilities, real-time monitoring and online management for protection patrols. With 65 monitoring points and 73 cameras, the system covers a range of crucial activity zones for the Chinese white dolphin, and has effectively documented the behaviors of this rare species on multiple occasions.

To boost the supply of food and assist in population recovery, the city's bureau of natural resources and planning regularly organizes activities to release food resources for the Chinese white dolphin in the city's waters. A total of 250,000 fry were released in July last year.

With sustained government investment and a dedicated focus on ecological restoration, the population of Chinese white dolphins in the waters off the coast of Xiamen has remained stable, with a gradual increase in recent years.

"They've gone from around 60 in the early 1990s to 80 in 2020," said Xu, adding that the age structure of the population has improved, with half of them being young adults.

Li Hongyang contributed to this story.

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## Former navy veteran turns conservationist

By LI MENGHAN and HU MEIDONG in Xiamen, Fujian

After more than a decade of hard work at China's inaugural rescue and breeding base for the Chinese white dolphin, a former navy veteran has been transformed into a conservationist.

With practical knowledge in marine ecology conservation firmly grasped in hand, Zhou Qing has garnered widespread recognition for his voluntary work on marine animal protection.

Zhou served 19 years in a naval unit in the coastal city of Xiamen, Fujian province, before taking a new direction working on marine resources and later being made responsible for the newly established Chinese White Dolphin Rescue and Breeding Base.

Established on Xiamen's largest uninhabited island — Huoshaoyu

Island — in 2011, the base was set up for the protection of rare marine animals, especially the Chinese white dolphin. The dolphin, also known as the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin, is a first-class State protected species in China.

"When I was a soldier, I was positioned at the forefront of coastal defense. While on duty, facing the sea with a rifle in hand, I often saw pods of dolphins frolicking. I was unaware at that time that they were indeed dolphins," Zhou said.

Thanks to his previous service life, Zhou is accustomed to feelings of isolation on the island. Boarding a boat headed for the base at 8:30 am, he spends eight hours every day working on the island, fulfilling tasks such as cleaning, maritime patrols, animal rescue and coastal engineering supervision.

Although knowing little about the species at the beginning, Zhou was

lucky to be involved in the rescue work of a stranded Chinese white dolphin in 2013.

One morning, the base received a phone call from a fisherman alerting them to a dolphin trapped in a discarded fishing net on a beach near Xiaodeng Island. Despite uncertainty about the species, the base organized rescue work, giving instructions to a local rescue team through phone calls while en route to the site. After removing the fishing net, the dolphin was transported to a nearby fish farm, where experts were called in for consultations.

Zhou said the Chinese white dolphin was in a poor condition, with its skin taking on a grayish-white tone. Sadly, despite 10 days of treatment, the dolphin passed away.

"Stranded dolphins are challenging to treat on most occasions," he said, adding that a postmortem

examination revealed internal pathological changes.

Zhou considers this experience invaluable, as it ignited a passion for learning new skills in his new career and provided crucial insights for the treatment and conservation of rare marine animals.

Because of the rarity of the Chinese white dolphin, the dolphins rehabilitating at the base are bottlenose dolphins, which share similar living habits and breeding features with Chinese white dolphins.

Due to their need for good water quality, he regularly cleans the 5-meter-deep pool at the base.

In 2016, Typhoon Meranti hit Xiamen, causing power lines to snap and resulting in a power outage on the island. Given the sweltering heat, it was imperative to refrigerate the dolphin feed to prevent it from spoiling. Zhou coordinated off-island boats to deliver diesel for a generator



Zhou Qing shares his thoughts on Chinese white dolphin conservation. CHINA DAILY

on the island, but the low tide prevented the boats from docking. He took the lead by jumping into the water and used rafts to transport the barrels of diesel to the island one by one.

He takes every marine patrol seri-

ously and once detected a lone dolphin using binoculars just before work began on a nearby offshore project. The dolphin, which was subsequently moved away from the area, had failed to be deterred by the protective sound wave and remained in the construction zone.

In his spare time, Zhou has established two volunteer teams, coordinating beach cleanup initiatives and providing educational sessions on the ecological, scientific and cultural significance of the species.

At the Chinese white dolphin protection day event in May last year, Zhou and other experts showcased the complete process of how they rescue dolphins. More than 40 families participated in the trial activity of caring for these animals.

"I will devote all my energy to conservation, and my public welfare work will be with me for the rest of my life," Zhou said.

Li Hongyang contributed to this story.

# BUSINESS

## BeiGene eyes imminent production in Guangzhou

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou  
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BeiGene Ltd, a global oncology company, announced on Monday the completion of its antibody-drug conjugate production facility in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province, demonstrating its commitment to the industrialization of innovative medicines.

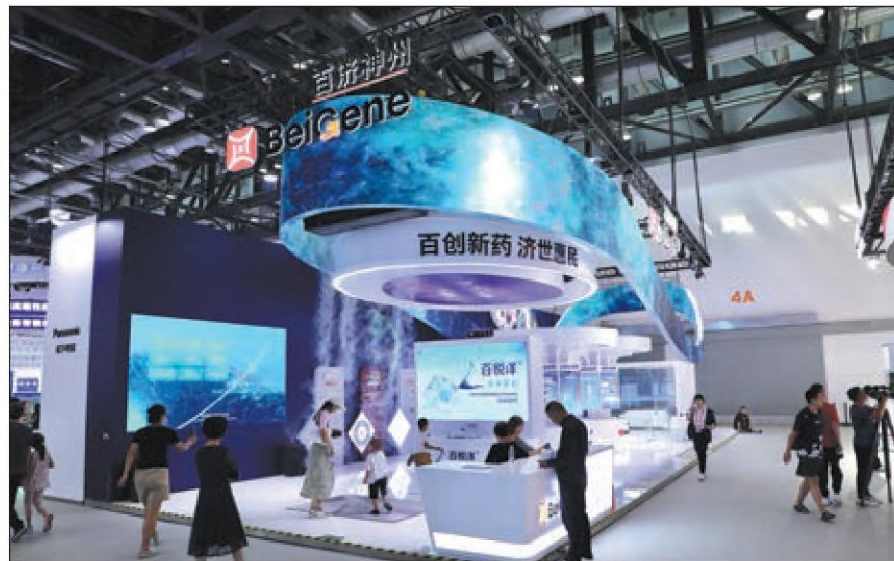
The launch of the ADC facility marks a major step forward in boosting the company's research and development capabilities, expanding manufacturing capacities and empowering innovative development of the biopharmaceutical industry, the company said.

The 58,000-square-meter ADC facility is expected to emerge as BeiGene's flagship and core base for ADC R&D and production globally.

Comprising two primary workshops and associated ancillary facilities, the initial stage of the project encompasses antibody conjugation, ultrafiltration purification, aseptic filling and lyophilization production lines.

Moreover, the facility boasts dedicated quality control analysis laboratories, along with sci-tech manufacturing and process development capabilities, to facilitate the technical transfer and commercial manufacturing of ADCs, BeiGene added.

Scheduled to commence production in the second quarter, the facility is expected to scale up its



BeiGene's booth is seen during an expo in Beijing in September. LI HE / FOR CHINA DAILY

production capacity more than two-fold to cater to the ever-growing demand for innovative solutions in the pharmaceutical market.

In July 2023, BeiGene and DualityBio, a Chinese pharmaceutical company, entered into an exclusive collaboration agreement, granting BeiGene the option for a global clinical, manufacturing and commercial license for preclinical ADC therapy for patients with select solid tumors.

With the official inauguration of the ADC campus, the new facility will provide clinical and commercial production support for preclinical medicines and more ADCs, jointly advancing the R&D and market launch of innovative medicines, BeiGene said.

The company will continue to leverage rich resources and its talent pool in Guangzhou and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao

Greater Bay Area — which plays a pivotal role in the biopharmaceutical industry — to build a biopharmaceutical ecosystem, said Wu Xiaobin, president and CEO of BeiGene.

"We aim to accelerate the R&D, manufacturing and commercialization of innovative medicines, providing more accessible and affordable innovative therapies to patients worldwide," Wu said.

As the global ADC market is expected to grow to \$64.7 billion by 2030, BeiGene is well prepared to produce a wide range of innovative medicines by establishing a comprehensive and advanced manufacturing infrastructure, said Kyu-Sung Lee, senior vice-president and global head of technical operations and manufacturing at BeiGene.

The company's manufacturing capabilities range from small-scale clinical trials to large-scale

commercial production, helping ensure a seamless transition from research to the market, Lee said.

"Moreover, with a strong pipeline of innovative drugs, including ADCs and other biologics, our R&D capabilities are a key advantage in drug manufacturing," he added.

By harnessing key technology operations and developing in-house manufacturing capabilities, BeiGene has built a diverse global supply network, with its production sites already built in Guangzhou and Suzhou, Jiangsu province, as well as New Jersey in the United States.

"The global supply network helps the company effectively cater to the global demand for pharmaceutical commercialization and clinical trial supplies, powering the rapid advance of our highly differentiated value chain across the global industry," he said.

## Guangdong promotes e-commerce for growth

Top trading province developing its major cities as global powerhouses

By WANG XU  
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**1** trillion yuan

amount Guangdong has targeted from annual cross-border e-commerce trade

In a bold strategy aimed at bolstering its trade and investment profile, South China's Guangdong province on Tuesday unveiled measures to support its key cities of Guangzhou and Shenzhen so as to build international hubs for cross-border e-commerce.

The plan, entitled "Opinions on Implementing the 'Five External Linkages' to Promote High-standard Opening-up", outlined comprehensive steps to propel the province to the forefront of the global e-commerce landscape with a goal to exceed 1 trillion yuan (\$138.24 billion) in annual cross-border e-commerce imports and exports.

Under the new plan, Guangdong will throw its weight behind Guangzhou and Shenzhen to transform them into international hubs for cross-border e-commerce by leveraging the province's strategic location, advanced infrastructure and robust logistics network to facilitate seamless trade flows across international borders.

A key component of the plan is the establishment of 20 "industrial cluster + cross-border e-commerce" parks, strategically located to maximize efficiency and connectivity. These parks will serve as incubators for innovation and collaboration, bringing together businesses, technology and logistics to drive the growth of cross-border e-commerce.

Furthermore, Guangdong aims to nurture 10 leading cross-border e-commerce enterprises with a scale of over 10 billion yuan, positioning them as industry leaders on the global stage. By providing targeted support and incentives, the province seeks to empower these companies to expand their reach and capture a larger share of the international e-commerce market.

In addition to building infrastructure and fostering enterprise development, Guangdong is also ramping up efforts to enhance the

logistics capabilities of its cross-border e-commerce ecosystem. The province plans to construct 500 large-scale overseas warehouses to facilitate efficient storage, distribution and fulfillment of cross-border e-commerce orders.

To accomplish the trillion-yuan feat, the province is focusing on streamlining Customs procedures, improving regulatory efficiency and enhancing trade facilitation measures.

As China's top trading province, Guangdong achieved a remarkable two-way cross-border e-commerce trade volume of 843.3 billion yuan in 2023, marking a significant 25 percent increase year-on-year. This amounted to approximately 35 percent of the national total and surpassed 10 percent of Guangdong's overall foreign trade share.

However, with foreign trade accounting for 64 percent of Guangdong's GDP, there has been an urgent need to identify new growth drivers because Guangdong's total two-way foreign trade value registered only a marginal 0.3 percent year-on-year increase in 2023.

"With Guangdong's strong economic foundation and established position as a major trading hub, the opinion provides a clear roadmap for promoting cross-border e-commerce, signaling to businesses, investors and other stakeholders that the province is committed to facilitating growth in this sector," said Zhou Xuezhong, an assistant researcher at the Institute of World Economics and Politics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

"This clarity and commitment are likely to instill confidence and attract investment, ultimately driving the development of cross-border e-commerce in Guangdong," Zhou added.

## Farmers reap sweet gains from lychee biz

By LI WENFANG in Maoming, Guangdong  
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He Jinming acquired 80 mu (5.33 hectares) of lychee orchard in his hometown last year and plans to rent 100 mu more this year.

He, who has been growing the round, delicate subtropical fruit in Baiqiao village in Maoming, Guangdong province since 1990, says new technology needed to upgrade the fruit species and the convenience of land transfers have emboldened him to make these big moves.

He made a net profit of 600,000 yuan (\$82,961) from the 120 mu lychee orchard that he acquired before the new orchard acquisition last year. The orchard transfer cost him 1,000 yuan per mu, with a contract spanning 20 years.

"I have a full set of technologies for managing the trees," said He, adding that these are helping with high flowering and fruiting rates, and preparation for unfavorable weather.

The freezing station right inside

the orchard helps keep the fruit fresh immediately after being picked. The weather is hot at harvest time and a delay in freezing causes a change in the color and taste of the fruit.

This year, he plans to build two more such stations, which can be shared with other neighboring lychee farmers.

He has been changing the tree varieties through grafting. Three years after grafting, a tree reaches its full fruiting capacity.

This year the lychee harvest is expected to be modest, following a major one last year. He expects unit prices to increase by about 20 percent over last year, even with the smaller quantity.

Maoming has the world's largest continuous lychee orchards, with fruit output of the city accounting for half of Guangdong's and a quarter of the country's total.

Lin Changzhen, another veteran lychee grower, heads an entrepreneurial park in the village, where shops, services by rural cooperatives, and freezing, logistics and

warehousing facilities, are all available to serve small businesses and younger workers.

The park was upgraded from an e-commerce street and Lin's twin sons have been working there since they graduated from high school. More young people are returning to the village to follow suit.

Lin's sons sell both fresh and dried lychee and longan and processed food through e-commerce platforms and have made a profit of more than 100,000 yuan each in a year.

E-commerce contributes about 80 percent to the sale of fresh fruits from Lin's orchards and is set to take up a larger share.

Sales via livestreaming also fetch farmers better prices. "Even senior villagers can do it. They can hold a phone, pick lychee and promote it to audiences," Lin said.

Lin's cooperative, which has 52 core household members, generated 18 million yuan in revenue from selling fresh lychee last year. The profits will be partly spent on building more facilities and expanding the showroom.

New lychee varieties are still being developed and the technologies for keeping the fruit fresh along the logistics chain have been constantly upgraded, Lin said.

Looking forward, Lin believes branding and packaging of fruits are important to maintain competitive prices.

The Maoming government has been devoted to optimizing the lychee varieties, including early, middle and late harvest varieties, said Wang Xiaohui, the city's vice-mayor.

A field gene bank for lychee in the city has 3,500 plants of 700 varieties from 12 countries, she said.

A lychee industry big data center and smart orchards where devices are installed for monitoring soil moisture, farming and weather conditions, have been established, she said.

Among the marketing efforts, customizing of lychee has been promoted, in which organizations or individuals promise to buy harvests from some trees or to buy certain amounts. This helps farmers get a better price and receive payments even before the harvest.

The city reported a record 8.85 billion yuan in fresh lychee sales revenue last year, she said.

## Future calling

As we move on to even greener pastures, more farmers are reaping the benefits of digital technology. Internet-connected infrastructure and a future blossoming with opportunities for green growth. With the digital world at their fingertips, they can unleash the power of innovation to welcome a more bounteous harvest than ever before.



## BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

## Zibo retains its unique flavor among tourists

Famed city of BBQ trying to go beyond culinary delights to attract more visitors in long run

By LIU YUKUN  
liuyukun@chinadaily.com.cn

As the aroma from grilled lamb skewers amid sizzling charcoal fires fills the air, the local people of Zibo and tourists alike are indulging in the culinary delights of the city's bustling barbecue scene.

With small grills fired up and tables running full, the barbecue fever remains ablaze even in spring, turning the city in Shandong province once again into a hot spot for gastronomic delights.

This has also concurrently spurred growth in tourism, injecting fresh impetus into the economic development of the industrial city.

The popularity index of Zibo surged 137 percent year-on-year during this year's Spring Festival, or Chinese Lunar New Year holiday, making it a magnet for tourists, latest data from online travel agency LY.com showed.

The boom continued to April. According to Meituan, an online booking services provider, during the Tomb Sweeping Day holiday that ended Saturday, the volume of cultural and tourism orders in Zibo increased by over 130 percent compared to the previous year. Apart from local users, there was also an influx of visitors from Beijing, Tianjin, Shijiazhuang, and other places. LY data showed that during the holiday, hotel bookings in Zibo increased by 58 percent compared to the previous year, while the volume of scenic spot tickets booked increased by over eight times.

"Our restaurant was full almost every night during Lunar New Year's Eve to around Feb 17 and the Tomb Sweeping Day holiday, averaging about a hundred tables per night. Demand exceeded supply; often, the meat was sold out by around 8 pm, and we couldn't take any more customers," said Liu Fang, who handles the cash register at Xuewei Barbecue.

"We've considered increasing the supply of meat, but due to the challenge of finding reliable workers for skewering and grilling, we were concerned it might impact the quality of our food and service, affecting our reputation."

Xuewei is not the only barbecue outlet that has experienced this surge in customers.

Zhang Xueyan, owner of Zibo Big Chimney Grilled Fish & Barbecue, said several customers at her store during the Spring Festival were visitors from other cities. "Some came to visit relatives, some for tourism, and others specifically for barbecue. We were hitting around 30,000 yuan (\$4,147) in daily revenue."

Zhang said that, at a preholiday 3.5-hour livestreaming session on short-video platform Douyin, she sold



Zhang Xueyan, owner of Zibo Big Chimney Grilled Fish & Barbecue, serves dishes at her restaurant in Zibo, Shandong province, in February. WANG JING / CHINA DAILY



Customers enjoy barbecue skewers at a diner in Zibo in February. WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

vouchers for in-house dining totaling 135,499 yuan, with nearly 10,000 people tuning in to the livestream.

"Many businesses, including mine, are expanding into online and takeaway services, searching for new growth points," she said.

"Even after Spring Festival, the number of daily diners has exceeded our expectations. The turnover rate has reached about two-thirds of the average during Spring Festival. The barbecue fever has picked up as the weather turns warm and more people enjoy outdoor activities," she added.

#### Surge in tourists

In March last year, driven by the

allure of barbecue skewers wrapped with small pancakes — a traditional way of consuming barbecue in Zibo — tourists from all over the country flocked to the city. Soon, reports of how travelers stuck in Zibo amid COVID-19 restrictions had been accommodated nicely by the local government and businesses added to its appeal.

With a sudden surge in visitor numbers in less than a month, the industrial city, which was facing challenges in transforming itself, successfully seized the opportunity through the concerted efforts of locals, businesses, and the government, garnering widespread acclaim.

Data released by Tujia, an online

accommodation services booking platform, revealed that during last year's May Day holiday, the number of homestay bookings in Shandong tripled compared to the same period in 2019, with bookings increasing 12-fold in Zibo.

For the first time in Tujia's record, Shandong led the nation in homestay bookings during the May Day holiday. On Meituan, accommodation bookings for Zibo surged by 800 percent compared to 2019, ranking first in Shandong.

Zhang Yaojun, a professor at the School of Applied Economics at Renmin University of China, said that Zibo barbecue became hot not only because of its taste, but also because

of the positive image of Zibo's businesses and local citizens, as their warm hospitality amid COVID-19 — a phenomenon that went viral on the internet — attracted tourists from across the country, leading to a rapid rise in visitor traffic to Zibo.

The urban services stemming from joint efforts of the Zibo municipal government and its citizens also added to the city's appeal, Zhang said.

For example, the city increased free parking lots and Zibo citizens spontaneously formed volunteer teams to provide services for out-of-town visitors. These efforts enabled Zibo to better cope with the sudden tourist numbers.

Zhang said online promotion has

also been a catalyst for the boom. Aside from traditional methods such as television and advertising, many local businesses used various new media platforms and social media influencers for real-time interaction.

However, the fervor for barbecue in Zibo cooled in the latter half of the year, characterized by a decline in the number of new barbecue restaurants. The city saw 69 out of the 839 newly established enterprises in Zibo winding up by November last year, said a report by media Yicai.

"Zibo's barbecue, from its peak popularity midyear to a decline months later and a recent rebound, reveals the instability of relying on a single internet-fueled trend to stimulate the local economy. The city needs to go beyond excessive reliance on short-term trends like barbecue," said Hong Yong, an associate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation's e-commerce research institute.

"It should deeply explore and combine Zibo's rich historical and cultural heritage resources to create unique cultural tourism products. The government should also implement corresponding policies, supporting the barbecue and related industries through measures like tax incentives and entrepreneurship support."

"Regulating market order is also essential for the healthy development of the industry. Ongoing improvements in infrastructure, enhanced transportation convenience, and improved quality of accommodation and dining services will also help maintain Zibo's appeal and visitor willingness to spend," he said.

Zibo is actively seeking ways to convert the current visitor traffic into a long-term development stimulus and promote the growth of other industries. By exploring its cultural heritage and investing in tourism, Zibo is injecting fresh vitality into its economic landscape.

The district of Linzi in Zibo served as the ancient capital of the Qi state during the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC) and the Warring States Period (475-221 BC).

The district boasts numerous historical sites such as the Chariot and Horse Museum. Local authorities and businesses are intensifying efforts to develop a range of products and services related to Qi culture to enrich the tourist experience.

Additionally, popular destinations like Zhoucun Ancient Commercial Street in Zibo's Zhoucun district and the Zibo Ceramic and Glass Museum are also hot spots for sightseeing.

"Many barbecue restaurant owners in our courtyard hope that Zibo's cultural and tourism will gain traction. We feel that many visitors, after trying Zibo's barbecue, might not return to the city solely for the barbecue again. However, if the city offers other attractions, such as historical sites, it can transform the short-term influx into long-term visits," said Zhang of Zibo Big Chimney Grilled Fish & Barbecue.



A technician inspects equipment at an intelligent robot manufacturer in Zibo in July. WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

## A 'white box' digital transition model for education

By LIU YUKUN

Liu Xincheng, a junior high school student in Zibo, Shandong province, has been learning English through a small terminal every day, as his school is situated in a rural area with limited English teaching resources.

The textbook-sized smart terminal, nicknamed "white box", has become the most important tool for improving Liu's English-speaking skills.

"Technology empowers education and effectively bridges the gap in educational resources between rural and urban areas. Students in our school can not only correct their pronunciation through the smart terminal, but also receive real-time feedback. Additionally, they can submit assignments through the device and immediately receive corrections for certain tasks," said Zhang Qiang, a teacher at Linzi Qiling Middle School in Zibo.

"Moreover, teachers can access a vast amount of teaching resources shared by different regions and teachers through the device, better

preparing for teaching content. They can also utilize the platform to conduct classroom or post-class tests, upload data on students' learning progress for analysis, and personalize assignment content," he added.

The AI-enabled rural education in Linzi district is just an example of how Zibo is vigorously promoting a digital transition in its education sector.

By last year, 97 percent of primary and secondary schools in Zibo had completed the digital transformation, with 295 schools establishing smart campuses equipped with multimedia classrooms.

Moreover, Zibo has built a service platform for online educational content sharing, on which users share 1.487 million cloud courseware and 11,000 on-demand video resources related to teaching content.

Courseware is a course software developed according to the requirements of the curriculum outline, after determining teaching objectives, analyzing teaching content and tasks, and designing the structure and interface of teaching activities.

The city has also established a smart education big data center, aggregating teaching and learning data from over 7,000 classrooms and more than 40,000 teachers across the city, providing education administrators with firsthand data for decision-making and precise management.

#### Several applications

Tech-embedded education has developed many application scenarios.

For instance, teachers can use virtual reality, augmented reality, and other technologies to create scenes from the textbook, allowing students to have a more vivid understanding of content.

On the "Run Across Shandong" app, students engage in physical activities they enjoy and virtually reach a city to unlock the next challenge, as if leveling up in a game. Such a "game challenge" format was designed to motivate students to exercise and improve their physical fitness.

"Visualizing content from the textbook has made somewhat bor-

ing class-learning into something fun and attractive, and helped us better understand and gain knowledge," said Liu.

Addressing the issue of differences between educational resources in urban and rural areas, Zibo has launched synchronous online classes through a digital education interaction platform that allows teachers from various areas to teach online, either in real-time or recorded. This platform has helped students from rural areas attend classes and ask questions to teachers from some of the city's top schools.

"Some parents in the rural areas are incapable of helping their children with homework; some rural schools lack well-trained teachers comparable with other areas ... these reasons make the digital platform important for students in rural areas to access a wider range of knowledge and a variety of teaching styles," Zhang said.

School-home communication is another challenge that matters to students' development.

To facilitate smoother communication between teachers and



Students learn in their classroom at a primary school in Zibo, Shandong province, in August. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

parents, Zibo has established a new system for school-home cooperation, creating online parent schools for parental education, a cloud platform for instant school-home communication, and an online communication group of parent committees for online discussions.

Sun Yingtao, head of the Zibo Bureau of Education, said that ensuring children enjoy equitable

and high-quality education is the original intention of promoting digital education.

"Digital education in Zibo has just begun and still faces many unprecedented new situations, problems and challenges. In the future, we will accelerate the innovation of digital education application scenarios, and make every effort to strengthen and optimize the city's digital education ecosystem," Sun said.

CULTURE

A fine legacy forged in friendship

A long-awaited Beijing exhibition celebrating six decades of diplomatic ties between China and France sheds fresh light on centuries of exchanges, Wang Kaihao reports.



From left: Drawing implements made by the imperial workshop of the Qing (1644-1911) court; a teapot with painted chrysanthemum in enamel, made in France in 1783, from the Palace Museum's collection; a gilt porcelain vase by the Sevres Manufactory; a gilt copper pocket watch with a portrait of Louis XIV and dragon and fleur-de-lis patterns; a silver ewer from Versailles with imagery of human figures, animals, flowers and pagodas in relief; a Sevres porcelain plate decorated with Chinese patterns; a porcelain bottle from Jingdezhen, today's Jiangxi province, mounted with Rococo decorations; a portrait of Voltaire from the collection of the Palace of Versailles; a pair of egg-shaped vases with gilt painted landscape and figures on light purple ground, made in Sevres. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG AND WANG KAIHAO / CHINA DAILY AND PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In 1685, desiring better links with a faraway land to the east, Louis XIV of France dispatched five mathematicians to Beijing to share the latest scientific and astronomical knowledge, and build a bridge of friendship.

The king worried whether his envoys had completed the hazardous sea journey and safely arrived at their destination, and so in 1688, he wrote a letter of greeting to Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

The letter never made it. Well, not until today, for a copy has finally arrived at its scheduled destination, the Forbidden City in the heart of Beijing, which is now known as the Palace Museum.

Though direct correspondence between the two longest-reigning monarchs in the history of their respective countries failed to materialize, had it happened, Louis XIV would have been satisfied.

The mathematicians not only arrived in Beijing after an arduous three-year journey, but were warmly welcomed by Kangxi, starting a beneficial relationship spanning generations that would resonate between the royal palaces of both countries — the Forbidden City and Versailles.

The city is currently being recounted at the gallery of the Hall of Literary Brilliance (Wenhua Dian) in the Palace Museum in a widely-anticipated exhibition, 'The Forbidden City and the Palace of Versailles: Exchanges Between China and France in the 17th and 18th Centuries.'



Around 200 relics from both China and France are on display to showcase the exchanges between the Forbidden City and the Palace of Versailles during the 17th and 18th centuries, an era during which porcelain was a key witness to that communication. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

claws, a motif that belonged exclusively to Chinese emperors. Engraved with the name of the Parisian studio, it is believed to have been a personal gift given from the Sun King to his Chinese counterpart, according to Guo Fuxiang, a researcher at the Palace Museum and chief Chinese curator of the exhibition.

Another key exhibit echoes the significance of the watch. It is a silver ewer with reliefs of auspicious Chinese patterns and motifs, including flowers, birds and pagodas. Produced around 1680 in China, it was presented to Louis XIV by an envoy of Siam (today's Thailand). It survived later social upheavals and is now a part of the collection of the National Museum of the Palaces of Versailles and Trianon.

"A clock and a pitcher, the two artifacts demonstrate the mutual respect and admiration the two countries had for each other's cultures," Christophe Leribault, president of the Public Establishment of the Palace, Museum, and National Estate of Versailles, emphasizes. "And the legacy of such exchanges continues."

Guo says that each exhibit was carefully chosen to reflect interaction between the

elites of China and France, a lesser-known chapter in this history. As such, many special items in the inventory of the Palace Museum have an opportunity to be displayed, revealing a less well-known side to royal life in the Forbidden City.

For example, French mathematicians stirred Emperor Kangxi's interest in geometry. A 1690 copy of Euclid's Elements of Geometry — handwritten in the Manchu script used by Qing royals — is the only surviving edition of its kind, and provides a key reference for the studies into the history of mathematics.

A gilt copper goniometer, a telescope and a case to hold measuring tools together paint the image of Kangxi as an engaged student of science. The emperor categorized imported scientific gadgets as ceremonial royal paraphernalia to attest to their importance.

He even ordered his own royal workshop to produce duplicates, including that of a mechanical calculator based on the model developed by French mathematician, Blaise Pascal.

"The mathematicians accompanied Kang-

xi on a daily basis, showing his recognition of the scientific knowledge and humanistic literacy of the French teachers," says Marie-Laure de Rochebrune, a researcher at Versailles and chief French curator of the exhibition.

If the idea of Emperor Kangxi as a devoted and enthusiastic student of Western science is not eyebrow-raising enough, a portrait of his son, Emperor Yongzheng, certainly is.

A portrait of the young emperor, best known for his diligence and devotion in handling national affairs, wearing a powdered wig and Western clothing and looking as if he is on his way to attend a ball, is sure to amuse visitors.

"It shows his interest in European fashion," Guo says. "Despite appearances, he was a maverick at heart."

For French royals, there was a passion for Chinese-style decoration, which can be seen at Versailles, he adds.

"France was both the birthplace of the term 'Chinoiserie' and the driving force behind its development," the curator explains. "In 1700, Louis XIV kicked off his celebrations of the new year, and of a new century, with Chinese-themed festivities,

and elevated the fervor for Chinese culture to a new level."

When introducing these signature Chinese products to Versailles, French royals wanted something more than dinnerware produced in Jingdezhen, a porcelain production hub in present-day Jiangxi province, stamped with the fleur-de-lis, as some of the exhibits demonstrate.

"(In Europe) there had been an obsession since the time of the Medici dynasty in 16th-century Italy to discover the manufacturing techniques for Chinese porcelain, which was imported at a great cost," Leribault, who is also a veteran art history scholar, explained in a previous interview with AFP.

French artisans finally discovered the mystery of Chinese pottery in the mid-18th century: kaolin. When fired, this variety of white clay whitens even more, giving Chinese porcelain its trademark appearance.

Deposits of the clay were eventually found in France and the examples of exquisite Sevres vases and plates from Versailles, decorated with Chinese patterns, heralded the new era of France being able to produce hard-paste porcelain, just like China.

Equally, when Chinese emperors saw the delicate enamel items coming from France, they wanted their own versions.

French craftsman Jean-Baptiste Simon Graveureau, who worked in the Qing court, specialized in enamel work. When Qing royals ordered customized enamelware from France via the trading port of Guangzhou, Guangdong province, the southern Chinese metropolis evolved into a manufacturing hub for locally produced transparent enamel.

The three baskets from the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1736-95), Kangxi's grandson, provide an interesting juxtaposition between the enamel products produced in the Forbidden City, Guangzhou, and Paris, respectively.

The mix of artistic talent from both countries appears to have created extraordinary products.

When a Jingdezhen green-glazed porcelain bottle arrived at Versailles, it was added to luxury Rococo decorations. Another green-glazed porcelain item produced in Zhejiang province was mounted upon a gilt copper foundation after being acquired by a French aristocrat. The same collector also added an ancient Greek-style gilt bronze base to a Chinese porcelain stool from the Ming Dynasty (368-1644).



Euclid's Elements of Geometry, handwritten in the Manchu script. WANG KAIHAO / CHINA DAILY



Chinese porcelains mounted with Western-style decorations from the Sevres collection. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY



A piece from Ten Tribute Horses, a booklet signed by French Jesuit painter and missionary Jean-Denis Attiret (1702-68). PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

When France and Chinese state leaders met in Beijing last year, an agreement was reached to mount this long-awaited event.

The exhibition, which runs until June 30, is a flagship cultural event that is part of the much-awaited celebrations surrounding this year's 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and France.

The Palace Museum and Versailles also drafted a new plan for future collaboration involving exchanges of exhibitions and personnel, joint research and conservation of relics.

This means that a story that began nearly 300 years ago, in which the history of the Forbidden City and the Palace of Versailles became inextricably intertwined, continues into a new era.

Voltaire, the famous French thinker, became a flag carrier, riding the Sinoophile wave. Adapted from a 13th-century Chinese literary classic The Orphan of Zhao — a tragic tale of revenge among nobles set 2,500 years ago — his own play, The Orphan of China premiered in Paris in 1755 and was later widely adapted across Europe.

"In Europe, there are scarcely any great houses whose antiquity can be compared to those of the (noble) families of China," Voltaire once wrote.

"It perhaps reflects his utmost respect for China," De Rochebrune says.

Voltaire also admired ancient China's system of governance, in which rulers were surrounded by a group of knowledgeable and reasonable elites. He advocated for the best educated to become civil servants, providing key inspiration for Enlightenment-era Europe.

It is no wonder then, that a portrait of Voltaire, from the collection of the Palace of Versailles, was specifically chosen for the exhibition, where most of the other individual portraits are of royalty.

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A statue of Josephine, Napoleon's first wife, on show at the Meet Napoleon: The Disappeared Palaces exhibition in Beijing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Displaying the classical chic of 'Le Petit Caporal'

By LIN QI linqi@chinadaily.com.cn

In September 1785, when the Ecole Militaire (Military School) in Paris released its exam results, only 58 of 137 students tested had passed, with a 16-year-old Corsican named Napoleon Bonaparte in 42nd place.

While academic performance is important, it clearly isn't everything. In Napoleon's case, few could have imagined that the young second lieutenant would later become a master tactician, statesman and emperor, reshaping not only France, but the European continent.

Today, Napoleon is a French icon, both revered and hotly debated, and "Le Petit Caporal", as he was affectionately nicknamed, is undarguably one of history's most prominent figures.

In 2021, France's Mobilier National mounted an exhibition marking the 200th anniversary of his death with fine pieces of decorative arts and crafts from its storerooms that exemplified Napoleon's political and private lives.

It has now come to Beijing. Meet Napoleon: The Disappeared Palaces runs until June 20 at the Meet You Museum in the bustling 798 Art District.

Organized by the China Arts and Entertainment Group, and a highlight of the yearlong celebration of the 60th anniversary of Sino-French diplomatic relations, the exhibition marks the Chinese debut of over 80 exquisite objects from the collection of the Mobilier National and the Fondation Napoleon in Paris.

They once decorated Napoleon's three palaces — the Tuileries, Saint-Cloud and Meudon, which were burned down between 1870 and 1871 during the turmoil of the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune — and show Napoleon at his zenith, and the creativity of the time.

Photos and introductory texts allow visitors to navigate his victories and failures, on both the political and literal battlefields, and reveal a man who, while outstanding in military matters and a tireless worker, was also a voracious learner with an interest in many other fields, including law and mathematics. These are demonstrated by his introduction of the Napoleonic Code and a theorem which is attributed to him.

"He was interested in a wide range of things. He was curious and open to different ideas. He was gifted," Hervé Lemoine, director of the Mobilier National, said at a forum following the exhibition's opening in Beijing on March 29.

He adds that the exhibition also shines a light upon Napoleon's lesser known patronage of the arts and sense of culture, vividly evidenced by the objects on show.

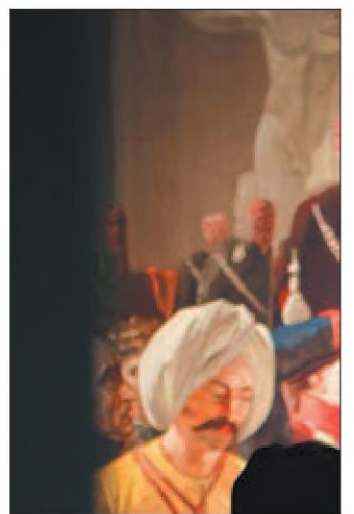
The Tuileries, Saint-Cloud and Meudon were appropriated by Napoleon following his crowning as emperor in 1804, and were used as places of governance and family retreats.

He turned the palaces into showcases of his individual aesthetics and the grand new style that emerged after the collapse of the French monarchy. In doing so, he delivered the message that France had entered a new age, and social order would be restored following revolutionary chaos.

Architects, artists, designers and representatives of prestigious manufacturers were summoned to aid with renovations, the results of which included the Arc de Triomphe and the luxurious interiors of the three palaces, with their neoclassical "Empire style" that later flourished outside France.

The style is exemplified by its integration of elements of ancient Egypt and Rome, both of which Napoleon greatly admired.

During the three years he ruled Egypt, scientists and scholars accompanied his armies to carry out surveys.



A tapestry on display in Beijing depicting Napoleon and his military deputies, from the collection of the Louvre Museum in Paris.

ancient Egypt in their work: modeling the legs and arms of furniture to resemble the Sphinx, for example.

Napoleon's admiration of ancient Rome is also presented at the exhibition, through iconic motifs and symbolic totems including Victoria, the goddess of victory, scepters, and ornaments adorned with bees and eagles.

He even gave his only heir, Napoleon Francois Charles Joseph (1811-32), the title of Roi de Rome (King of Rome).

The emperor's keen interest in decorative arts was motivated by a desire to rebuild commerce and industry after the revolution, so that France could compete with European counterparts empowered by the First Industrial Revolution.

Several of the tapestries on show are the work of prestigious producers, among which Gobelin stands out as a noted supplier to the royal house, and one painting depicts Napoleon inspecting the Gobelins Manufactory in 1810.

Already an arbiter of fashion under the monarchy, the royal porcelain factory at Sevres also benefited from Napoleon's policies. Its artisans continued to produce exquisite items that furnished his palaces and the homes of European nobility.

The exhibition contains re-creations of the rooms Napoleon and his first wife Josephine lived in, showing the empress' artistic tendencies.

"Josephine placed orders at the royal furniture works, and her preferences also influenced people. Unlike her husband, she favored a more refined and delicate style. Similar examples were found at the Chateau de Malmaison, which she purchased to live in," Lemoine says.

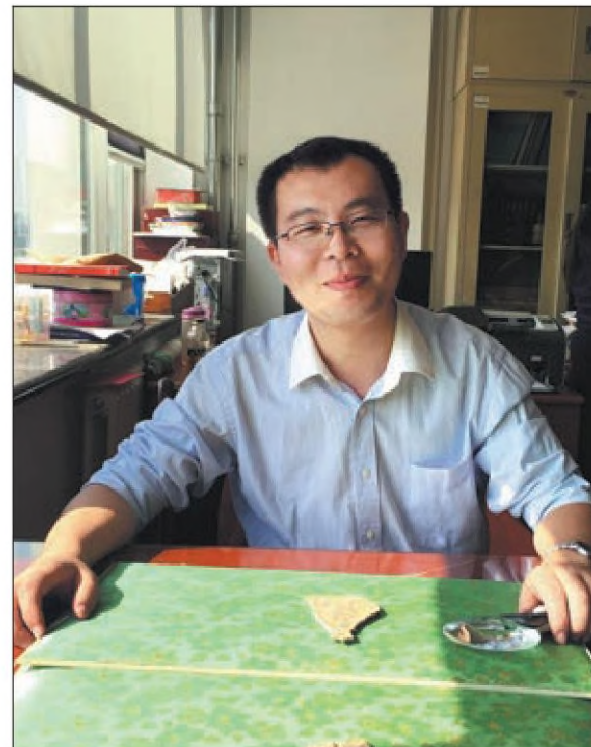
Su Xu, former director of the China Cultural Center in Paris, studied and worked in France for nearly three decades. He told the forum that he was happy that Chinese audiences were able to see ornaments from these once glorious buildings.

Having seen many objects from the Napoleonic era at French exhibitions, he says he is impressed by the exhibition, which makes him feel he was in Paris again.

Lemoine expresses hopes that the Mobilier National will bring more French arts and crafts to China, such as silk textiles and Sevres porcelain, two crafts that have connected China and France for centuries, but which have evolved differently in their respective locales.

Wang Chunchen, director of the Meet You Museum, and an art history professor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, says the exhibition enables people to see the commonalities and the differences between the two cultures, which is "what makes exchanges meaningful".

# CULTURAL HERITAGE



**Left:** A group photo of staff at the Center for Research on Chinese Excavated Classics and Paleography at Fudan University. **Above:** Jiang Yubin, a researcher specializing in oracle bone inscriptions at the center at Fudan University. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## A vocation with character

A team of researchers strives to unlock the mysteries and meanings of Chinese oracle bone inscriptions, **Wang Xin** reports in Shanghai.

If we want to demystify an ancient civilization, decoding the language and writing of that time is an inevitable part of the work, as it usually provides the clearest view of history and evidence of daily life.

In China, there has long been a group of paleographers working on solving the mystery of oracle bone inscriptions, which are the earliest-known form of Chinese writing.

Professor Chen Jian, researcher Jiang Yubin and associate researcher Xie Mingwen from the Center for Research on Chinese Excavated Classics and Paleography at Fudan University in Shanghai have been studying ancient writing and oracle bone inscriptions for decades.

Led by notable paleographer Qiu Xigui, the center enjoys a stellar reputation among its peers, and its work has brought public attention to this little-known subject.

In January, Chen and Xie were recognized by the National Museum of Chinese Writing for their interpretation of characters on oracle bone inscriptions. The award adds to the one Jiang received in 2018 worth 100,000 yuan (\$13,891), for confirming and explaining the meaning of a single, newly discovered oracle bone character.

"There are some 160,000 pieces of oracle bones in total scattered across the world, among which about 80,000 have been sorted and published or released to the public. If we were to compile a dictionary of oracle bone characters, we would need to include roughly 3,500 to 4,000 characters. To date, we have confirmed about 1,160 characters," says Jiang.

### Messages from the past

Since the first oracle bone inscriptions were discovered in 1899, research of these precious materials has not stopped.

Found in the Yinxu Ruins in Anyang city, Central China's Henan province, the oracle bone inscriptions proved the existence of the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC). The site was later determined to be the location of the last Shang capital.

Etched into animal bones and turtle shells, the 3,300-year-old inscriptions — used for fortunetelling and recording major events of the time — are profoundly important for understanding Chinese civilization.

The Yinxu Ruins were inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2006. In 2017, oracle bone inscriptions were listed as part of the UNESCO Memory of the World Register program.

"The material remains discovered at Yinxu provide tangible evidence of the early history of Chinese writ-

Oracle bone inscription	Bronze inscription from the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC)	Bronze inscription from the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-771 BC)	Small seal script from the dictionary, <i>Shuowen Jiezi</i> (AD 100)	Modern Chinese
				春

ing and language, ancient beliefs, social systems, and major historical events, which are considered of outstanding universal significance," UNESCO states.

"One of the biggest challenges with research into oracle bone inscriptions is the difficulty in accessing original materials. In the past, you needed money to buy the oracle bones. It could be extremely hard too to get books of rubbings of the bones — let alone conduct research," says Chen.

"But now, we have benefited greatly from digitalization, which has lowered the barriers for our studies. It is easier to get high-definition digital photos of oracle bones from institutes and individuals across the world," Chen adds.

According to the nomination form submitted to the UNESCO Memory of the World Register program in 2016, the oracle bones are scattered across the globe in the collections of more than 100 institutes.

There are more than 90,000 pieces on the Chinese mainland and over 30,000 in Taiwan. There are also pieces in Japan, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, France, Singapore, the Netherlands and New Zealand.

"In the past 110 years, about 3,900 scholars from around the world have carried out research on oracle bone inscriptions. There have been 16,000 published papers on the subject. The study of oracle bone inscriptions has become an internationally famous subject," reads the form.

Nevertheless, China still dominates the research on oracle bone inscriptions, mainly led by domestic academic institutions, including Tsinghua University, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Capital Normal University in Beijing, Fudan University in Shanghai and Jilin University.

"The inner circle of paleographic study in China is very small. There are over 100 scholars of Chinese



**Top:** The evolution of the character *chun*, meaning "turbulent", from oracle bones through history. **PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY** **Above:** Oracle bones with inscriptions on them unearthed at the Yinxu Ruins. WANG KAIHAO / CHINA DAILY

"We have benefited greatly from digitalization, which has lowered the barriers for our studies. It is easier to get high-definition digital photos of oracle bones from institutes and individuals across the world."

**Chen Jian**, professor at Fudan University's Center for Research on Chinese Excavated Classics and Paleography



He says that recognizing, interpreting and explaining a single word can form the basis of their work, but it is neither the only, nor the most important, task. Furthermore, decoding a single character usually requires a lot of effort and the accumulated knowledge from historical materials, aided by solid reasoning and a coherent trail of evidence that runs all the way from ancient times to the present.

A character inscribed on an oracle bone often looks very different to its modern counterpart. Take the character that Jiang won the award for deciphering as an example. The original character looks extremely simple, with roughly two strokes. As is often the case with ancient Chinese pictograms, they have become more complicated, written with more strokes, over time. It was eventually confirmed to be a simplified version of a character with 21 strokes: *chun*.

Furthermore, although *chun* usually means "foolish" or "stupid" today, based on abundant evidence, historical background, font evolution and contextual interpretation, Jiang reasoned that, in the oracle bone inscriptions, it is used to mean "turbulent".

"We tend to store a bunch of questions in our mind, which may get proved or answered by chance in a flash of inspiration," says Chen, who has been devoted to paleography for about three decades.

Jiang, who has specialized in oracle bone inscriptions for over 20 years, shares similar sentiments: "I think we paleographers are actually quite close to scientists, as we both have to be very focused and employ rigorous logic and evidence, as we pursue the true meaning of the writing."

As one of the leading institutions involved in paleography, the center has won numerous awards on various levels, both by individuals and the team. However, more than the public awards or honors, they care about what they actually contribute to the study.

"Choosing to be an academic is choosing a lifestyle. I have always said that the vocation of the scholar is to create new knowledge. One valuable consensus at our center is that we aim to become 'pure' scholars without too many distractions. We never feel like what we do is boring — even though it might seem so to the public. Instead, we enjoy our work and are having fun every day," Chen says.

**Fostering the future**

Not only are the professors enjoying the task to which they are committed, they are also encouraging the younger generation, which is already following in their footsteps

and contributing to the study of oracle bone inscriptions with youthful vigor. Yang Yi, Huang Bo and Cheng Minghui, three post-1990s doctoral students at the center, were the driving forces in the launch of the center's open and practical platform last February. Using technology like big data, the platform is a database that integrates updates on pieces of oracle bones that have been "rejoined" — basically, matching separate pieces that were originally part of the same oracle bone — which greatly facilitates the study of inscriptions.

They explained that it can be extremely hard to understand the inscriptions on a single piece of oracle bone, but when two or more pieces are rejoined, the inscription becomes more complete and provides more references. Although the pieces of a single oracle bone may be separated and kept in different institutions around the world, the platform is able to bring them together, enabling researchers anywhere to collaborate, regardless of distance.

Previously, the results of the rejoining of oracle bone pieces were intermittent and announced in publications or on websites, which made it hard to retrieve the information in an efficient and timely manner. The open online platform greatly reduces work for the scholars, as well as any repetition.

Constantly kept up to date, the database includes over 6,600 groups of rejoined oracle bones and has already received more than 3 million visits from researchers across the world.

Looking ahead, these committed paleographers and students are calling for a greater global joint effort to carry forward the study of oracle bone inscriptions.

One critical area the researchers would like to improve upon is the submission of images of inscribed oracle bone pieces by more collectors and institutions, as they form the basis of the study. Some institutions, such as the British Library, are doing a great job, according to the team, but there are still about 70,000 to 80,000 pieces that have yet to be located.

They are also calling for more paleography positions to be established at universities and institutions. "We have been consistently training PhDs and new paleographers, but only when their career path and future can be guaranteed, can they devote themselves to the research without worry, carrying the study of oracle bone inscriptions forward and forward," says Chen.

Contact the writer at wangxin2@chinadaily.com.cn

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## US holds deciding card on whether UN bid played with a winning hand

In what the Palestinian Authority ambassador to the United Nations called a "historic moment", the UN Security Council decided on Monday to review the PA's renewed application for full membership, and to make a formal decision this month.

This is indeed historic, considering that the PA's last, and first application, which Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas submitted in 2011, didn't even make it to a vote. It may also be historic because international sympathy for the proposed "two-state solution" is reaching a historical high as Israel faces an increasing global backlash against its military operations in Gaza. With humanitarian concerns dominating global news headlines, even the United States, Israel's closest ally, has urged the Benjamin Netanyahu government to exercise restraint and repeatedly emphasized the importance of "two states" as the ultimate resolution to the Israel-Palestine issue.

But the extent to which the latest bid for membership proves to be historic remains to be seen. The degree of diplomatic breakthrough that enabled the PA's 2011 bid to result in Palestine gaining its present status as a nonmember observer state may be less forthcoming this time.

This is not because Palestine doesn't deserve the full membership it desires, or Palestinians don't deserve the kind of international recognition full UN membership would bring. They are entitled to a rightful place among nations, and to be treated as equals.

But a state can't become a UN member without the approval of both the UN Security Council and General Assembly. As per the UN Charter, the application needs to first be approved by the UNSC, and then get the support of two-thirds of member countries in the UNGA. According to its rules of procedure, the UNSC should decide whether the applicant is committed to peace and able and willing to carry out the obligations set in the UN Charter, and, accordingly, whether to recommend the applicant for membership. With about 140 of the 193 member countries recognizing Palestine as a state, the application is widely believed to stand a good chance in the UNGA. So its fate lies with the Security Council.

The presiding UNSC president's remarks on Monday about the referral receiving no objection doesn't mean that would continue to be the case going forward. For its long-standing, openly, repeatedly stated sympathy and support for the Palestinian people and the "two-state solution", there is little doubt about China endorsing full membership for Palestine. However, as has been obvious, especially since the onset of the Gaza conflict, the UN, its Security Council in particular, has become unprecedentedly divided over ongoing conflicts from Ukraine to Gaza.

Theoretically, Israel's vehement opposition to the UNSC considering awarding Palestine full UN membership won't suffice to derail a decision in the PA's favor, unless the US manifests it by using its power of veto.

UNSC approval requires at least nine votes in favor, with no vetoes. That the US didn't prevent the referral from being made in the first place and has repeatedly highlighted the two-state solution doesn't mean it will support the PA's bid for full membership. Washington's commitment to "two states" has always been conditional — it should follow a deal between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The US' UN Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield has said the US "position is a position that is known, it hasn't changed".

The US supporting immediate UN membership for the PA will thus betray not only its commitment to Israel as a close ally, but also its own set condition of a deal negotiated by Israel and Palestine. The latter seeming a remote possibility given the doubts Israel has expressed about both the PA's capacity for delivering peace as well as its corresponding commitment.

Given all this, the truly historic breakthrough that is widely hoped for could continue to prove elusive.

## Mud slung at neighbors' ties won't stick

The high attention the world paid to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's visit to Beijing on Monday and Tuesday reflects the important role Sino-Russian relations play in the world today.

The attention was also due to some United States and NATO officials' recent hyping up of the bilateral ties of the two neighbors against the backdrop of the Ukraine crisis, with the aim of tarring them with a malign agency brush.

Yet their ties are on the basis of non-alliance, nonconfrontation and nontargeting of any third party. While those who view them from a Cold War perspective are trying to douse their relations with dirty water, it is akin to water off a duck's back.

China and Russia have committed themselves to lasting good-neighborliness and friendship. The China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination is a natural outcome of the mutual trust forged by the friendship between the peoples of the two countries and the broad prospects that exist for mutually beneficial cooperation, as well as their shared advocacy for true multilateralism and common aspiration for the establishment of a global governance system that is more equitable and reasonable.

This is in stark contrast to the attempts by the US and some of its key allies to divide countries into opposing camps based on arbitrary "values" chosen by themselves with the intention of creating bloc confrontation that enables them to maintain their dominant positions in global affairs.

A strategy that is conspicuously being applied in the Asia-Pacific region at present, both by the US and its transatlantic alliance tool, with the former pushing NATO to aggressively get its claws into the region, the same way it has in Europe.

With regard to the Ukraine crisis, China has always held a neutral and equitable stance, and it has been working with other countries to try and secure a cease-fire. China supports the holding of an international peace conference in due course that is recognized by both Russia and Ukraine and ensures the equal participation of all parties and fair discussions on all peace plans.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Russia, and the two countries have embarked on a new path of harmonious coexistence and win-win cooperation between major countries and neighbors. Russia's presidency of the BRICS group this year and China assuming the presidency of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the second half of the year provide platforms for the two countries to make further efforts to promote a multipolar world and work for greater democracy in international relations.

Both countries are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, and they firmly uphold the UN-centered world order and the basic norms of international law, while opposing unilateralism and hegemonism.

The two countries are expected to further dovetail their development plans and advance their practical cooperation in various fields.

And, in the spirit of equality, openness, transparency and inclusiveness, they will continue to promote the reform of the global governance system, and vigorously lead the building of a community with a shared future for humanity by shouldering more responsibility to unite the countries of the Global South.

Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## Enterprises need to do more to seize opportunity of equipment upgrade

The central government recently issued a document aimed at promoting the updating of equipment in the industrial field, saying that by 2027, the equipment investment scale in the field will have increased by more than 25 percent compared with 2023.

It says that by 2027, the digital transformation of industrial enterprises will have been fully covered in major industrial provinces, cities and key industrial parks; production capacity below the benchmark level of energy efficiency in key industries will have been phased out; the energy efficiency of major energy-consuming equipment will have basically reached the level of energy conservation, and the application of innovative products will have accelerated.

The document sets out a series of measures to promote updating of industrial equipment as well as the digital transformation, green equipment popularization, and safety level improvement, with a total

of 12 key tasks laid out. For example, it maps out the accelerated replacement of backward and inefficient equipment or old equipment, and calls for greater efforts to promote the in-depth application of new technologies such as artificial intelligence, 5G, and edge computing in manufacturing, unleashing production data connectivity, manufacturing flexibility and intelligent management, and creating a digital workshop.

At the same time, the document rolls out a number of safeguard measures to promote the upgrading of equipment in the industrial field, through increasing fiscal support for equipment renewal and technological transformation, and including eligible key projects in the scope of investment funds supported by the central budget. It will also increase preferential tax support for special equipment for energy conservation, water conservation, environ-

mental protection, and production safety.

As an industrial power, China's total industrial added value in 2023 amounted to 39.9 trillion yuan (\$5.51 trillion), accounting for 31.7 percent of GDP, and its manufacturing added value accounted for more than 30 percent of the global total, ranking first in the world for 14 consecutive years.

However, it should be noted that it is the enterprises themselves that must shoulder the responsibility for equipment updating. To promote large-scale equipment renewal, the market should play a decisive role in allocating resources, and the government only needs to play a guiding role. What the government should do is to make policy arrangements for solving the difficult points of enterprises' equipment renewal, and provide a strong guarantee for accelerating the formation of scale effects.

— WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

## Low-altitude industry readies for takeoff

The Civil Aviation Administration of China issued the production license for the EH216-S unmanned aerial vehicle system on Monday. This is the first production license obtained by the global electric vertical takeoff and landing aircraft industry.

Mass production of eVTOL aircraft will soon be a reality, raising expectations for the development of China's low-altitude economy. Among several strategic emerging industries proposed by the Central Economic Work Conference last year was the low-altitude economy. The low-altitude economy was also mentioned in the Government Work Report at this year's two sessions.

China has tens of thousands of A-level tourist attractions, but it is difficult to train tens of thousands of pilots to take tourists there. The use of eVTOL can solve this problem. Besides, eVTOL also comes in handy for goods transport, during medical emergencies, police patrols, equipment inspection and firefighting.

In fact, taking an eVTOL might soon become as common as taking a taxi. In some sparsely populated cities in the western regions, where traffic conditions are relatively simple, eVTOL can be used for point-to-point operations. In the Pearl River Delta region, especially within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater

Bay Area, eVTOL is suitable for cross-sea point-to-point operations.

With eVTOL, a person will be able to take off for work in the morning, landing in the office.

China still lags behind some developed countries in the field of general aviation. As of the end of 2022, China had a registered fleet of 3,177 general aircraft, while the US had approximately 220,000. The rapid rise of drones and eVTOLs provides China an opportunity to catch up. Utilizing new energy sources and improving energy efficiency has greatly reduced barriers for aviation transportation.

— BEIJING NEWS

## What They Say

## Chinese economy will continue to defy its ill-intentioned critics

Nicholas R. Lardy, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, published an article on the website of Foreign Affairs last week titled "China Is Still Rising—Don't Underestimate the World's Second-Biggest Economy", arguing that the US academics' recent view of China already peaking as an economic power underestimates the resilience of its economy.

Lardy said in the article that although China faces several headwinds, the country overcame even greater challenges when it started on the path of economic reform in the late 1970s. China's economy is likely to expand at twice the rate of the United States in the years ahead. Although there are different views on the Chinese economy's expected growth rate in the years to come, Lardy is not alone in his view.

It is natural that there are different views on the same economy. Yet it is notable that many of the proponents of the "China peaking" theory are also those that painstakingly peddled the "China collapse" theory before.

The Chinese economy has not collapsed as predicted by them, nor has it peaked as they claim now. More political than objective, they are always ready to see and exaggerate the downside.

For instance, be it the low birth rate and aging society or the real estate bubble and local debts, these are not problems exclusive to China. They are the type of challenges any economy will face after its socioeconomic development reaches a certain phase.

The reduction of foreign direct investment and the withdrawal of capital from the emerging market economies are global trends caused by the US Federal Reserve's interest rate adjustment, which is a technical means of the US to reap the world's recovery dividends. Rather than a sign of the "decline" of the Chinese economy, the reduction of foreign investment and capital

reflect the inherent bias of the dollar-centered world financial system and its negative effects on the world economy.

The Chinese economy still has a solid foundation, strong connections with the world market, remarkable resilience and enormous potential.

The country's relentless pursuit of high-quality development featuring innovation, sustainability, inclusiveness and fairness is the answer to the challenges. That it has taken the initiative to leave the comfort zone and bid farewell to the old high-speed growth model based on high inputs, low labor costs and heavy pollution, testifies to the nation's resolve to press ahead with its modernization.

It is through effectively finding the solutions to problems that the Chinese economy has so impressively expanded in scale and improved in quality over the years. China welcomes and encourages all insightful and objective analyses on its economy. Chinese policymakers will not shy away from the problems.

— LI YIYANG, CHINA DAILY

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## COMMENT

Fan Zhai and Jae Young Lee

## Demography presents both challenges and opportunities

In just a few decades, China has undergone a remarkable transformation, evolving from an agrarian society to a global economic powerhouse. An important factor contributing to China's ascent was the demographic dividend — a reduction in the dependency ratio that propelled rapid economic growth.

But China's demographic profile is now transitioning from being a dividend to a drag on the economy. This shift carries profound implications for the country's economic trajectory.

China's journey to economic prominence was in part facilitated by a set of policies that shaped its demographic landscape. China implemented the stringent family planning policy in the 1970s. As a result, the total fertility rate (TFR) plummeted dramatically from 5.7 in 1969 to 2.7 in 1978. With the introduction of the one-child policy in 1979, the TFR fell below the replacement rate of 2.1 in the early 1990s, and further declined to 1.6-1.7 between 2000 and 2020.

The decline in the fertility rate resulted in slower population growth and a reduction in the young dependency ratio, giving rise to what economists call the "demographic dividend." This era of favorable demographics contributed to higher savings rates, an increase in women's participation in the labor market, and improved education and health outcomes.

## From tailwinds to headwinds

However, the once-favorable demographic winds are shifting direction. China's working-age population peaked in 2013 while its population peaked in 2021. With fertility rates plunging to 1.09 in 2022, China witnessed its first population decline in more than six decades — in actual terms, the population declined by 850,000. And the aging population is becoming a demographic burden, with the number of people aged 60 or above increasing from 14.3 percent of the total population in 2010 to 19.8 percent in 2022.

Although demographic shifts unfold gradually, once the process starts, it often becomes unstoppable. In the coming decades, the large number of post-1960s baby boomers will propel China's rapidly aging process.

According to United Nations projections, the proportion of China's old-age population in the total population is expected to double to 30.1 percent by 2050. This surge will increase the old dependency ratio from 20 percent in 2022 to 51 percent in 2050 and the total dependency ratio from 45 percent in 2022 to 71 percent. The UN's baseline projection foresees a 7 percent reduction in the total population to 1.31 billion by 2050, with more pronounced declines expected in the youth and working-age populations.

The trend of declining fertility rate has persisted for the past decade despite the abandoning of the one-child policy in 2013, and further easing of the family planning policy in 2016 and 2021.

China's TFR stood at 1.5 in 2019, nearing the threshold of the "low fertility trap." The UN's "medium-fertility" baseline projection envisions a modest increase in China's fertility rate from the current trough of about 1.1 to 1.39 in 2050 and 1.44 in 2100. Such projection may look overly optimistic in light of the experience of the other ASEAN+3 economies where the already very low TFRs continue to fall.

## The impact on future growth

As the population ages, overall work-force participation is expected to decline. However, the implications of an aging society extend beyond the volume of labor supply, because it has the potential to undermine productivity. The advantages of having older and more experienced workers could be counterbalanced by diminishing sharpness of knowledge and skills, and the health challenges associated with aging. Also, limited job mobility among the older workforce could impede the transfer of knowledge and technology.

Studies have consistently shown a negative correlation between the age of the workforce and overall productivity. The International Monetary Fund estimates that China's aging workforce could curtail the country's total factor productivity growth by 0.3 percent a year from 2020 to 2050.



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY



An aging population also poses a challenge to investment prospects, as it could lead to a lower return on capital relative to labor, depressing corporate investment. In China, where the overall population is declining and urbanization decelerating, these demographic shifts may dampen the demand for investments in the key drivers of growth, that is, housing and infrastructure.

To better evaluate China's future growth potential amid these demographic changes, it is important to look into the impact of demographic shifts on labor, capital and productivity.

According to the UN's projection, China's working-age population will decrease by 22 percent between 2022 and 2050, or at an annual rate of 0.9 percent, potentially subtracting half a percentage point annually from the GDP growth rate between 2023 and 2050. But a counteracting force to the GDP decline may emerge through strategically investing in education and health.

Population aging is expected to diminish the return on capital, thereby dampening enterprises' incentive to invest. This, combined with the rebalancing of China's growth from investment-driven to innovation- and consumption-led development, is poised to substantially reduce the role of capital in overall economic growth compared with the past decades.

Since China still lags behind the global productivity frontier, it has substantial potential to catch up. But the shift from industry to services, coupled with the diminishing efficiency gains from market-oriented reforms, is expected to reduce China's productivity growth.

Moreover, geopolitical tensions may exacerbate this challenge by affecting China's economic relations with the developed world, impacting technology transfer and learning.

Our analysis indicates that China's total factor productivity growth was about 2 percent per year in the 2010s. Factoring a modest deceleration to 1.7 percent in total factor productivity growth from 2023 to 2050, China's potential GDP growth is projected to average 3.2 percent, indicating a gradual deceleration, that is, declining from 4.9 percent in the early 2020s to 3.7 percent by 2030 and further easing to about 2.4 percent in the 2040s. That China is expected to face challenges in sustaining higher growth rates, as in the past, signals a new era for the country's economy.

## Country navigating uncharted waters

As China confronts demographic challenges and strives to sustain growth, adopting a comprehensive policy approach is imperative. Several key measures warrant consideration.

While pronatalist policies might yield modest results, initiatives to reduce housing and education costs for raising children are essential. Policymakers should consider according priority to improving economic security for young people and building

social infrastructure to support child rearing.

Labor force participation can be boosted by raising the retirement age and making flexible post-retirement work arrangements for people. And policies supporting work-life balance for women will further contribute to higher labor force participation.

In order to offset the impact of a shrinking labor force on productivity, the authorities should leverage automation. Investments in research and development, along with the application of robotics, will not only enhance productivity but also bolster competitiveness.

It is necessary to implement structural reforms including encouraging innovation, promoting market competition, reducing regulatory burdens and fostering global collaboration to sustain growth.

Addressing China's demographic challenges requires a nuanced and strategic policy response to mitigate economic slowdowns and foster sustainable growth. Proactive measures can lay the foundation for a new era of economic prosperity, one that is intricately connected with the global economy. The stability and dynamism of the Chinese economy play a pivotal role in the global economic landscape and exert a major influence on the overall health and growth of the global economy.

Fan Zhai is a senior economist at ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO); and Jae Young Lee is group head and lead economist of AMRO. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Wu Songbo

## Chinese EVs can overcome headwinds in global markets

China's electric vehicle (EV) industry has become increasingly competitive in the global market thanks to the country making rapid advancements in EV technology, manufacturing capability and quality production. Official data show China's EV production and sales in 2023 reached 9.58 million and 9.49 million respectively, both highest in the world for nine straight years. China also exported 1.20 million EVs in 2023, a year-on-year increase of 77.6 percent.

The main reason why Chinese-made EVs have become popular is cost competitiveness. And cost competitiveness is partly driven by economies of scale, efficient manufacturing and government support. The large market size and the home market effect have allowed Chinese EV makers to achieve economies of scale, reduce production costs, and sell their products at competitive prices.

Also, China has made significant strides in EV technology, particularly in areas such as battery technology, electric drivetrains and other connectivity features. Chinese EV makers have also developed competitive electric power trains and battery packs, and built charging infrastructure, contributing to the overall competitiveness of Chinese-made EVs.

China's shift toward electric vehicles is largely driven by its environmental commitments — to peak its carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060. The country has also built the world's largest charging infrastructure system in terms of number, largest radiation area and most comprehensive service vehicles. And the government's support in the form of investment in the charging infrastructure network has promoted the rapid development of EVs.

However, the international success of Chinese-made EVs has increased the concerns of the US and European Union countries, with some of them resorting to protectionist measures, including imposing extra tariffs on Chinese-made EVs, to safeguard their own automobile industries. In October 2023, for example, the European Commission launched an anti-subsidy investigation into the imports of battery-driven electric vehicles (BEVs) from China, apparently to determine if they benefit from excessive government subsidies which could harm BEV makers in the EU.

Besides, last month, US President Biden initiated measures to prevent Chinese-made EVs from entering the US on the pretext of safeguarding national security, claiming they could collect sensitive data of users. The probe may lead to the US imposing additional restrictions on importing vehicles that rely on Chinese software.

Such efforts to restrict the import of EVs reflect the broader political and economic concerns of the US and EU policymakers about China.

First, both the US and the EU regard large-capacity EV battery making units as strategic sectors and say the industries are related to its overall competitiveness. While the US has passed the Inflation Reduction Act to provide discriminatory subsidies for EV assembly lines, the EU has enacted battery-related regulations and raised the requirements for battery makers to export their products to the EU.

Second, major economies, including the US, are paying greater attention to strengthen their supply chains so as to reduce the vulnerability and safeguard national security. China's increasing global market share in EVs and large-capacity battery components has drawn attention to supply chain policies amid anti-globalization sentiments.

Third, many US- and EU-based fossil-fuel car makers are skeptical about EVs, because the impact of EVs on economies has heightened labor conflicts within the traditional auto sectors in the US and Europe. Consequently, influenced by these interest groups, the US and the EU might consider implementing more protectionist measures against imported EVs or battery components.

Electric vehicles have many advantages compared with fossil fuel-operated vehicles, such as environmental benefits, reduced operating costs, enhanced driving experience, and technological advancements. These advantages make China a global leader in EVs, and given the global success of Chinese-made EVs, the US and the EU cannot win the competition by resorting to protectionist trade policies.

If the Western countries impose punitive tariffs on Chinese-made EVs, they will unwittingly raise EV prices for their consumers, and protectionist measures that aim to shield domestic companies from competition may hinder innovation and lead to inefficiency, especially in an industry that relies heavily on technological advancements.

Fourth, protectionist policies will hinder the countries' efforts to reduce emissions, and weaken the global fight against climate change. Protectionist measures that limit a country's access to international markets or EV technologies may slow down the global progress in addressing climate change, prompting people to question the legitimacy of protecting "domestic industries" amid the growing need to address climate change.

And fifth, hindering competition or even cracking down on foreign companies for political reasons such as on the pretext of safeguarding national security will make people wonder whether the market in some developed countries is as free and open as they claim.

Technological advancements in the EV sector can only be achieved through cooperation and fair competition. Political strategies based solely on competition among major powers will not only restrict the development of EVs but also undermine global emissions reduction efforts. Policymakers should carefully consider these factors before taking any climate decision.

The author is an associate researcher at the Institute of American Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

## GLOBAL VIEWS



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



ZHANG YUJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

ZHOU YUYUAN

## Smart cooperation

BRICS can partner with Africa to boost the continent's digital transformation and industrial development

The fourth industrial revolution, which is driven by advancements in digital technology and artificial intelligence, is fundamentally reshaping the world. The new round of industrial revolution is a major area of cooperation for the BRICS member states, and also provides an opportunity for developing countries to catch up with the developed ones.

BRICS and Africa have a strong consensus on riding the wave of the new industrial revolution. The African Union regards the fourth industrial revolution as a watershed in the continent's development. In 2020, the AU summit set the target of building a unified digital market on the continent by 2030, and African nations have prioritized a digital agenda in their development plans.

International Monetary Fund data indicate that the original BRICS member states — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — accounted for 31.5 percent of the global GDP in purchasing power parity terms by October 2022, overtaking the G7 countries, and the BRICS countries' share of global GDP rose from 8.4 percent in 2001 to 25.8 percent in 2022. The fast development of the BRICS economies has been fueled by their industrial growth. Now the new industrial revolution offers an opportunity for the BRICS countries to upgrade their economy and boost their industrial processes.

In 2017, at the BRICS Xiamen Summit, the BRICS countries formulated the Action Plan for Deepening Industrial Cooperation, and in 2018, at the Johannesburg Summit, China and South Africa proposed the BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution. In 2020, the BRICS countries adopted the Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership 2025. In 2020, a new industrial revolution innovation center for BRICS was established in Xiamen in Southeast China's Fujian province. In 2022, the BRICS Digital Economy Partnership Framework was launched, ushering in a new stage for member states to deepen cooperation on the digital economy.

The BRICS and African countries, sharing similar historical experiences and being at the same development stage, are good partners in development. In promoting the development of

Africa, BRICS member states have their respective advantages.

For instance, China is a leader in boosting infrastructure construction and the economic growth of Africa; Russia is a major player in the continent's mineral industries; and India has rich experiences in areas such as retail, medicine and health, remote medical services and education training.

The BRICS countries have helped build a favorable international environment for Africa's development by pushing for the reform of the global financial system and global governance architecture. Cooperation platforms under the framework of BRICS, such as the New Development Bank and the BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution Innovation Center, have brought benefits to Africa. In 2017, the NDB opened its Africa Regional Center in Johannesburg, which was the bank's first regional office. By August 2023, the bank had granted 14 loans totaling \$7.4 billion to South Africa.

As Africa advances the building of the African Continental Free Trade Area and African countries face the growing need to industrialize and digitalize, BRICS and Africa should seize the opportunities presented by the new industrial revolution to turbocharge Africa's development.

First, the priority is to improve Africa's weak digital infrastructure in communications, data and cloud computing, which is the foundation for the development of artificial intelligence, the internet of things, and other emerging industries.

Nearly 80 percent of the 3G network and 70 percent of the 4G infrastructure in Africa was built by Huawei and ZTE, and the two Chinese companies are helping construct the 5G network on the continent. BRICS countries, particularly China, have huge potential to help Africa strengthen its digital infrastructure.

Second, it is imperative to promote BRICS-Africa cooperation on the digital economy. The African Union envisions building a unified pan-African digital market by 2030 that enables universal access to digital services. The International Telecommunications Union estimated in 2019 that a 10 percent increase in mobile internet penetration in Africa would drive GDP growth of 2.5 percent. Progress in e-commerce, digital payments, and technology-enabled agriculture, mining, manufacturing and tourism is injecting new impetus into the development of Africa.

The digital economy is not

only of great significance for Africa's future, but also represents tremendous opportunities for its international partners. BRICS countries have amassed rich experiences and practices in developing the digital economy and international cooperation in the area.

In 2018, China's e-commerce giant Alibaba signed a deal with Rwanda to help the country export local specialties through its electronic World Trade Platform initiative (eWTP), making Rwanda the first African country to join the platform; thanks to China's digital technologies and drones, Mozambique and Ghana have built smart farms; and China and Rwanda are cooperating on a smart fishing program. These pioneering efforts provide references for other African countries.

Third, job creation is an acute need for the BRICS-Africa cooperation in the new industrial revolution. Africa's fast population growth poses a severe employment challenge for regional countries. While the new industrial revolution is creating jobs, it requires higher skills of workers. This necessitates establishing vocational training in African countries. BRICS countries, which have accumulated extensive expertise in industrial cooperation, technology transfer and vocational training, are well-positioned to support Africa in this endeavor.

Last, the African Continental Free Trade Area is a major strategy to fuel development, attract investment and boost the competitiveness of African countries. Technologies and innovations catalyzed by the new industrial revolution will accelerate the building of the AfCFTA. Development in big data, e-commerce, smart governance and IoT will help break down the information barrier that has long hampered economic integration among African countries. Therefore, the new industrial revolution presents an opportunity to facilitate the building of the AfCFTA and advance regional integration, and the BRICS-Africa collaboration in that area can become a highlight in the group's international cooperation.

The author is a senior research fellow and deputy director at the Center for West Asian and African Studies at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHEN ZHAOYUAN

## United, they stand

Concerns about challenges to collective action after BRICS expansion are uncalled for

Following its historic expansion earlier this year when Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates joined BRICS, the impact of the group's cooperation on the Global South and global governance has garnered widespread attention. This year, BRICS countries successively held their first coordinators' meeting and the first meeting of their finance ministers and central bank governors.



The first meeting of BRICS leaders after the expansion is scheduled to be held in Kazan, Russia, in October. Some observers fear that the addition of new members will exacerbate the "collective action problem" of the BRICS countries, weakening its effectiveness in providing public goods to the international community, especially the Global South. As the creator of the term "BRICS", Jim O'Neill pointed out that "the group's influence will depend on its effectiveness, not on its composition or size". However, what is at least equally important is that the grouping needs to value the new momentum that its expansion has brought to collective action. In fact, the expanded BRICS mechanism will better provide public goods, promoting unity, cooperation and common development among the Global South through enhanced stability, expanded possibility and elevated mobility.

First, the grouping can enhance stability through strategic collaboration and policy coordination. After its expansion, the representativeness and influence of BRICS have increased further, injecting more constructive force into maintaining world peace and promoting global development. Currently, the GDP of the 10 BRICS countries accounts for about 36 percent of the global economy, with their population accounting for about 45 percent of the global total, and crude oil production taking up 44 percent of the global total.

Last November, BRICS leaders issued a joint statement on the situation in Palestine and Israel, setting a good precedent for greater BRICS cooperation after the expansion. It also indicates that BRICS countries will continue to strengthen their coordination on major international and regional issues, uphold global fairness and justice, maintain global strategic stability, and serve as an important force in building a multipolar world and advancing the democratization of international relations.

By strengthening macroeconomic policy coordination, the addition of new members can bring greater economic stability to BRICS countries and even the broader international community. BRICS countries have prioritized the development needs of the Global South. In responding to international financial crises and geopolitical tensions, BRICS countries

can maintain the positive momentum of global economic recovery and growth through coordinated actions in their domestic fiscal and monetary policies, showcasing their active role and collective leadership in global economic governance, providing a more predictable environment for the long-term planning and investment of emerging markets and developing countries.

Second, the grouping can explore greater possibilities through topic expansion and innovative solutions. The addition of new members to the BRICS ushers in new resources and demands for cooperation, which can be instrumental in enriching and deepening cooperation within the grouping. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran have proposed the need for cooperation in the fields of energy security and energy transition. Egypt and Ethiopia have huge potential but both face challenges in infrastructure construction, agricultural development, and educational investment.

Meanwhile, the addition of new members results in a more diversified economic structure and industrial strengths, which helps to deepen BRICS' financial cooperation. Saudi Arabia's oil resources and its economic diversification strategy, as well as the UAE's experience in financial center construction, technological innovation, and sustainable development, provide new perspectives and pragmatic cases for BRICS financial cooperation. Efforts made by countries such as Egypt and Ethiopia in enhancing regional connectivity, industrial upgrading and human resource development blaze new paths for BRICS' financial cooperation.

After its expansion, BRICS will more effectively shape the multilateral agenda, contributing more BRICS solutions to global governance. Last October, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres visited Beijing and stated that the international financial system can no longer reflect the political and economic realities of the world today and is in urgent need of reform. Among the new BRICS members, Saudi Arabia is a G20 member, and the UAE and Egypt were guest countries at the G20 Summit in New Delhi in September. This enhances the voice of BRICS countries in global economic governance. The expanded BRICS can more forcefully advance international agendas that are favorable to emerging markets and developing countries, proposing and implementing initiatives and projects with broad influence in areas such as climate change, digital economic governance, and infrastructure development through collective actions.

Third, the grouping can elevate mobility through joint efforts in self-strengthening and promoting openness and inclusiveness. BRICS countries, upholding the spirit of openness, inclusiveness, and win-win cooperation, have created a hallmark

of South-South cooperation. This expansion also reflects the openness and inclusiveness of BRICS, incorporating new member countries with different systems, injecting new vitality into BRICS cooperation. The wide range of countries applying for BRICS membership reflects the confidence of many developing countries in BRICS cooperation and demonstrates the effectiveness of the BRICS mechanism in common development. Over 40 countries have now expressed their desire to join the BRICS, with more than 20 countries submitting formal applications. This indicates that BRICS countries have won the trust of countries in the Global South. In recent years, some developed countries have continuously strengthened small circles centered on the G7, and some countries have politicized and marginalized development issues, leading to more pronounced development divides and technological gaps. The expansion of BRICS shows the strong desire and resolve of emerging markets and developing countries to unite, cooperate, and seek development together, helping to narrow the North-South gap and promote more balanced and sustainable global development.

Emerging markets and developing countries increasingly recognize that BRICS can serve as an effective vehicle for achieving South-South cooperation and building a new international political and economic order. This has spurred their enthusiasm to participate in the cooperation. BRICS expansion and BRICS Plus cooperation can offer more development opportunities and intellectual support for countries in the Global South, enhancing their competitiveness and upward mobility in the global economy. BRICS expansion will also help build a more just and reasonable international order and global governance system, creating a broader space for the development of the Global South.

Concerns about challenges to collective action after BRICS expansion should not be exaggerated. By leveraging the resources of its member countries, BRICS can build consensus and take collective action around common goals. Through flexible and pragmatic institutional design, BRICS member countries can expand and deepen cooperation in multiple areas, reducing the risk of cooperation falling into a deadlock. With increased representativeness and influence, BRICS countries will more actively shape the global governance agenda, providing more public goods to the Global South and the international community.

The author is an assistant researcher with the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



MAXUEJING / CHINA DAILY

## WORLD

# ASEAN states struggle as El Nino bites

Joint action urged as prolonged dry spell and higher temperatures cut food supply

By PRIME SARMIENTO  
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In Indonesia's Aceh Province, coffee grower Adha Arico has seen how extreme heat has affected his crops.

Although his farm in the village of Suka Makmur is located in a highland area with relatively cooler temperatures, Arico said the weather has been hotter in the past few days. His coffee trees, while still bearing cherries despite the onset of the El Nino season, are producing beans that are "a bit less than in normal times".

Coffee is one of Indonesia's cash crops and Aceh, in the western island of Sumatra, is one of the biggest coffee producing areas. To reduce the dry weather's influence on their coffee harvest, farmers in Aceh intercrop coffee trees with avocado trees as this helps lower the high temperature.

"We feel it here," Arico said. "People here know there are El Nino troubles in many parts of Indonesia."

The onset of El Nino has not only parched farmlands in Indonesia, but also affected some member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, with temperatures hitting as much as 40 C in mid-March.

The ASEAN Specialized Meteorological Center has forecast the region will have "above-normal temperatures" this month, with "below-normal rainfall" expected for the Mekong Subregion.

A prolonged dry spell caused by El Nino can cut food supply and commodity exports, experts warned. Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam are among the world's biggest agri-commodity exporters.

Meanwhile, climate change has also intensified the heat wave, making it more urgent for governments to enforce policies that will mitigate the effect of extreme heat on farmlands and human health, experts said.

"A single dry spell doesn't necessarily prove climate change, but it's a cause for concern, especially if it fits a pattern of increasing aridity," Jongsoo Shin, regional director for Asia at the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines, said.

The increased frequency and severity of dry spells could be linked to climate change, he said, and this can significantly reduce the produc-

tion of rice — a staple crop in Asia — as it is a water-intensive crop. He said lower production can also spike food prices and lead to food insecurity.

Siva Kumar Balasundram, head of the Department of Agriculture Technology at Universiti Putra Malaysia, estimated that a 1-degree increase in temperature could reduce rice yield by up to 10 percent as the dry weather disrupts the process of nutrient uptake and photosynthesis.

Aridity and heat are "co-stressors" that can also cut down the yield of other crops, Balasundram said.

Emerging technologies can mitigate the effects of El Nino, he said. For example, irrigation technologies powered by artificial intelligence can make a difference in delivering water to crops in a timely manner without wastage.

Sheeba Nettukandy Chenoli, senior lecturer at the Department of Geography in the University of Malaya, said El Nino can lead to water shortage that can hurt the agriculture sector and the public.

## Mitigating risks

As such, both the governments and local communities must take proactive measures to mitigate the risks associated with extreme events. These include establishing early warning systems, promoting water conservation measures, investing in water storage infrastructure and diversifying water sources through rainwater harvesting.

On a broader scale, Chenoli said ASEAN member states can develop regional policies to mitigate the effect of adverse weather events.

The dry season has increased saline intrusion in Vietnam's Mekong Delta, reducing water supply for home consumption and irrigation.

The Thai National Shippers' Council forecast that the drought will cut rice production by 0.6 percent to 0.9 percent and slash cassava, fruit and seafood exports this year, The Nation newspaper reported.

Indonesia has imported 650,000 metric tons of rice and has signed import contracts for another 350,000 tons to close the gap in the local shortage caused by the drought.

Leonardus Jegho in Jakarta contributed to this story.



## Rope trick

French athlete and Olympics torchbearer Anouk Garner climbs a 110-meter-long rope up the Eiffel Tower in Paris on Wednesday, in a bid to break the world record for rope climbing distance.

STEPHANE DE SAKUTIN / AFP

# Boeing facing new whistleblower claims

By AI HEPING in New York  
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The United States' Federal Aviation Administration said on Tuesday it is investigating claims by a Boeing engineer that the company knew of safety flaws in its 787 Dreamliner jet, but covered them up to speed production.

The planemaker has been grappling with a full-blown safety crisis that has undermined its reputation following a Jan 5 midair panel blow-out on a 737 MAX plane. It has undergone a management shake-up, and US regulators have put curbs on its production. Deliveries fell by half in March, Reuter reported.

The FAA 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 for 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.

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.

US Senator Richard Blumenthal's office said his investigation subcommittee would hold a hearing on Boeing issues with Salehpour on Wednesday.

In the latest development on Tuesday, an Air Canada Boeing 737 MAX 8 landed safely in Boise, Idaho, after experiencing an in-flight emergency when pilots received a warning light in the flight deck, airline and airport officials said.

The issue was determined to be a faulty cargo hold indicator, Air Canada said in an email without elaborating. No injuries were reported, Boise Airport officials said in a post on Facebook.

Agencies contributed to this story.

# AI film marathon competition kicks off in Los Angeles

By RENALI in Los Angeles  
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Just one month after the premiere of the world's first AI feature film in Los Angeles, film and television companies are accelerating the integration of artificial intelligence technology into the industry.

Shanghai Film Company took its initiative abroad and hosted an event titled "The New Era: AI & Global Film" on Monday in Los Angeles, displaying the robust presence of Chinese films and television in the IP+AI domain to international audiences.

The event marked the official launch of the Global AI Film Marathon competition, which aims to discover high-quality AI film and television startups, projects and talent worldwide.

Seeking to establish a global "AI+film" ecosystem, the competition offers a prize pool of \$100,000, with investment opportunities of up to 1 billion yuan (\$140 million) from the Shanghai Film New Vision Fund.

Wang Jian'er, chairman of Shanghai Film, expressed the company's commitment to embracing the AI era.

"Standing at the forefront of the new technology era in the industry, Shanghai Film needs to expand its global presence," Wang said.

Because Shanghai and Los Angeles are leading film capitals, they can work together to leverage their strengths and drive innovation in the industry globally, Wang said.

"We are dedicated to promoting the practical implementation of Shanghai Film's IP+AI projects and fostering collaboration to establish a global AI film and television ecological alliance," he said.

Earlier this year, the threat of AI to Hollywood's status quo became more tangible with the introduction of Sora by OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT. Sora is a tool capable of generating photorealistic and cinematic video from text-based prompts, further highlighting the potential of AI in filmmaking.

Last month, Los Angeles welcomed the world premiere of one of the first feature-length films entirely generated by AI. This groundbreaking parody remake of *Terminator 2* involved the collaboration of 50 artists in the AI space, demonstrating the evolving landscape of AI-driven creativity in cinema.

Since Sora sparked a wave of turbulence in the film and television industry, Shanghai Film has swiftly responded to the AI trends, and the Global AI Film Marathon will be a crucial platform for talent acquisition through projects and talent chain technology.

The competition is jointly organized by Shanghai Film, the New Vision Fund and filmMarathon, a platform for young film creators. Co-organizers include Shanghai Film's affiliates — Shanghai Animation Film Studio, Shanghai Film Infinity and Haopu Film and TV Base.

Together, they will drive the

implementation of film+AI and IP+AI collaboration across production, IP partnerships and industrial empowerment, injecting new momentum into Shanghai Film's global IP initiatives.

The Chinese American Film Festival, as the overseas co-organizer, will partner with Shanghai Film to facilitate exchanges and collaboration between Chinese and US filmmakers in AI-driven cinema.

Andre Morgan, co-chair of the Chinese American Film Festival and producer of the Oscar-winning film *Million Dollar Baby*, stressed the significant potential for AI cooperation in film co-productions between the United States and China.

## Fostering collaborations

"These interactions will foster collaboration and facilitate the exchange of ideas to further improve the integration of AI technology in the global film and television industry," Morgan said.

He emphasized Shanghai's longstanding position at the forefront of innovation in media, entertainment and technology. Morgan said he believes that through Shanghai's initiative in launching the competition, both sides can actively promote participation among young filmmakers and encourage them to take part in the endeavor.

Bob Underwood, a scriptwriter and producer, said that while AI may initially transform certain aspects of film production, it will not replace

human creativity anytime soon.

"I don't think AI is going to be able to do that convincingly very soon. I do think it's going to change the production aspects very quickly, but it'll change the marketplace for international productions a lot," he said.

Underwood said he has partnered on a couple of projects in China, including a science fiction project, in the animation.

Cultural exchanges between China and the US are highly important given the unsteady bilateral relationship, he said.

Damon Ross, a business manager whose company represents numerous actors, writers and directors, said his talent could be quite interested in taking part in the AI film competition.

"There's immense potential in the marketplace, and we should collaborate to ensure we produce the best creations possible. I believe AI can play a significant role in this endeavor," he said.

Li Zhiqiang, deputy consul general of China's Consulate General in Los Angeles, said China and the US, as the world's two largest film markets, are highly complementary in industrial development and economic interests.

"With the help of this competition, the film and television industry of China and the US can work together to leverage the advantages of artificial intelligence, carry out practical and efficient cooperation, and actively explore beneficial aspects," he said.



People walk past an electrical appliances store in Bangkok on March 29, Thailand braces for temperatures expected to rise above 40 C, the Thai Meteorological Department said. LILLIAN SUWANRUMPHA / AFP

# Europe votes on 'dehumanizing' migration policy

By JONATHAN POWELL in London  
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The European Parliament was set to vote on extensive new legislation to revamp its migration policy on Wednesday, amid criticism that it is aligning with the far right's agenda rather than protecting vulnerable individuals.

Despite receiving support from some politicians, the set of laws remains divisive, as critics argue that instead of neutralizing the far-right influence, the legislation essentially legitimizes its viewpoints and fails to address the escalating death toll on migration routes to the European Union.

Ylva Johansson, the home affairs commissioner who spearheaded the

legislation, said on Tuesday the reforms would lead the 27-member bloc closer to countering the influence of the populist far right, The Guardian reported.

"We have already taken away a lot of the arguments from the far right by reaching this agreement. I hope we will get the vote because it has been a long journey, a marathon," she told reporters in Brussels.

"It will really be a big, big moment for Europe, showing that we can deal with very challenging political issues in an environment that is challenging."

However, following eight years of political deadlock over the regulations, there is a real possibility that lawmakers may vote against the agreement, the Politico reported.

Malin Bjork, a member of Parliament for the Swedish Left Party, said: "This is an adaptation of what the far right have been asking for, for years. Can we come up with something even more dehumanizing? This is taking some of the worst of practices in the EU and institutionalizing it."

## 'Not solving problems'

Bjork, who was responsible for drafting the package's laws on resettlement, said the legislation "does not solve any of the problems it was supposed to".

The comprehensive set of laws, initially proposed in 2018, aims to streamline the asylum process by expediting eligibility assessments and forced returns within a time frame of about 12 weeks.

The legislation will also introduce a centralized screening system at all EU external borders and a "solidarity" mechanism, requested by Greece and Italy, to enable overwhelmed countries to transfer their asylum procedures to another member state.

The Guardian reported that representatives from 161 civil society organizations urged lawmakers to reject the legislation, saying it had been flawed from the start.

Stephanie Pope, a migration expert at nonprofit Oxfam International, criticized the package, highlighting its focus on "deterrents, detention and deportation" instead of protecting the human rights of vulnerable individuals. She described the legislation as "very political and zero evidence-based".

## Tender moment



Jony, a chimpanzee who was rescued from a circus, attempts to kiss keeper Silvia Salvatierra at the Lujan Zoo in Lujan, on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, Argentina, on Monday. Felines, including tigers and lions, will be transferred from the zoo to a wildlife sanctuary in India. AGUSTIN MARCARIAN / REUTERS

## WORLD

## Countries pushing to recognize Palestinian statehood

DUBLIN — Ireland will move to recognize the Palestinian state in the coming weeks, Irish Foreign Minister Micheal Martin said on Tuesday in Dublin.

Martin said he would make a formal proposal on recognizing the Palestinian state to the government when "wider international discussions" are complete.

"Be in no doubt, recognition of a Palestinian state will happen," he told the Irish parliament during a speech.

Delaying recognition "is not credible or tenable any longer," he said.

Martin later told local news site The Journal that the formal proposal would happen "in the next couple of weeks."

Last month the leaders of Spain, Ireland, Slovakia and Malta said in a joint statement that they stand ready to recognize Palestinian statehood.

Ireland has long said it has no objection in principle to officially recognizing the Palestinian state if it could help the peace process in the Middle East.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez will meet several of his European Union counterparts over the next week to try to garner support for the recognition of a Palestinian state.

Sanchez's agenda includes meetings with the prime ministers of Norway, Ireland, Portugal, Slovenia and Belgium, focusing on the EU's position regarding the Israel-Hamas conflict in the Gaza Strip, government spokesperson Pilar Alegria told reporters.

Australia's foreign minister also joined the call for the recognition of a Palestinian statehood. In a speech to the Australian National University security conference on Tuesday night, Penny Wong said that international recognition of a Palestinian state would improve the chances for peace in the Middle East and "build momentum toward a two-state solution."

The Australian government has escalated its criticism of the Israel Defense Forces after Australian citizen Zoni Frankom and six colleagues from World Central Kitchen were killed in an airstrike while delivering aid in central Gaza earlier in April.

On Monday, Wong announced that former Australian Defense Force chief Mark Binskin has been appointed as a special adviser to oversee Israel's official investigations into the incident.

AGENCIES—XINHUA



A boy distributes sweets to displaced Palestinians as they attend a morning prayer to start the Eid al-Fitr festival, marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan in Rafah on Wednesday. MOHAMMED ABED / AFP

## Cease-fire urged for Gaza in Eid wishes

Messages muted with tragic tones as UN, Israel disagree over aid figures in enclave

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong  
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From the Al Aqsa Mosque compound in East Jerusalem to other Islamic facilities in Africa, Asia and Europe, Eid wishes this year were muted with tragic tones and eager calls of leaders of Muslim-majority countries for an end to Gaza bloodshed and hunger.

The holy month of Ramadan is ending with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2728 left in the cold, while an agency of the United Nations suspects Israel could be using starvation as a weapon by limiting food aid convoys.

In his Eid message, Organization of Islamic Cooperation Secretary-General Houssein Ibrahim Taha said at Eid al-Fitr that his heart "is overwhelmed by Palestinians languishing under unprecedented brutal aggression of the Israeli occupation forces" who "did not give the people space to pray or even observe the Ramadan fast in peace", but rather "intensified their killing, destruction, and starvation."

In his Eid al-Fitr speech on Tuesday, Saudi Arabia's King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud reiterated the need to stop attacking the Palestinian people and end their suffering by recognizing their legitimate rights, Arab News reported.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Sunday called for limiting the activities of Eid al-Fitr to religious rituals only, citing the difficult circumstances as the result of ongoing

fighting in the Gaza Strip, Xinhua News Agency reported.

Palestinian News Agency Wafa reported that Muslim Palestinians in the Gaza Strip performed Eid al-Fitr prayers on the ruins of mosques that had been destroyed by Israeli attacks in shelter schools "to which they were displaced, and in public squares in the rain and cold weather."

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in his Eid message this year that his heart "is broken to know" that, in Gaza, in Sudan, "and so many other places because of conflict and hunger."

## Supplies argument

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said Israel was deliberately delaying and blocking food supplies from entering Gaza in comparison to other forms of humanitarian aid, Arab News reported.

"In northern Gaza, food distribution by humanitarian actors reached only 16 percent of the population," a report from the OCHA stated.

However, Israel accused the United Nations of undercounting aid entering Gaza, saying on Wednesday the UN was using a flawed approach meant to conceal its own distribution difficulties.

While Israel said 419 trucks entered the Gaza Strip on Monday, the main UN agency there, UNRWA, said only 223 trucks had come in on that day.

"The UN's incorrect numbers are

a result of their flawed counting method," the COGAT, the Israeli military branch responsible for aid transfers, said in a statement.

Israeli forces kept up combat operations and airstrikes on Gaza a day after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed no let-up in the campaign to destroy Hamas.

US President Joe Biden called Netanyahu's handling of the conflict in Gaza a mistake and called for his government to flood the beleaguered territory with aid, ramping up pressure on Israel to reach a cease-fire and widening a rift between the two staunch allies.

"I think what he's doing is a mistake. I don't agree with his approach," Biden told Spanish-language TV network Univision in an interview that aired on Tuesday night.

Meanwhile, the Council on American-Islamic Relations slammed US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin after he said the US does not have any evidence that Israel was committing genocide in Gaza in a Senate hearing.

Israel and Hamas are currently engaged in talks meant to bring about a cease-fire in exchange for the release of hostages captured by Hamas who stormed across the border on Oct 7. But the sides remain far apart on key issues, including the return of Palestinians to hard-hit northern Gaza.

Agencies contributed to this story.



Online  
Watch the video  
by scanning  
the code.

## Chinese company to help build Peru port

By JIMENA ESTEBAN  
in Buenos Aires, Argentina  
For China Daily

Another Chinese firm has won a contract to build a new port terminal in the south of Peru, the latest project in the construction of a network of ports that could reshape how goods flow between Latin America and Asia.

Jinzhao Peru, the local subsidiary of a Chinese construction firm, will build the country's third-largest port, San Juan de Marcona, and continue to redefine how goods move in and out of the west coast of South America. In the north of the country, COSCO Shipping Ports is building the huge Chancay Multi-purpose Port Terminal.

Peru announced on March 22 that it had awarded the tender to build the port in the southern region of Ica, near the Pampa de Pongo iron project, which Jinzhao is also developing.

The new port terminal will cost \$405 million and will be able to move 19 million metric tons of ore per year and make it easier to transport bulk goods, including iron concentrate and copper. This will ultimately reactivate mining projects worth \$15 billion by attracting more investments and driving improvements in Peru's logistics infrastructure.

Such improvements could turn the country into a South Pacific logistics hub, reducing transportation time for goods to Asia by 10 to 15 days, said Carlos Pareja, a diplomat and former ambassador.

"I am sure that as port activities are enabled, there will be an increase in the flow of ships and activities in the logistics area," Pareja said.

"Peru is a country open to foreign investment. We have very successful investments in mining. We also have many foreign investors who are partners with Peruvian companies."

Construction of the new terminal is due to start next year or in early 2026, and the first phase should be operational two years after that,

said Jose Salardi, head of Peru's state investment agency Proinver, during an event to announce the awarding of the tender.

By designing, financing and building a new terminal and operating it for the next 30 years, Jinzhao will be the second Chinese company to build and operate a port in Peru.

The Chancay port is expected to ultimately cost \$3 billion and will include 11 berths and another one for bulk cargo, general cargo and rolling cargo. It is slated to start operations later this year.

The new ports are important for Peru, given that 45 percent of the country's exports go to Asia and 30 percent of imports come from Asia, said Alejandro Indacochea, chairman of Indacochea Associates.

## Key role

The new port terminal, along with the Chancay port, will be part of a network of ports that will play an important role in connecting the entire Pacific Basin, with shipping routes extending to multiple ports in China, Japan, Singapore and Australia.

The expanded port network in Peru could facilitate exports of bananas and flowers from Ecuador. Colombia, which does not have a free-trade agreement with China, is considering setting up a free-trade zone in Peru. Chile could use Peru to ship minerals mined in the north of the country at a much lower cost. Peru is also a natural outlet for landlocked Bolivia, Indacochea said.

In the long term, the port network would make it possible for Brazil, in the east of the continent, to link directly to a Pacific Ocean port "so that its products and goods can reach Asia more promptly," Pareja said.

And Chancay itself, where the new mega port is being built, could be transformed.

"It has been said that Chancay could be the Hong Kong of South America," Indacochea said.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.



The tunnel gate to Chancay port facilities, is still under construction, on the Peruvian coast, on Aug 22. The port is being built by COSCO Shipping from China. CARLOS GARCIA GRANTHON / GETTY IMAGES

## Gunfire in Haiti capital disrupting medical care

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Fresh gunfire erupted on Tuesday in downtown Port-au-Prince, forcing aid workers to halt urgently needed care for thousands of Haitians.

Weeks of gang violence have forced some 18 hospitals to stop working and caused a shortage of medical supplies as Haiti's biggest seaport and main international airport remain closed, warned aid workers with The Alliance for International Medical Action, a Senegal-based humanitarian organization.

"The situation is really challenging and affects our movement on a daily basis," said Antoine Maillard, the organization's medical coordinator based in Port-au-Prince.

The gang violence has driven about 17,000 people in the capital from their homes with many crammed into abandoned schools and other buildings where they often share a single toilet.

Maillard said aid workers were able to reach one of the camps for



Police officers patrol an intersection amid gang violence in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on Monday. ODELYN JOSEPH / AP

displaced people on Tuesday, "but there were too many gunshots to provide support."

He said the health crisis is worsening and it is difficult to find basic medications including antibiotics and antidiarrheals since gang violence has shuttered suppliers. The limited medication available has doubled and even tripled the price.

That means Haitians like 65-year-old Denise Duval are unable to buy much-needed medication or see a doctor.

"My health right now is not good," she said, adding that she has high blood pressure and often feels dizzy "from hearing gunfire all the time, my heart beats a lot."

Gunfire still echoes daily throughout Port-au-Prince, though the gang

violence has subsided in certain areas since gunmen began attacking key government infrastructure on Feb 29.

Haiti's largest public hospital, the State University Hospital, is among those closed. Located in downtown Port-au-Prince, it has been seized and looted by gangs that also pillaged nearby pharmacies.

While some private clinics and hospitals are operating, they remain inaccessible to the majority of people in a country where 60 percent of the population earn less than \$2 a day.

The violence forced Ariel Henry to announce last month that he would resign as the prime minister once a transitional presidential council is created.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## South Africa's court allows ex-president Zuma to contest in general elections

JOHANNESBURG — A South African court on Tuesday ruled that former president Jacob Zuma can stand in the upcoming general elections, overturning a decision by electoral authorities to bar him over a contempt conviction.

In a surprise verdict, the electoral court ruled in favor of the 81-year-old who is leading uMkhonto we Sizwe, or MK, a new opposition party that has become a potential upsetter in the elections.

"The decision of the Electoral Commission ... is set aside," the court wrote in a ruling seen by Agence France-Presse.

It did not provide an explanation of how the verdict was reached.

South Africa will hold the national and local government elections on May 29.

South Africa's general elections are expected to be the most competitive since the advent of democracy in 1994 and Zuma's presence in the campaign could prove a key factor.

Banking on his popularity, MK is expected to cut into the vote share of the embattled ruling African National Congress, or ANC, the former president's former political home.

This could see the ANC's vote share drop below 50 percent for the first time since 1994.

Short of a parliamentary majority, it would be forced to seek coalition partners to remain in power.

MK hailed the ruling as a "triumph" over what it said were ANC-led efforts to marginalize it.

"This victory extends beyond president Zuma and the MK Party as it symbolizes a victory for every South African who believes in fairness, democracy, and the inviolable right to elect leaders of their choice, free from undue interference," it said.

The Electoral Commission said it had taken note of the decision but asked the reasons for it.

"Naturally the commission is taking legal advice ... and will chart a way forward based on such advice," it said.

The Electoral Commission had excluded Zuma from the race, saying the constitution barred anyone convicted and sentenced to more than 12 months' imprisonment.

Zuma was sentenced to 15 months in jail in June 2021 after he refused to testify before a panel probing financial corruption and cronyism during his presidency. His lawyers argued the sentence

did not disqualify him as it followed civil rather than criminal proceedings and it had been shortened by a remission.

Zuma was freed on medical parole just two months into his jail term.

"If the masses want me to be president, what's going to stop them?" an upbeat Zuma told supporters, after Monday's hearing.

Some opinion polls put MK at above 10 percent nationwide, a share that would make it the third or fourth political force behind the ANC and the liberal Democratic Alliance.

Tensions between the ANC and MK have run high in recent months.

The ANC has unsuccessfully tried to have the new party disqualified and has taken it to court to stop it from using the MK name, alleging intellectual property theft.

Last week the MK leader appeared in court accused of inciting violence for saying that massive riots would erupt if the MK was not allowed to run.

The Electoral Commission is expected to publish the final candidate list on Wednesday.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## WORLDUS



Chinese pianist Lang Lang gestures as he unveils his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in Los Angeles on Wednesday. MARIO ANZUONI / REUTERS

## Lang Lang joins Walk of Fame

By RENALI in Los Angeles  
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The world-renowned Chinese classical pianist Lang Lang was honored with the 2,778th star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on Wednesday, making him the first Asian pianist to receive a star on the iconic sidewalk.

Lang's inclusion on the Walk of Fame places him among a select group of Asian performers, including luminaries such as Anna May Wong, Mako, Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, Lucy Liu, James Hong and Ming-Na Wen. "We're proud to recognize Lang Lang's outstanding contributions to the world of classical music and celebrate his extraordinary talent with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame," said Ana Martinez, producer of the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Steve Nissen, president and CEO of the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce expressed pride in welcoming Lang Lang.

"We hope to bring the message of peace and unity through Lang Lang's

“Music can express the heritage of different cultures. I hope that by receiving this honor today, the mainstream art world in the West can see the artistic talents of our Chinese people.”

**Pianist Lang Lang**, after getting his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on Wednesday

star on the Walk of Fame forever," Nissen told China Daily.

"From a young boy in Shenyang, China, to this iconic location, one underlying principle has remained constant: his brilliance

as a musician," emphasized Dickon Stainer, president and CEO of Global Classics & Jazz.

During the celebration, Lang expressed his gratitude by performing two piano pieces live, one was Chinese folk song *Jasmine* and the second was *Ritual Fire Dance* by the Spanish composer Manuel De Falla.

"Music can express the heritage of different cultures. I hope that by receiving this honor today, the mainstream art world in the West can see the artistic talents of our Chinese people. I hope that I can serve as a bridge for cultural exchanges between China and the United States," Lang told China Daily.

As an internationally acclaimed pianist, Lang Lang has achieved unparalleled success in the world of classical music. With millions of albums sold globally, he has consistently topped classical music charts while also gaining mainstream recognition.

Time magazine recognized him as one of the 100 most influential

people in the world. Over the past decade, Lang Lang has graced prestigious stages, performing for esteemed figures such as former US President Barack Obama, Pope Francis, and the late Queen Elizabeth II. His sold-out concerts with leading orchestras and conductors have captivated audiences worldwide.

Lang's presence extends beyond the concert hall, as he has also made significant appearances on television. His performances at high-profile events like the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the final match of the 2014 FIFA World Cup have been witnessed by millions around the globe. Additionally, he has collaborated with renowned artists such as Metallica, Pharrell Williams and Herbie Hancock at prestigious events like the Grammy Awards.

In April 2020, Lang Lang participated in the *One World: Together at Home* concert, a global event that united audiences across major television networks and online platforms.

## US inflation rises, casting doubts on rate cuts by Fed

By AI HEPING in New York  
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The US consumer price index (CPI), a measure of goods and services prices across the economy, rose 3.5 percent in March from a year earlier, the Labor Department said Wednesday, a larger-than-predicted jump that caused many economists to doubt the Federal Reserve will soon cut interest rates — if at all this year.

The increase was higher than economists had forecast and a pickup from February's 3.2 percent. So-called core prices, which exclude volatile food and energy categories, also rose more than expected on a monthly and annual basis.

The CPI number caused stock prices to slide and government bond yields, which underpin interest rates throughout the economy, go higher. It was a blow to President Joe Biden that could mean no interest rates cuts before the November election. He has seen his approval ratings hurt by rapid inflation and rising interest rates and has been counting on lower inflation to boost his reelection campaign.

Stock investors didn't like the CPI's dimming of rate-cut prospects and sent the Dow Jones Industrial Average down 422 points to 38,462; the S&P 500 fell 49 points to 5161, while the Nasdaq Composite dropped 136 points to 16,170.

Treasury yields hit new highs on the CPI report, rising to 4.55 percent on the 10-year note.

"Goldilocks has left the building — inflation isn't coming down anymore, and rate-cut hopes are going to be pushed off even further into the future. The Fed can look past any one report, but as we continue to see multiple reports in a row that are higher than expected, it becomes more difficult for the Fed to advocate cutting rates any time soon," Chris Zaccarelli, chief investment officer at Independent Advisor Alliance, told The Wall Street Journal.

"The Fed is not done fighting inflation, and rates will stay higher for longer," Torsten Slok, chief economist at investment giant Apollo, told The New York Times, adding that he doesn't expect any cuts to interest rates this year.

Lindsay Rosner, head of multi-sector investing at Goldman Sachs Asset Management, told The Times

that the data did not "eclipse" the Fed's confidence. "It did, however, cast a shadow on it," she said.

After the report's release, Biden said his administration was making progress on fighting inflation, but there was still work to be done.

He reiterated what he has said previously: "Prices are still too high for housing and groceries, even as prices for key household items, like milk and eggs, are lower than a year ago. I have a plan to lower costs for housing — by building and renovating more than 2 million homes — and I'm calling on corporations, including grocery retailers, to use record profits to reduce prices."

Prices outside the volatile food and energy categories rose 0.4 percent from February to March, the same accelerated pace as in the previous month. Measured from a year earlier, those core prices are up 3.8 percent, unchanged from the year-over-year rise in February.

The CPI showed overall, food prices climbed 0.1 percent from the prior month, a slight increase from February, when prices were flat. Grocery prices were also flat for the second straight month. Still, many consumers continue to struggle with higher food prices. Although overall food prices have been increasing at a slower rate in recent months, they are still up about 25 percent compared with four years ago.

But after sagging in 2022 and 2023, medical care services, which include hospitals and health insurance, have increased over the past six months and are now up 2.1 percent over the year.

The price of energy continued to rise in March, increasing 1.1 percent month over month and 2.1 percent year over year. Wars in Ukraine and the Middle East have caused the price of Brent crude oil, the international benchmark, to rise more than 20 percent since mid-December.

Despite the CPI increase, on paper, the US economy has looked solid, with the unemployment rate remaining below 4 percent for the longest stretch since the 1960s, stocks have been at all-time high, and the economy continues to add jobs.

But since the start of the pandemic, Americans have seen the average cost for many goods and services, housing and food increase more than 20 percent overall.

## Ex-Mississippi officers sentenced for torturing black men

By AI HEPING in New York

Six former Mississippi law enforcement officers who had nicknamed themselves the "Goon Squad" and tortured and abused two black men in a racist attack were sentenced on Wednesday to 15 to 45 years in prison on state charges.

The men — former Rankin County Sheriff's deputies Brett Morris McAlpin, 53, Christian Dedmon, 29, Jeffrey Middleton, 46, Hunter Elward, 31, and Daniel Opdyke, 28, and a former police officer from the city of Richland, Joshua Hartfield, 32 — had pleaded guilty to state charges in August.

They had also pleaded guilty to federal charges in connection with the assault and were sentenced to federal prison terms of 10 to 40 years.

McAlpin, Middleton, and Opdyke were sentenced to serve 20 years; Dedmon to 25 years; Elward to 45 years; and Hartfield to 15 years in federal penitentiaries.

The sentences will be served concurrently with their federal sentences, and all were ordered to pay \$6,431 within two years of release, and permanently surrender their law enforcement certificates.

Prosecutors said the white officers had nicknamed themselves the "Goon Squad" due to their willingness to use excessive force



Joshua Hartfield (center), a former Richland police officer and one of six former Mississippi law enforcement officers who pleaded guilty to a long list of state and federal charges enters the Rankin County Circuit Court to listen to the victims' impact statements, prior to the state sentencing for his involvement in the 2023 racially motivated torture of two black men, on Wednesday in Brandon, Mississippi. ROGELIO V. SOLIS / AP

and cover up their brutal attack on Michael Corey Jenkins and Eddie Terrell Parker in January 2023.

In the attack, the men verbally abused Jenkins and Parker, beat them, assaulted them with stun guns and a sex toy, and one of them shot Jenkins in the mouth in a "mock execution".

The men also had pleaded guilty

to federal charges in connection with the assault and were sentenced to federal prison terms of 10 to 40 years.

In January 2023, McAlpin received a call from a white person who complained that Jenkins and Parker were residing with a white woman at a house in Braxton, Mississippi.

McAlpin then texted the

self-described Goon Squad, which the Justice Department described as being known "for using excessive force and not reporting it".

The group of men then went to that home without a warrant and assaulted Jenkins and Parker, punched and kicked them, called them racial slurs, forced them to ingest liquids, and assaulted them with a sex toy, the Justice Department said.

Dedmon also fired his gun twice to intimidate the men, the department said.

In a mock execution, Elward removed a bullet from the chamber of his gun and forced the gun into Jenkins' mouth before pulling the trigger. No bullet was fired the first time, but he pulled the trigger a second time, and it lacerated Jenkins' tongue and broke his jaw.

The officers then planned a cover-up and agreed to plant drugs on Jenkins and Parker, and those false charges stood against the men for months, The Associated Press reported.

In Wednesday's sentencing, attorneys read statements for the victims.

"After Hunter Elward shot me, they left me to die bleeding on the floor and they tried to set me up to be imprisoned," a statement on behalf of Michael Jenkins said. "January 24th, your honor, was the worst day of my life. I was brutally beaten and nearly killed by the Rankin County Sheriff's

Department, also known as the Goon Squad. I never would have thought a night of hanging out with friends would nearly cost me my life."

"They beat, kicked, tased, insulted, waterboarded and humiliated me over and over again," the statement said.

"I can no longer do what I love to do and that's sing. I play the drums for my church. And because I was shot in the face, it affected my vision so I can no longer play."

"I wake it up at night covered in sweat because of the nightmares of my attack. Loud noises, police lights, sirens, all give me extreme fear and anxiety. I am broken inside, and I don't ever think I'll be the person I was," the statement continued.

A statement on behalf of Eddie Parker said the actions of that night of terror "has left a scar on me that will last forever".

"I never knew the ones that were sworn to protect and serve would be the ones I need protection from," the statement said. "I am in constant fear someone will break into my home and terrorize me again; the humiliation and embarrassment from the sexual assault is too great to me to talk about."

"My life was not perfect. But it was mine. I doubt if I'll ever experience it again. They should be given what they gave me and Michael Jenkins — which was no mercy and I pray for the maximum sentence," his statement concluded.

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