

Saving the seals

Spotted variety of mammals thrive in nature reserve

GOING GREEN, PAGE 6



China Energy hits record in renewables output

BUSINESS, PAGE 8



Special mails

Foreign students send letters home in Chinese to polish their language skills

LIFE, PAGE 14

CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中國日報 WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17, 2024

Xi, Scholz call for mutual progress

Vast potential seen in exploring more stable relations in new fields

By CAO DESHENG

caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn

Mutually beneficial cooperation between China and Germany creates no "risks", but serves as a guarantee for their stable relations and presents opportunities for future development, President Xi Jinping said on Tuesday when meeting in Beijing with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

Scholz was on a three-day official visit to China, which started on Sunday. His trip came after Germany's federal government pushed for a "de-risking" policy in July to reduce "economic reliance" on China.

Xi emphasized the deep interconnection of the industrial and supply chains between the two countries as well as the high-level market interdependence.

He said that there is vast potential for them to explore win-win cooperation, not only in traditional sectors such as machine manufacturing and the automotive industry, but also in emerging fields including green transformation, digital development and artificial intelligence.

Noting that both China and Germany support free trade and economic globalization, Xi urged the countries to be vigilant against rising protectionism and view the issue of production capacity objectively in line with economic principles.

China has made significant contributions to addressing global supply challenges, inflation pressures and climate change through exports of electric vehicles, lithium batteries and photovoltaic products, he said.

Xi noted that there is no fundamental conflict of interest between China and Germany, and they do not pose a security threat to each other.

Cooperation between the two countries is beneficial for both sides as well as for the world, he said, adding that the more turbulent the world becomes, the more important it is for both sides to enhance the resilience and vitality of their bilateral relationship.

China and Germany should uphold independence and autonomy in engaging in multilateral cooperation, and jointly promote practical actions from the international community to address global challenges, such as climate change, imbalanced development and regional conflicts, contributing



President Xi Jinping and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz talk while walking at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing on Tuesday. DING HAITAO / XINHUA

Inside

- Editorial, page 11
- Comment, page 12

more to the balance and stability of the world, Xi said.

While reiterating China's commitment to opening-up, Xi urged Germany to provide a fair, transparent, open and nondiscriminatory business environment for Chinese enterprises.

Scholz said that Germany is willing to further strengthen bilateral relations with China and deepen bilateral dialogue and cooperation in various fields. Germany is committed to upholding a multilateral international order, while rejecting confrontation and advocating free trade, he said.

As an important member of the European Union, Germany is willing to play an active role in promoting the positive development of EU-China relations, Scholz added.

The visiting German delega-

tion included the federal ministers of environment, agriculture and transportation, as well as many German business leaders, including senior executives from BMW, Bayer, Mercedes-Benz, Siemens and ThyssenKrupp.

Ola Kaellenius, chairman of the board of management of Mercedes-Benz Group AG, told China Daily that China plays a pivotal role in Mercedes-Benz's global strategy, serving not only as the home of its largest market and one of its largest manufacturing sites, but also as one of its global centers for technological innovation.

"We will continue to invest in China, strengthen cooperation with our Chinese partners, promote electrification as well as digital transformation, and continue to contribute to Germany-China economic and trade cooperation," he said.

During the meeting, Xi and Scholz also exchanged views on the Ukraine crisis, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and other issues of common interest.

On the Ukraine crisis, both leaders expressed their commitment to upholding the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, opposing the use of nuclear weapons or attacks on nuclear facilities that are used for peaceful purposes, and addressing food security issues in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Xi proposed four principles to prevent the Ukraine crisis from spiraling out of control and to restore peace at an early date.

"First, we should prioritize the upholding of peace and stability and refrain from seeking selfish gains. Second, we should cool down the situation and not add fuel to the fire. Third, we need to create conditions for the restoration of peace and refrain from further exacerbating tensions. Fourth, we should reduce the negative impact on the world economy and refrain from undermining the stability of global industrial and supply chains," he said.

Xi encouraged and supported all efforts conducive to a peaceful resolution of the Ukraine crisis, expressing China's willingness to maintain close communication with relevant parties, including Germany, regarding the timely convening of an international conference accepted by both Russia and Ukraine, with equal participation from all relevant parties for fair discussions on all peace proposals.

On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, both sides agreed on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2728 to prevent further escalation of the situation, ensure unimpeded and sustainable humanitarian access to the Gaza Strip, and support the early negotiation-based resolution of the Palestinian issue on the basis of the two-state solution.

They also called on influential countries to play a constructive role in maintaining regional peace and stability, and to push for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian issue.

First-quarter GDP grows 5.3 percent year-on-year

By OUYANG SHIJIA and LIU ZHIHUA

China's economy grew more strongly than expected in the first quarter though pressures and challenges from insufficient demand persist, bolstering the case for more policy stimulus to consolidate the recovery trend.

Officials and analysts said that policymakers are expected to introduce more supportive measures for the development of the real economy and to restore consumer confidence and address property woes. Potential moves include increasing support to bolster emerging industries, as well as support for completing unfinished pre-sold homes and allocating more resources to support household spending, they said.

Projections indicate a potential acceleration in China's GDP growth in the second quarter, given the low comparison base. However, analysts cautioned that strong stimulus efforts must persist, and they advocated continued fiscal and monetary support in the coming months.

China's GDP grew 5.3 percent year-on-year in the first quarter of this year, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Tuesday.

Sheng Laiyun, deputy head of the NBS, said the strong economic performance in the first quarter was led by notable improvement in industry and services.

NBS data showed China's value-added industrial output grew 6.1 percent year-on-year in the first quarter, after a 4.6 percent annual gain in 2023. Fixed-asset investment rose 4.5 percent in the first three months year-on-year, while retail sales grew 4.7 percent during the same period.

Looking forward, "the economy will continue the recovery trend, underpinned by global economic recovery, stepped-up policy support and the anticipated strong holiday business", Sheng told a news conference in Beijing on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Sheng noted that China's housing market is still being adjusted. He said that more efforts will be made to increase support for the development of the real economy, foster emerging industries and boost consumer confidence.

See *Growth*, page 3

CHINESE FAST-FOOD CHAINS TASTE SUCCESS AT HOME, ABROAD

Infusion of traditional flavors, new generation of diners have industry sizzling

By LI YINGXUE

liyngxue@chinadaily.com.cn



Wrapped in a bright red cape, with a horn, round belly and starry eyes under flame-shaped eyebrows, Ta Lion has become a beacon for a new generation of China's fast-food lovers.

Ta Lion is the brand ambassador for the Tastien burger chain. Since its establishment in 2012, Tastien, also known as Tasiting, has quickly spread to over 7,000 locations across the nation, serving up Chinese-style burgers that stand out for their hand-rolled, freshly baked buns.

Their offerings blend Western-style burgers with traditional Chi-

nese flavors, offering choices such as Peking duck, garlic pork and Mapo tofu. At the end of March, Tastien launched a cumin-flavored duck burger, which has been a hit with customers.

Wang Ping, a 43-year-old Beijing resident, said: "I had my first taste of their burger when I was very hungry and had no other fast-food choice in the neighborhood. It turned out to be juicy and full of flavor. I have been buying them ever since then."

See *Fast food*, page 2

Knife crime



Police investigators inspect the Assyrian Christ the Good Shepherd Church in Wakely, Sydney, Australia, on Tuesday after a knife attack during a service the night before. JAIMI JOY / REUTERS

www.chinadailyglobal.com

Member of ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Newsstand prices: US \$1, Canada C\$1, UK 1£, EU 1€, Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling, Asia Pacific: Thailand 120, this; Philippines 120 php; Myanmar 2000 kyat; Japan 210 yen; Dubai 10 dirham; Pakistan 300 rupee

Attempts on to trigger South China Sea conflict

The Philippines is unfortunately attempting to follow a one dimensional foreign policy, putting it on a dangerous path. This is because overreliance on the United States against China does not align with the Association of South East Asian Nation's basic principles of independence, neutrality and centrality, and ultimately it would be on the receiving end.

Not soon after its first joint maritime exercise with Australia, Japan and the US close to Chinese waters, the Philippines joined the first trilateral US-Japan-Philippines leaders' summit. Its joint statement singled out China as a potential target. Both are considered to be serious attempts to bully China with the intent of igniting a power struggle in the South China Sea.

By disregarding former agreements with China on handling maritime disputes especially on Ren'ai Reef, the current administration of the Philippines is purposefully creating frictions in the South China Sea, boosting and justifying the presence

WORLD WATCH By Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan

of the US military on its land.

Systematically, both countries have increased their presence in Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Force Base, expanded a total of nine bases — some very close to Chinese territory — and inched toward a confrontational situation in the South China Sea.

The further legitimizing of military ties and cooperation with the US by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr by signing Executive Order No. 57 section 7 on March 25, enables Philippine agencies to "accept donations, contributions, grants, bequests, or gifts from domestic or foreign sources".

It is feared that the order would facilitate foreign interference and that regional maritime conflicts would be ignited and increase.

See *Relations*, page 3

PAGE TWO



From left: A deliveryman waits to get food at a Tastien outlet in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, in October. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A stall of liangpi, a cold noodle dish, attracts visitors during an Asian food festival in Markham, Ontario, Canada, in June. YU RUIDONG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE Vendors serve food at a Dragon Fest carnival celebrating Chinese street food culture in New York, in June. LIAO PAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

From page 1

The rise of Tastien is part of a broader boom in Chinese fast food, with chains like Liao Xiang Ji and Micun Banfan expanding rapidly. Some, like Bingz, have seen success abroad, challenging global giants and eyeing markets like the United States.

Culinary heritage

This trend reflects a growing appetite among young consumers for fast food that incorporates Chinese culinary traditions and ingredients, driven by a renewed interest in cultural heritage.

Tastien, in particular, embraces Chinese cultural elements not only in its menu, but also in its branding and store design, combining traditional motifs with a modern aesthetic.

During the Spring Festival, Tastien teamed up with reality show *National Treasure* to introduce a special "Treasure Basin" set meal. Inspired by a lacquered carved box, an item once used by royalty for storing valuables or food, the meal symbolizes wealth and prosperity.

On Tastien's official WeChat account, it collected ideas for co-branding from netizens, with posters hoping it could collaborate with the Palace Museum and domestic comics like *The Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* to promote traditional culture.

Meanwhile, even Western fast food chains in China are weaving Chinese cuisine into their offerings, from *youtiao* (deep-fried dough sticks), tea eggs and porridge at KFC to pickled vegetable and bamboo-shoot chicken porridge and soy milk at McDonald's, highlighting a wider trend of cultural fusion in the fast-food industry.

Chen Yong, an associate professor at EHL Hospitality Business School in Switzerland who focuses on tourism and hospitality marketing and economics, sees the fast-food industry's quick service, efficiency, and affordability as key to its high customer return rate. For fast-food chains, this means expanding their presence with more outlets is essential for accessibility, Chen said.

He also views China's vast catering market as ripe with opportunities for Chinese fast-food brands, especially since Western fast food has already paved the way for demand among Chinese consumers.

A January report by the World Federation of Chinese Catering Industry highlighted that young people, particularly students and young professionals aged between 18 and 24, are the backbone of food consumption, valuing cost-effectiveness and convenience above all.

This demographic is also the primary customer base for fast food, influenced by their income, expenditure, and a preference for a fast-paced lifestyle encouraged by short-video platforms, Chen said.

Lao Xiang Ji, a chain with over 1,000 locations nationwide, is rapidly expanding to meet the demands of these young consumers. Known for its quick-serve chicken dishes, Lao Xiang Ji has tapped into health trends by collaborating with Bohee Health to launch a fat-reduced menu, in line with the popularity of the movie *You Only Live Once* and a growing consumer preference for low-calorie options.

They've even introduced a "Nutritionist Recommended" section on their mini app, complete with calorie counts for each dish. This initiative has been well received online, with social media users launching challenges like the "14-Day Lao Xiang Ji Eating Challenge".

Chen believes that for Chinese fast-food chains to continue growing and to compete with Western fast food, they must maintain their price advantage, ensure the quality of their dishes, and gradually increase their coverage area.

China's domestic fast-food brands are relatively young, he said. "Chinese entrepreneurs should have a

Fast food: Blending tradition, efficiency, and global expansion



Customers wait in line to get roujiamo meat burgers at a Bingz restaurant in Singapore in December. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

vision to ensure their Chinese fast-food brands still exist 20 to 30 years from now," Chen said. "These emerging brands should strive to explore business models, products, and services that are better than their competitors."

Chen hopes that Chinese catering brands consider the global market in their development plans for the future. "Chinese culinary culture is among the best in the world. Foreign tourists who come to China and want to try Chinese food would also be willing to try Chinese fast food," Chen said. "By providing good products and services, coupled with the advantage of pricing, we can also offer a great experience for foreign tourists."

Word-of-mouth appeal

According to the 2023 Snack and Fast Food Category Development Report by the Hongcan Industry Research Institute, the market surpassed 80 trillion yuan (\$11.25 trillion) by the end of 2023, with over 4 million snack and fast-food outlets nationwide. About 30 percent of brands have over 50 outlets, and 2.9 percent have more than 500.

Chinese snack and fast-food options are diverse, including noodles, rice dishes, buns, dumplings, wontons, pancakes, and porridge. Typically, Chinese cuisine offers a wide range of flavors and involves complex cooking processes, which can be a challenge for standardization compared with Western fast food. However, Chinese fast-food chains are finding ways to adapt.

For Wang Guoyu, founder of Nan Cheng Xiang in Beijing, efficiency is crucial in the food industry. With over 200 outlets, Nan Cheng Xiang earned 1.5 billion yuan in revenue last year, setting a benchmark for fast-food efficiency. Each outlet generates about 10 million yuan annually, which is five to ten times the industry average.

Nan Cheng Xiang mainly operates

as a community canteen in residential areas, offering all-day service and a cost-effective menu. For instance, the average amount spent on lunch is around 30 yuan, which attracts regular customers such as parents with children and seniors.

A notable aspect of Nan Cheng Xiang's strategy is its exclusive focus on Beijing for the past 21 years, without franchising, financing, IPO plans, or advertising. Instead, it relies on word-of-mouth and the appeal of its outlets. Wang believes that expanding the company's footprint in Beijing is more effective than spending on ads.

Unlike mall-based outlets, community stores have flexible operating hours, opening from 6am to 10pm to maximize revenue. Wang said that rent and labor are the major cost factors in Beijing's food industry, and full-day operations require careful management.

To enhance efficiency, Nan Cheng Xiang continuously adjusts kitchen layouts and streamlines processes. They employ a unique organizational structure, known as the "UFO-shaped model", which eliminates middle layers and enables direct

communication between the headquarters and outlets. The team at headquarters is kept lean, with just over 30 staff members.

Efficient ingredient sourcing and distribution are also priorities for Nan Cheng Xiang. Besides their central kitchen in Daxing district, they are building another one, Wang said. Vegetables are processed at their factory in Hebei province, 60 kilometers from Beijing, and delivered to stores ready for cooking.

Selecting prime locations in communities can be challenging due to limited availability. Nan Cheng Xiang's site selection team uses digital tools and on-site inspections to make informed decisions. "However, securing desired locations often requires patience, with waiting times of up to two to three years," he said.

Nan Cheng Xiang's outlets also undergo daily adjustments based on market trends and efficiency improvements.

Partner system

Micun Banfan, a brand specializing in authentic Korean cuisine from Yanji, Jilin province, has recently become the new favorite



Diners line up outside a Chinese restaurant during the Spring Festival holiday in New York on Jan 28. LIAO PAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

feature of Chinese fast-food chains.

Bingz, a Chinese fast-food chain famous for its *roujiamo* meat burgers, decided to slash prices in early 2023. Some dishes like the chicken bone spicy and sour noodles dropped from 15.75 yuan to just 9.9 yuan for a limited time.

Founder Meng Bing said their market research highlighted the importance of offering value for money. "We've noticed a shift away from impulsive spending to a more practical mindset, where people want quality products and services for their money," Meng said.

At the end of last year, Bingz opened a new factory in Leling, Shandong province. The factory processes noodles for the global market and meat products for domestic tastes.

Bingz also sources ingredients globally to ensure quality and affordability. "Our restaurants are adopting a low-margin, high-volume sales strategy, moving away from high prices to attract more customers," Meng explained.

Currently, Bingz has about 200 stores across China, spanning 13 cities including Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Guangzhou, Guangdong province. This year, Bingz plans to expand to more provincial capitals, aiming to surpass 500 stores by the year's end.

Going global

In 2021, Bingz opened its first international restaurant in Toronto, Canada. Today, Bingz operates five stores in Ontario province, with a single outlet's annual revenue exceeding 20 million yuan, outperforming established brands like Burger King, Starbucks, and Subway, Meng said.

The menu favorites in Canada include the Signature Beef Burger, Black Pepper Beef Burger, Butter Chicken Burger, Plum Fizz and Cold Noodles Salad.

New restaurants are set to open in British Columbia later this year, with Bingz aiming for a total of 15 restaurants by the end of 2024, Meng said.

The success in Canada has encouraged Bingz to enter the United States market. A central factory is being built in San Diego to serve North America, with plans to open 10 restaurants in California by the end of 2025.

Bingz currently employs over 300 people in Canada and the US, with the number expected to grow to nearly 1,000 by the end of the year. "The US is seen as Bingz's biggest market outside China, with a target of 3,000 restaurants introduced in multiple five-year phases," Meng said.

The first five-year phase includes opening 300 restaurants with anticipated annual revenues of \$4 million to \$6 million.

Last year, Bingz also launched in Singapore, and rapidly became popular. Meng doesn't view Singapore as a market but as a regional hub for Southeast Asia, with plans to open more than 50 restaurants in the city.

Singapore's restaurants have also attracted customers from Malaysia and Indonesia, particularly for the chain's Butter Chicken Burger, Sizzling Chili Noodles, and Hong Kong Milk Tea.

Meng intends to extend Bingz's reach into Japan, Australia, and the United Kingdom in the near future, with the aim of entering 20 countries within three years. Packaged food products from Bingz are scheduled to launch in the second quarter of this year, targeting swift entry into the global market through offline channels like Costco and Walmart, as well as online platforms such as Amazon and Shopee.

Established in 2014, Bingz has experienced significant growth over the past decade. Meng's vision for the next five years is to see Bingz emerge as a globally influential multinational chain and a distinguished ambassador of Chinese culture.

of working people. Founded in 2014, it now boasts 1,000 stores and is nicknamed the "Northeast McDonald's".

In its kitchen, customers can witness the preparation process as staff pour pre-prepared ingredients onto an iron plate, and heat and mix them with a pre-prepared sauce before serving a sizzling dish.

Despite some reservations about pre-prepared dishes, Micun Banfan's use of quality ingredients and affordable pricing (around 20 yuan) has earned it the title of "the favorite work meal of working people" on social media. Served in steaming stone pots with specially made protective paper to prevent splashes, it creates a different dining experience.

Zhou Ning, general manager of Yanbian Micun Catering Management Company, said that the brand's mission is to offer great food at a reasonable price. In 2021, its traditional Korean cooking techniques were recognized as an intangible cultural heritage in Jilin. That same year, Micun Banfan moved its headquarters to Shenyang, capital of Liaoning province, and introduced a partner system to implement its expansion.

Under the system, partners, store managers, master chefs, regional managers, and site selection teams share the benefits and risks together. This approach allows the brand to expand without shouldering all the operating costs.

"We continuously refine our partner mechanism to ensure mutual success," Zhou said. "Our regional managers support store managers, focusing on customer satisfaction and maintaining our brand's reputation."

Micun Banfan uses a structured training system for all its staff, with the aim of fostering a culture of continuous improvement and passing on knowledge.

Competitive pricing stands out as a

TOP NEWS

Restoration nears completion



People walk past a scaffolded Notre Dame Cathedral on Monday in Paris, France. Monday marked the fifth anniversary of the devastating fire that engulfed and severely damaged the medieval structure. The process of restoring the monument is expected to be completed by the end of the year. CHRISTOPHE ENA / AP

Beijing taking steps to ease Mideast tension

Spillovers of Gaza conflict felt elsewhere, regional stability at stake

By ZHOU JIN
zhoujin@chinadaily.com.cn

Inside

- Editorial, page 11
- See more, page 7

China has stepped up diplomatic efforts to rein in the conflict between Iran and Israel, with Foreign Minister Wang Yi holding phone conversations with his counterparts in Iran and Saudi Arabia, and pledging that Beijing will work to prevent the regional security environment from deteriorating.

The phone calls were made on Monday evening, a day after Iran launched drones and missiles targeting Israel, which Teheran said was in retaliation for an airstrike on April 1 that hit an Iranian diplomatic building in the Syrian capital of Damascus.

During the phone talks, Wang emphasized that the current escalation of tension in the Middle East is the latest spillover effect of the Gaza conflict, and the top priorities include immediately realizing an unconditional and lasting ceasefire, effectively protecting civilians and ensuring the uninterrupted flow of humanitarian assistance.

China believes that Iran can han-

dle the situation well and spare the region further turmoil, while safeguarding its own sovereignty and dignity, Wang told Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

He appreciated Iran's emphasis on not targeting regional and neighboring countries as well as its reiteration on continuously pursuing a good-neighborly and friendly policy.

Amir-Abdollahian briefed Wang on Iran's position, saying that the United Nations Security Council did not make a necessary response to the Israeli attack, and that Iran has the right to self-defense in response to the violation of its sovereignty.

Noting that the current situation in the region is very sensitive, Amir-Abdollahian said that Iran is willing to exercise restraint and has no intention of further escalating the situation.

When speaking with Saudi For-

eign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, Wang said that Beijing appreciates Riyadh's emphasis on resolving issues through diplomatic means, adding that China is willing to work together with Saudi Arabia to avoid further escalation of confrontation.

Faisal told Wang that Saudi Arabia expects China to play an active and important role in upholding regional peace and stability, adding that his country is willing to strengthen communication and coordination with China to promote an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza as well as start the implementation of the two-state solution.

Also on Monday, Zhai Jun, special envoy of the Chinese government to the Middle East issue, met with Israeli Ambassador to China Irit Ben-Abba Vitale, hours before Wang's phone talks with the foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Liu Zhongmin, a professor of Middle East studies at Shanghai International Studies University, said that China seeks to maintain communication and coordination

with relevant parties that can play their roles in the region and around the globe to jointly cool down the current tension in the Middle East.

The recent confrontation between Iran and Israel comes amid the unresolved long-standing differences between the two nations, and an escalation of the conflict will negatively impact the Middle East situation, he said.

Liu said the spillover effects of the Gaza conflict are being felt in various directions, including the Red Sea, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and the Persian Gulf region, adding that any further escalation of tension between Iran and Israel will undoubtedly affect stability in the Gulf.

Since China appointed a special envoy on the Middle East issue in 2002, it has been striving to play a constructive role in promoting peace talks on many regional hot spot issues, such as the situations in Syria and Iraq as well as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the professor said.

China's mediation of a landmark agreement last year to restore diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia is a highlight of its diplomatic efforts in the region, Liu said.

Through communication with Saudi Arabia, a country that is capable of exerting influence on both the United States and Israel, China is playing a constructive role and making contributions to maintain security and stability in the Middle East, especially in the Gulf region, he added.

Archaeological finds expected to shed light on Chu vassal state

By WANG RU in Huainan, Anhui
wangru@chinadaily.com.cn

Chu, a vassal state in China over 2,000 years ago, left a lot of charming legends in history. Thanks to new discoveries at a key site, its stories can be told more vividly today.

One of the largest-scale Chu state tombs with the highest rank and most complex structure dating back to the late Warring States Period (475-221 BC) recently underwent an excavation, which is expected to help promote understanding of a once powerful state in its final days, cultural heritage experts and authorities said on Tuesday at a news conference in Huainan, Anhui province. The news conference was held by the National Cultural Heritage Administration.

The Wuwangdun Site, located in Huainan, includes a cemetery surrounded by a moat, covering an area of about 1.5 square kilometers.

In the cemetery, there are pits for chariots and sacrificial items as well as tombs accompanying the No 1 tomb, the largest, which is believed to be that of the cemetery's owner, said Gong Xicheng, a researcher at the Anhui Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology and head of the archaeological team.

Zhang Zhiguo, a researcher at the National Centre for Archaeology, said the research team had succeeded in unearthing fragile artifacts such as burial chamber cover boards, bamboo mats on the boards and lacquer items.

Meanwhile, Wu Pingchuan, head of Huainan's publicity department, said there are plans to build an archaeological ruins park to better showcase the archaeological findings.

The Wuwangdun tomb had been robbed multiple times, and the local police retrieved more than 70 cultural relics in recent years.

As a result of these robberies, the tomb had been severely damaged. This led to concerns that there had been changes in the environment for buried artifacts, and a rescue excavation was carried out at the site in 2020.

The No 1 tomb has burial chambers arranged in the shape of a cross, with eight side chambers around a central one, according to archaeologists. The top of each chamber is covered with four layers of planks. Ink inscriptions were found on the cover boards, indicating the functions of each chamber, said Gong from the Anhui Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology.

Cultural relics unearthed from chambers include bronze ritual artifacts, daily utensils, wooden figurines and musical instruments, Gong added.

As a powerful vassal state, at its height Chu once ruled a vast area

along the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River. The state lasted for about 800 years before it was conquered in 223 BC by Emperor Qinshihuang, who later established the first united dynasty of China.

King Kaolie of Chu moved the state's capital eastward to Shouchun, now Shouxiang county in Huainan, in 241 BC, to distance it from the rising Qin state to its west.

Eighteen years later, Chu was defeated by Qin, making Shouchun the state's last capital, and the Wuwangdun tomb is about 15 kilometers from the Shouchun city ruins, said Gong.

Last year, the Huainan city government built an archaeological building, which houses 11 conservation laboratories for the study and protection of lacquerware, textiles, organic and inorganic materials, low-oxygen sterilization, relics analysis and testing, and material storage.

"The facilities have provided strong support for the archaeological excavation and conservation work of the site," said Zhang from the National Centre for Archaeology.

A highlight of these efforts is the extraction of bamboo mats on the top of burial chambers' cover boards. Experts analyzed the mats' size and preservation, and applied a method of spraying menthol on their surface for reinforcement and then extracting the mats one by one.

So far, 78 bamboo mats have been extracted, with each one measuring approximately 45 centimeters in width and the longest one around 7.5 meters. The total area of the extracted bamboo mats exceeds 200 square meters, said Zhang.

"This is currently the largest-scale ancient bamboo mat extraction project conducted worldwide. It has also formed a technical method for the on-site reinforcement and extraction of bamboo mats, as well as their packaging, transportation and protection," Zhang said.

"The Wuwangdun No 1 tomb has a huge size and is the largest Chu state tomb we have excavated to date," said Gong. He explained that it was sealed off with an earth mound, which had a diameter of over 130 meters at the bottom, and the burial pit exceeded 400 square meters.

"It serves as an important example for studying the construction techniques of large-scale tombs during the late Warring States Period," he said.

"Moreover, since the tomb was from a crucial period when the feudal state system was disintegrating and the formation of a unified country was imminent, it provides systematic information for our studies on the formation of a unified country and its culture during the Qin (221-206 BC) and Han (206 BC-AD 220) dynasties," said Gong.

Growth: Recovery trend expected to continue

From page 1

Lu Ting, chief China economist at Nomura, said that while China's first-quarter real GDP growth beat expectations, March activity data was well below expectations.

"Activity data may drop further from March on weak momentum," Lu said. "Some sectors, especially exports, may hold up relatively well on falling prices and robust external demand."

He said the country might introduce more forceful measures to address the property woes in the coming months, especially regarding support for completing unfinished pre-sold homes.

China's economy is affected by the downturn in its property sector, said the International Monetary Fund's latest World Economic Outlook. The IMF estimated that China will grow at 4.6 percent this year, unchanged from the previous forecast in January.

Louise Loo, lead economist at British think tank Oxford Economics, said her team expects government bond issuance to pick up again in the third quarter.

Activity data may drop further from March on weak momentum. Some sectors, especially exports, may hold up relatively well on falling prices and robust external demand."

Lu Ting,
chief China economist
at Nomura

Despite the fluctuations in March, Zhou Maohua, a researcher at China Everbright Bank, said he believes the economy is well on track to a steady recovery in the following months, given the continued recovery in industrial production and investment and the gradual improvement in consumption.

He said that China "still has ample policy space to bolster the

world's second-largest economy".

On the monetary front, Huang Yiping, dean of Peking University's National School of Development, said the US Federal Reserve might cut the policy rate this year, which "should also create more room for the People's Bank of China to ease monetary policy if it wants to".

Tang Yao, an associate professor of applied economics at Peking University's Guanghua School of Management, said the United States should have been more cautious with its monetary policy to avoid negative effects in emerging markets.

"The US adopted an extremely loose monetary policy during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to out-of-control inflation. It then raised interest rates frantically and rapidly, which has had a severe spillover effect on economies globally," Tang said.

If the US dollar remains strong, "the emerging markets will face higher pressure to keep capital from flowing away to the US, especially emerging markets with relatively less room for macroeconomic policy maneuvering," he said.

Zhou Lanxun contributed to this story.

Contact the writers at
ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn

Relations: China moves lawful, justified

From page 1

The Philippines' heavy dependence on the US to advance its position in the South China Sea is truly hurting Philippine-Chinese relations, as Beijing's Foreign Ministry spokespersons have reiterated that Manila should keep its word to remove the dilapidated Philippine navy vessel in Ren'ai Reef as soon as possible and stop encroaching on Chinese interests in the area.

Moreover, China has emphasized that it has indubitable territorial ownership and sovereign integrity of Nanhai Zhudao (the South China Sea Islands), including Ren'ai Reef and other features in the region occupied by the Philippines.

Obviously the Philippines acting as a pawn for the US could not receive support from other regional countries.

Most ASEAN member countries do not appreciate the Philippines' obsessive tone against China and its deviation from the true spirit of ASEAN, which favors ASEAN centrality and consensus building with China. Manila's push from under US' wing on a track of conflict could sabotage regional peace, freedom and neutrality.

No doubt both China and ASEAN

members in general desire that the South China Sea should be a region of peace and stability, unlike those who cling to or live by hegemonic power.

China represents the collective hope of the Global South. Southeast Asian countries' relationship with China are improving, while confidence in the US as a strategic partner and provider of regional security has declined significantly. China is also the biggest trading, manufacturing partner and investor in most South Asian countries which reflects its strategic importance in stimulating regional economic recovery and supply chains.

Moreover, China is expected to firmly guard its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests as its peaceful maritime operations in the East China Sea and South China Sea remain lawful, justified and restrained.

Yet the US, with one of the largest embassies among US missions abroad in Manila and increasing staff in its military bases, has been seeking to fire up tension and even conflict in the Asia-Pacific, especially in the South China Sea, which puts the Philippines on a volcano.

Under these circumstances, any military misadventure and inflammatory statements by any party

under the instigation of external forces should not be allowed to undermine the overall mutually beneficial partnership between the ASEAN and China.

Thus US-Philippine military cooperation targeting China or another third country should be discouraged and jointly discarded. Any conflict in the South China Sea would be a disaster for the Philippines, including its blue economy and tourism industry.

The emerging geopolitical trends spoiling peace prospects could trigger increasingly massive domestic dissatisfaction among Philippine politicians, civil society and business community.

Thus hawks of the Philippines should avoid borrowed wisdom, weapons and wonderful pledges of the US to disturb the deep waters of the South China Sea, and should return to resettle the issue directly and bilaterally with China. Otherwise, it would be simply wandering in wonderlands.

The author is executive director of the Center for South Asia and International Studies in Islamabad, and director of the Global Development and Connectivity Institute in Islamabad. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Culture
camp

Foreign students at a spring camp in Urumqi, capital of the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, learn the art of tea making from a student at Xinjiang Normal University on Monday. The opening ceremony of the 2024 Chinese Bridge Spring Camp for Students from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Countries was held at the university on the same day. Nearly 500 young students from SCO member states are taking part in the 15-day camp to experience Chinese culture.

WANG FEI / XINHUA

More cargo,
passengers
flow in
1st quarter

By YANG ZEKUN

The civil aviation sector set records for passenger and cargo and mail volumes in the first quarter of this year, the Civil Aviation Administration of China said on Tuesday.

Throughput totaled 34.93 billion ton-kilometers, up 45.6 percent year-on-year and 12.9 percent more than in the first quarter of 2019. Domestic routes accounted for 23.86 billion ton-kilometers, while international routes accounted for 11.07 billion.

Civil aviation operators transported nearly 180 million passengers in the first quarter, representing a 37.7 percent year-on-year increase and a 10.2 percent increase compared to the same period in 2019.

Domestic passenger transport routes served 160 million passengers, up 14.3 percent compared to the same period in 2019, while international routes served 14.12 million passengers, down 22 percent from the same period in 2019.

Over 2 million metric tons of goods were transported in the first quarter, up 34.4 percent year-on-year and a 19.6 percent increase compared to the same period in 2019.

Domestic cargo transport routes accounted for 1.23 million tons, 8.2 percent more than in the same period in 2019, while international routes accounted for 775,000 tons, up 43.6 percent compared to the same period in 2019.

Civil aviation operators transported 54.73 million passengers last month, up 25.7 percent year-on-year and a 7.3 percent increase compared to the same period in 2019. Cargo transport volume reached 708,000 tons, up 28.2 percent year-on-year increase and a 12.3 percent increase compared to the same period in 2019.

Cafe 'maid assistant' services targeted

By YANG ZEKUN
yangzekun@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese authorities are cracking down on businesses in the tabletop gaming and esports cafe sector that promote services like "maid-style kneeling service" and "maid assistant", which officials say demean women and violate their rights.

The Supreme People's Procuratorate, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions and the All-China Women's Federation released details of 12 cases on Monday aimed at protecting the rights of women and children.

One case involved authorities in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, who uncovered the maid issue while investigating a sexual assault case in March last year.

Prosecutors found that several gaming cafes were advertising "maid-style kneeling service" and "maid assistant" services on social media. Some videos garnered over 5 million views, raising concerns about their societal impact.

The advertisements depicted women performing servile acts such as kneeling to serve tea, feeding customers, providing massages, and bowing while welcoming them as "masters". Officials said such practices were degrading.

Some businesses offering the services lacked proper systems to prevent sexual harassment, leaving female employees vulnerable.

The Yiwu procuratorate determined the practices violated the Civil Code, the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests, the Law on Advertisement and other regulations.

Public hearings involving experts agreed the services violated social norms and harmed women's dignity.

In October, the Yiwu procuratorate issued recommendations to local market regulators and cultural tourism departments urging increased supervision of advertising that demeaned women and inspections of businesses offering improper "maid" services. The Yiwu Public

Security Bureau was also advised to enhance security management at related venues.

Subsequent inspections led to the removal of numerous advertisements and videos, and some entertainment venues established sexual harassment prevention systems.

The Supreme People's Procuratorate highlighted the case's significance in the use of public interest litigation to safeguard women's rights.

It said new entertainment industries, like esports and tabletop gaming, have created new service formats like "gaming assistants". However, the lack of clear industry regulations and inadequate oversight had led to violations of public order and women's rights.

Authorities are using public interest litigation to work with women's federations and urge multiple departments to fulfill their legal obligations, promoting a collaborative approach to protecting women's rights and regulating the development of new industries.

Courts told to focus on juvenile crimes

By CAO YIN
caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn98,000
individuals

under the age of 18 were criminally punished from 2021 to 2023.

Chinese courts, while continuing to protect children through case hearings, have been mandated by the Supreme People's Court, China's top court, to focus more on juvenile crimes and the underlying issues behind them.

The directive, which aims to create a better environment for minors to grow up under the rule of law, comes in response to the persistent severity of juvenile delinquency in recent years, with cases showing an upward trend.

From 2021 to 2023, over 98,000 individuals under the age of 18 were criminally punished in more than 73,000 cases, according to the top court. It highlighted internet addiction, insufficient family care and school bullying as major issues requiring urgent attention and resolution in addressing juvenile crimes.

Of the minor offenders, nearly 60 percent who committed robbery, theft and violent crimes were found to be long-term internet addicts, or

were more susceptible to harmful online influences. Additionally, about 30 percent of juvenile defendants who committed violent crimes between 2021 and 2023 came from left-behind or single-parent families, indicating a lack of parental care, education and supervision as contributing factors.

Many cases revealed instances where young criminals had either bullied others or been victims of bullying in school, without timely intervention from school authorities, leading to more serious offenses. In response, the top court called for a collaborative effort among schools, families, social organizations and government agencies to establish a joint work system to address bullying and ensure timely assistance for bullied children.

The work system will also address the problem of internet addiction.

Judges across the nation were also told to proactively address the needs of children involved in lawsuits, providing stronger legal education to both the children and their parents to correct misbehavior and prevent juvenile delinquency.

The top court emphasized the importance of high-quality handling of cases to combat juvenile offenses. Public security departments were urged to conduct tighter inspections on entertainment venues, where many juvenile crimes and incidents in which minors are victimized occur.

While addressing juvenile crimes, courts were also urged to take measures to protect the legitimate rights and interests of children and women who are victims. Chinese courts issued 5,695 personal safety protection orders last year for women experiencing domestic violence, up 41.5 percent year-on-year — the highest growth rate in nearly five years.

Age limit raised
to give women
better support

Women age 40 and below can apply for NSSF Youth Projects, up from 35

By YAN DONGJIE
yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

To offer more support to young female academics, the National Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences announced a policy change on Friday that raised the age limit for female applicants to National Social Science Fund Youth Projects to 40, five years more than the age limit for male applicants.

The fund's annual projects are designed to cultivate young talent and encourage innovation in social science research. The Youth Projects specifically target early-career scholars.

The age limits for male and female applicants were previously the same.

The policy change follows a similar move by the National Natural Science Foundation of China in 2011, which extended the application age for women to the Youth Science Fund program from 35 to 40.

That adjustment resulted in a significant increase in female applicants, reaching 47.5 percent in 2011, a jump of 11 percentage points from the previous year. As of 2022, women made up 51.15 percent of applicants for NNSFC Youth Science Fund projects.

Jin Kuijuan, a prominent physicist and academician at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, welcomed the growing support for female researchers in China. She highlighted the role of funding agencies like the NNSFC and Outstanding Youth Funds in relaxing age restrictions, acknowledging the time women dedicate to family responsibilities.

Jin's research on the participation of women in physics has revealed that while women represent roughly 30 percent of college students in physics, that number drops to 20 percent for graduate students and a mere 10 percent for professors. Jin attributes the decline to the increased time and energy women devote to family life once they reach a certain age.

"Women bring valuable quali-

ties to scientific research," Jin said. "Their meticulousness, intuition, and resilience contribute significantly to a more comprehensive advancement of science."

Jin Kuijuan, physicist at the Chinese Academy of Sciences

"Their meticulousness, intuition, and resilience contribute significantly to a more comprehensive advancement of science."

Huang Jin, a professor at the China University of Political Science and Law, exemplifies the potential beneficiaries of the policy change. Inspired by the relaxed age limit, she is preparing an application for an NSSF project.

She said the period between the ages of 35 and 40 is a crucial time for researchers to solidify their academic direction. She said the age extension would alleviate pressure on young academics facing a confluence of career advancement, parental responsibilities, and potentially, the demands of raising children under the new three-child policy. For women, the burden of child care can be particularly significant, impacting their research output.

Participation in NSSF projects is highly valued in academic circles, serving as an important criterion for performance evaluations and qualifying researchers to mentor PhD students at top universities.

Huang sees the relaxed age limit as a positive trend, not just for the NSSF program but for funding bodies across the board. "This policy sets a strong example for encouraging young researchers, particularly women, by providing them with more opportunities," she said.

After the storm



Strong winds knocked over a tree in Neijiang, Sichuan province, on Tuesday. The city experienced severe convective weather including thunderstorms, a burst of heavy rain and strong winds on Tuesday morning. Personnel were deployed to clear obstacles from roads, ensuring the safety of residents. HUANG ZHENGHUA / FOR CHINA DAILY

Xizang launches pilot work for cultural relics census

By PALDEN NYIMA
and DAQJIONG in Lhasa

Significant cultural discoveries have been made in Maldrongkar county in Lhasa, capital of the Xizang autonomous region, with 54 cultural relic sites identified since 2012 comprising ancient ruins and buildings, tombs, grotto temples and stone carvings, according to the regional cultural heritage bureau.

To help preserve and document Xizang's rich cultural heritage, the region recently commenced pilot work for the fourth national cultural relics census in Maldrongkar.

Staff members from cultural relics

census departments in the region's seven cities or prefectures participated in the initiative, a pivotal step in the region's commitment to heritage conservation.

The cultural relics census, deemed a fundamental pillar for the development of cultural relics, aims to comprehensively survey and register historical, artistic and scientific relics in the region.

By employing meticulous field investigations and registrations, the census seeks to enrich the cultural connotations and expand the scope of cultural relics protection.

The fourth cultural relics census encompasses critical tasks includ-

ing the re-examination of previously identified and registered immovable cultural relics, the investigation and registration of newly discovered relics, the establishment of a comprehensive catalog and the development of robust teams for cultural relics protection.

The census will establish a comprehensive database of immovable cultural relics for the region, facilitating shared access through the national land planning "one map" implementation supervision information system.

This will enable government agencies, research institutions and the public to access different levels

of data services, fostering a broader understanding and appreciation of Xizang's rich cultural heritage.

Maldrongkar, known as the birthplace of King Songtsen Gampo, boasts a profound historical legacy, with landmarks such as the Horkhang Palace and the Jasang Ancient Road making it a significant cradle of Tibetan culture.

The county is currently home to 181 immovable cultural relics.

Chodron, the head of the regional cultural heritage bureau, said that the pilot work will serve as an experimental ground for cultivating census expertise and refining technical processes.

"Launching this work in this county can help cultivate a group of census forces and also test and improve the technical route, work process, standard norms, census system and data collection software for the census work," Chodron said.

During the fourth national cultural relics census, a comprehensive re-examination will be conducted of 4,277 immovable cultural relics identified and registered since the third national census, which ran from 2007 to 2011, alongside investigations and registrations for immovable relics not previously cataloged and those discovered since 2012. The census in Xizang is scheduled to be completed by June 2026.

Chen Jing, deputy secretary of the Lhasa Municipal Party Committee and executive deputy mayor of Lha-

sa, said the leading group for the fourth national cultural relics census in Lhasa has been established. The city has allocated 1.99 million yuan (\$275,000) for the census, with more than 1.73 million yuan earmarked for different counties and districts already. China News Service reported.

Zhao Xingbang, an official from the regional department of culture and tourism, said, "The launch of the fourth national cultural relics census pilot work in the region signifies a crucial step toward preserving and celebrating the region's rich cultural legacy, laying the groundwork for a comprehensive and inclusive documentation of its invaluable heritage."

Contact the writers at
palden_nyima@chinadaily.com.cn

POLICY REVIEW

Action plan to bolster foreign investment

Measures rolled out to enhance reform and opening-up efforts

By WANG KEJU
wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

China has taken pragmatic measures to expand market access, facilitate the flow of talent and scientific research resources, and align with international economic and trade rules as part of the country's efforts to create a favorable business environment and further open up its economy to global investors, officials and experts said.

Though the downward pressure on the world economy continues to mount and the global outlook for cross-border investments appears less optimistic, China's steady economic growth, expanding consumer market and continuous efforts to improve its business climate have positioned it favorably in the global investment landscape, they added.

They made the comments after the State Council, China's Cabinet, rolled out an action plan outlining a series of measures aimed at bolstering the country's international openness and attracting increased foreign investment in mid-March.

While China has achieved significant milestones and has become a global manufacturing powerhouse over the years thanks to its reform and opening-up policy, the emphasis on attracting and utilizing foreign investment still remains crucial.

"The recent release of the action plan once again highlights China's high regard for attracting foreign investment and its commitment to strengthening beneficial interactions with the global economy through high-level opening-up," said Wu Hao, secretary-general of the National Development and Reform Commission, China's top economic regulator.

The plan, accompanied by concrete actions, aims to enhance the confidence of overseas investors and foster increased investment in China, Wu added.

Despite accounting for only 3 percent of the total number of enterprises in China, statistics from the Ministry of Commerce showed that foreign-invested enterprises have made significant contributions to the country's economy. They are responsible for 40 percent of China's foreign trade volume, about one-sixth of its tax revenue and nearly 10 percent of urban employment.

The emphasis on attracting and utilizing foreign investment goes beyond financial considerations. Foreign investors bring advanced technologies, managerial expertise and international networks that contribute to the upgrading of China's industries and the enhancement of its competitiveness in the global market, said Long Guoqiang, vice-president of the State Council's Development Research Center.

Furthermore, the presence of foreign companies introduces new ideas, good practices and higher standards, encouraging domestic firms to improve their efficiency and product offerings. By partnering with foreign companies, China can further improve its production processes, enhance product quality and promote innovation-driven growth, Long said.

The country saw a significant increase in the number of newly established foreign-invested enterprises last year, according to data released by the Ministry of Commerce, with 53,766 companies being set up nationwide, up 39.7 percent year-on-year.

To further leverage the role of foreign investment, expanding market access and increasing the level of liberalization for foreign investment topped the policy measures listed in the action plan. The plan calls for reducing restrictions outlined in the negative list for foreign investment, allowing greater participation of foreign investors in the field of technological innovation through pilot projects, and facilitating the entry of foreign financial institutions into the banking and insurance sectors.

"In addition to market access, the ability to conduct business operations is crucial for foreign financial institutions," said Zhou Yu, head of the international department of the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Since 2018, China has significantly relaxed market access restrictions in the financial services industry, persuading over 110 foreign financial institutions to expand their operations in China. While ensuring fair competition, China aims to forge an enabling business environment for foreign financial institutions, Zhou said.

For example, the central bank has introduced carbon reduction support tools, taking into account the demands of foreign institutions, and has included 13 foreign banks in the scope of institutions eligible for such tools.

The action plan also emphasizes the smooth flow of innovation resources and promotes collaboration between domestic and foreign-funded enterprises.

Specific measures have been in place to facilitate international business personnel exchanges and ease the visa application process for foreign nationals who want to enter China. Notably, the validity period for visas granted to management personnel, technical staff of foreign-invested enterprises, and their spouses and children, has been extended to two years.

Wang Xiaosong, a professor of economics at the Renmin University of China, said that the essence of fostering new quality productive forces lies in innovation-driven growth, and foreign-funded enterprises play a crucial role in introducing innovative elements, including patents, technology and management.

By removing barriers and restrictions and streamlining channels for the flow of innovation resources, China aims to foster a level playing field where both domestic and foreign enterprises have equal access to services and receive equal treatment, and it encourages the exchange of ideas and knowledge to stimulate technological advancements and create a vibrant atmosphere of creativity and entrepreneurship, Wang added.

Meanwhile, facilitating the exchange of international business personnel is an essential aspect of promoting innovation-driven cooperation between domestic and foreign-funded enterprises.

Since last year, the National Immigration Administration has introduced more than 20 policy measures to attract foreign nationals, providing them with better services to help them enter China and adjust to life in the country.

Jia Tongbin, the head of the administration's foreign management department, highlighted the agency's future plans focusing on attracting talent and promoting investment.

In a bid to remain in step with international economic and trade rules, the country continues to advance its accession into the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement.

China has taken the initiative to create pilot

programs on par with the CPTPP standards in some pilot free trade zones, as well as at the Hainan Free Trade Port. Additionally, a group tasked with facilitating the nation's accession to the DEPA has been established to fully advance negotiations, and China is having in-depth exchanges with member countries.

China has faced challenges in its efforts to attract foreign investment as it navigates a landscape marked by intensified competition from developing nations and emerging economies relaxing investment restrictions, as well as "decoupling" and "de-risking" narratives touted by some Western countries, said Wang Xiaohong, a researcher specializing in cross-border investment at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges in Beijing.

That said, China's stable policy environment and comprehensive industrial system provide a solid foundation for foreign investment, said Xu Hongcai, deputy director of the China Association of Policy Science's Economic Policy Committee.

Moreover, China's position as a global economic powerhouse is underpinned by its vast consumer market and ongoing economic transformation. The country's growing middle class and rising disposable income have fueled demand for high-quality products and services, presenting a significant opportunity for foreign businesses, Xu added.

export of services in Hainan grew by 29.6 percent year-on-year in 2023.

The positive outcomes of Hainan's service trade expansion have laid a solid foundation for the implementation of the negative list system nationwide, said He, the ministry spokesman.

Reducing the number of entry barriers for foreign investors in the services sector stimulates competition among domestic service providers. Competition encourages businesses to improve their services, increase efficiency and enhance their overall competitiveness, said Bai Ming, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

The negative list system also encourages cooperation between domestic and foreign service providers. Collaborative efforts can lead to the development of new business models, the sharing of best practices and the expansion of service offerings. The collaborative approach enhances overall market stability and contributes to the growth of the service trade sector, Bai said.

As a result, consumers can benefit from a wider range of high-quality services, while businesses are incentivized to innovate and upgrade their offerings, Bai added.

Policy Digest

Coal reserve system to be established by 2027

China has pledged to set up a coal reserve system by 2027, aiming to secure energy security through more flexible coal supplies, according to plans jointly released on Friday by the National Development and Reform Commission and the National Energy Administration.

By 2030, the country will strive to attain a yearly coal reserve of 300 million metric tons that can be dispatched by the authorities under emergency conditions and improve the capacity and flexibility of coal supplies, according to the document.

The establishment of the system will facilitate the rapid release of coal in extreme situations, such as severe fluctuations in the international energy market, adverse weather conditions and dramatic changes in supply and demand, according to an official with the NEA.

By serving as an emergency reserve, the system will also better leverage the role of coal in power generation, promote the high-quality development of new energy, and facilitate the green and low-carbon transformation of the energy industry, the official added.

Coal has long been China's mainstay fuel. China mined a record 4.66 billion tons of coal last year, up 2.9 percent from the previous year.

The reserve system will remain inactive under normal conditions, the official said.

Zones to boost flow of urban, rural products

Demonstration zones for the coordinated development of rural e-commerce and express delivery services have been established in 117 cities and counties across the country, the Ministry of Transport said in a notice on Thursday.

The zones are part of China's efforts to further facilitate the circulation of agricultural products from villages to cities and consumer goods from urban to rural areas.

The list of the zones has been jointly released by the State Post Bureau, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce.

In Jiashan county of Jiaxing city, Zhejiang province, which is on the list, a three-tier logistics system has been set up to help link production and consumption between urban and rural areas.

The system consists of a county-level agricultural product distribution center, a township-level express logistics public transit center, 20 village-level comprehensive service stations for goods and mail, and numerous end-point express stations in rural residential areas.

Medical reimbursement to be more convenient

New measures will be adopted this year to make it easier for insured people to be reimbursed for their medical bills, according to the National Healthcare Security Administration.

People will also be able to pay their bills at hospitals and pharmacies not only with their medical insurance cards but also via QR codes or through facial recognition, said Fu Chaoqi, an official with the administration, at a news conference on Thursday.

Insured persons will be able to submit reimbursement applications and check their claim status more easily online, Fu said, adding that direct medical reimbursement settlement for bills incurred in different cities will be expanded to cover more chronic diseases to spare patients the burden of paying bills upfront and receiving reimbursements later.

In addition, authorities will streamline the procedures required for parents to get infants covered by national medical insurance schemes and for mothers to get medical bills associated with pregnancy and childbirth reimbursed, he said.

A reduction in the time required for the insured to receive reimbursements is also expected, Fu said.

CHINA DAILY—XINHUA

Clear negative lists to speed up services trade

By WANG KEJU

China has rolled out national and pilot free trade zone versions of negative lists for international trade in services, signaling the country's latest effort to further liberalize its service sector and create a more open and fair business environment, officials and experts said.

The negative lists serve as regulatory frameworks that specify the sectors and business activities in which foreign businesses are restricted or prohibited from engaging. In sectors or activities that fall outside the scope of these lists, the country will ensure equal treatment for both domestic and foreign service providers, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

The announcement marks the first time that China has formulated negative lists for international trade in services at the national level. The lists consist of 71 items in 11 sectors, including software and information technology, education and healthcare, according to the ministry.

The pilot FTZ version of the negative list for cross-border trade in services contains 68 items, and covers the aforementioned sectors, as well as fields such as professional services, finance and culture.

By providing a clear outline of the restrictions, these lists offer transparency and predictability for foreign investors, allowing them to make informed decisions and navigate the Chinese market more effectively, said He Yadong, spokesman for the ministry.

Over the past decade, international trade in services has experienced rapid development, with an average annual growth rate 1.5 times higher than that of trade in goods. It now accounts for 22 percent of global trade, according to the ministry.

China's introduction of the negative lists is a significant step toward aligning with international high-standard economic and trade rules and advancing institutionalized opening-up, said Sang Baichuan, dean of the Insti-

tute of International Economy at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing.

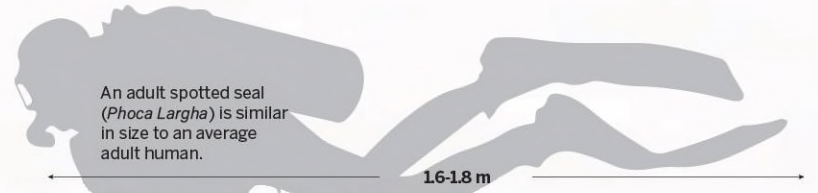
In recent years, numerous large-scale free trade agreements have placed a strong emphasis on the liberalization of service trade, Sang said, adding that China has made significant strides in liberalizing and facilitating its trade in goods over the years. However, there remains ample room for opening up in the realm of trade in services, with sectors such as education and healthcare holding great potential for further development.

China released its first negative list in services trade at the Hainan Free Trade Port in July 2021, which generated tangible results in sectors such as finance, transportation and legal services.

The implementation of Hainan's version of the negative list has played a significant role in driving the rapid expansion of trade in services in the province. According to statistics provided by Hainan authorities, the import and



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.



An adult spotted seal (*Phoca largha*) is similar in size to an average adult human.



Weight	Domestic population	Max speed	Life span
Adult males: 85-110 kg	Around 2,000	20 km/h	35 years
Adult females: 65-115 kg			

Pups weigh about 7-12kg at birth and are covered with white fur, which makes them difficult to be spotted by predators, as well as keeps them warm.

Closable and V-shaped nostrils

Thick short fur and widely varied coat pattern

Large eyes

Closable ears with no external earflap

Sensitive whiskers

Thick neck

Lighter-colored underbelly

Pup

The front and hind flippers have five toes each.

The ends of the fingers and toes have sharp claws, with webbing in between.

Fifteen days after being born, when the subcutaneous fat is gradually formed, pups begin to shed their fetal hair. In about seven to 10 days, the hair is lost and replaced with short, coarse, hard, shiny and spotted new hair. After about a month of drinking mother's milk, the weight of the pups increases to 30 kg and they begin to live independently.

SAVING SPOTTED SEALS

As designated day for protecting the mammal arrives, improved wetlands see more returning to Liaodong Bay

By YAN DONGJIE and WU YONG in Panjin, Liaoning

Volunteers at the Liaohe River Estuary National Nature Reserve counted a record 393 spotted seals on March 25, the highest number in recent years, according to the Panjin Forestry and Wetland Protection Management Bureau.

"Over the past week, we have been able to observe over 200 spotted seals from the Western Pacific basking in the sun on the mudflats every day," said Tian Jiguang, founder of the Panjin Wetland Protection Association in Panjin, Liaoning province.

According to the observations of Tian's team, who counted the spotted seals daily from high-definition images taken by drones, the population of Western Pacific spotted seals in Liaodong Bay was 181 in 2021, 253 in 2022 and 302 last year. The number of spotted seals observed this year has increased by 30 percent compared to 2023.

In February 2021, the State Forestry and Grassland Administration and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs increased the national protection status for Western Pacific spotted seals from level II to level I. The following year, the date April 16 was designated as China's National Spotted Seal Protection Day to promote the conservation of the marine mammal. Tuesday marked the third such day.

The spotted seal, or *Phoca largha*, is known as the "Spirit of the Bohai Sea". Similar to bird migration, they can be observed in Liaodong Bay

from around October each year. The following May, after breeding, the seals embark on the long journey back to the Pacific.

Officials from the bureau of agriculture and rural affairs in Panjin's Panshan county said in recent years they have carried out the "returning farmland to wetlands" initiative, restoring 34,780 hectares of coastal wetlands. This initiative has created a favorable breeding and habitat environment for the Western Pacific spotted seals that migrate annually.

Spotted seals primarily feed on fish and cephalopods, with their main diet in the reserve being saury fish and crustaceans.

"Thanks to the favorable natural environment and abundant marine resources here, and the absence of predators, the winter sea ice serves as a natural birthing ground for the spotted seals," said Tian.

Some 200 kilometers to the south from the Liaodong Bay coast in Panjin, a national-level protection area dedicated to spotted seals has been in place for more than two decades in the waters off the city of Dalian, covering some 560,000 hectares.

The observed population of spotted seals at two vital habitats — Xizhuangshi and Shixianjiao — has reached over 560 in recent years, showing an increasing annual trend, according to sources from the administrative bureau of the Dalian National Spotted Seal Nature Reserve.

Contact the writers at yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

Spotted seals spend most of their time in the sea, climbing ashore only to breed, nurse, rest and molt.



DIVING ABILITY

Spotted seals are excellent divers. They can dive as deep as 300 meters. They dive up to 40 times a day, with each lasting more than 20 minutes.



The two hind flippers swing left and right in the water to propel the body.

In the water, movement mainly relies on the hind flippers and the body undulating in unison.

The front flippers are used to steer in the water.

DIET

During spring in the Yellow Sea and the Bohai Sea in China, spotted seals feed on



Herring



Sand lance



Yellow croaker

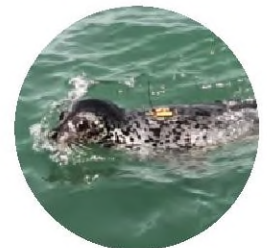
In autumn and winter



Barracuda

HUNTING SKILLS

Spotted seals hunt their prey by sight and by sensing temperature, pressure and electromagnetic changes in the water.



If people get too close, seals will rush back to the water and potentially injure themselves.



Seals will stare at those who have intruded on their space.



Those that have intruded on a seal's space should back away slowly.



Online See more by scanning the code.

Sources: The administrative bureau of the Dalian National Spotted Seal Nature Reserve; The Liaoning Ocean and Fisheries Science Research Institute
TEXT BY YAN DONGJIE AND ZHANG XIAOMIN / CHINA DAILY
GRAPHICS BY LI XIAOTIAN AND JORGE CORTES / CHINA DAILY

WORLD

House sends 2 articles vs Mayorkas to Senate

By HENG WEILI in New York
hengweili@chinadailyusa.com

The US House of Representatives delivered two articles of impeachment against Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to the Senate on Tuesday, saying he has failed to enforce immigration and border security laws.

The proceedings will begin on Wednesday, when senators will be sworn in as jurors. The Senate will then issue a summons to Mayorkas to inform him of the charges and ask for a written reply. He will not have to appear.

While the Senate is obligated to hold a trial under the rules of impeachment once the charges are walked across the Capitol, Democrats are expected to try to dismiss or table the charges later this week before the full arguments start.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, said he wants to "address this issue as expeditiously as possible."

"Impeachment should never be used to settle a policy disagreement," Schumer said. "That would set a horrible precedent for the Congress."

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said he would "strenuously oppose" any attempt to table the articles.

"Never before has the Senate agreed to a motion to table articles of impeachment," he said on the Senate floor. "It would be beneath the Senate's dignity to shrug off our clear responsibility."

The articles were passed by one vote on Feb 13 in the House, where the GOP has a slim majority, but their delivery was delayed until after lawmakers finished the appropriations process.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, said, "If he (Schumer) cares about the Constitution and ending the devastation caused by Biden's border catastrophe, Senator Schumer will quickly schedule a full public trial and hear the arguments put forth by our impeachment managers."

"Congressional Republicans should stop wasting time with unfounded attacks, and instead do their job by passing bipartisan legislation to properly fund the Department's vital national security missions and finally fix our broken immigration system," a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) spokesperson said in a statement.

The 20-page impeachment document includes Article 1, titled "Willful and Systemic Refusal to Comply With the Law," and Article 2, "Breach of Public Trust."

"In large part because of his unlawful conduct, millions of aliens have illegally entered the United States on an annual basis with many unlawfully remaining in the United States," Article 1 states.

The article also states that Mayorkas' inaction "has significantly contributed to unprecedented levels of illegal entrants, the increased control of the Southwest border by drug cartels, and the imposition of enormous costs on States and localities affected by the influx of aliens."

Among the charges in Article 2 is that Mayorkas "knowingly made false statements to Congress that the border is 'no less secure than it was previously'; that the border is 'closed' and that DHS has 'operational control' of the border."

A vote of two-thirds (67 or more) in the 100-member Senate is required for a conviction at an impeachment trial, and even if a trial were to be held, a conviction is unlikely. The current Senate breakdown is 49 Republicans, 48 Democrats and three independents, although the independents generally vote with the Democrats.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Sacred ritual



Greek actress Mary Mina, playing the role of high priestess, lights the flame during the Olympic flame lighting ceremony for the Paris 2024 Olympics, in southern Greece on Tuesday. ALKIS KONSTANTINIDIS / REUTERS

Yoon vows to 'listen' to people after poll loss

By YANG HAN in Hong Kong
kelly@chinadailyapac.com

In the first public remarks since his party's defeat in the general elections, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol said on Tuesday that he will better communicate with the people and make enhancing their livelihoods a priority.

"I will humbly accept the public sentiment revealed in the general election," Yoon said at a cabinet meeting. "I will listen to the public sentiment, and better communicate with the people with a more humble and flexible attitude."

In the general elections held on April 10, Yoon's ruling party, the People Power Party, won only 108 seats in the 300-member National Assembly.

Yoon started his five-year single term in May 2022. The National Assembly will serve a four-year term.

Since becoming president, Yoon has struggled with low approval ratings, hovering between 30 and 40 percent.

"In the past two years since I took office, though I have been focusing on the national interest and looking only at the people, I did not meet people's expectations," said Yoon, admitting his policy measures were not enough even though he worked to tackle inflation and property prices, and promote an economic recovery.

Responsibilities stressed

Yoon said the government has to take better care of people who are facing difficulties and reiterated he is committed to major reforms for the nation's labor, education and pension systems, as well as the medical sector.

"We will fulfill our responsibilities in what the government can do and work closely with the

National Assembly," said Yoon.

Analysts said Yoon's speech indicated his policy direction will largely remain the same after the election defeat.

Yoon's speech "did not show much humility. He basically seemed to indicate that he believed that the policies that he advocated before were correct," said Mason Richey, a professor at the Graduate School of International and Area Studies at the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul.

Richey said Yoon did not show a willingness to compromise with the opposition or change his domestic priorities in a significant way.

He expects Yoon to have a very difficult time pushing through any key policy measures on domestic issues.

This is not only because of the opposition but also because "increasingly his own party allies and his own party supporters are going to distance themselves from him because they are looking toward the 2027 presidential election," said Richey.

While Yoon reaffirmed his commitment to medical reform, how to deal with the striking doctors will be the biggest problem that Yoon has to solve in the short term because many of his supporters belong to the older generation who depend on the medical infrastructure, said Yang Jun-sok, an economics professor at the Catholic University of Korea.

More than 90 percent of South Korea's 13,000 medical interns and residents have been on strike since late February as they protest against a plan by Yoon's administration to increase the medical school enrollment quota by 2,000 next year from the current 3,058 intake.



South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol (right) presides over a cabinet meeting at the presidential office in Seoul on Tuesday. YONHAP NEWS AGENCY

China's training camps help table tennis players from Europe tap their potential

By CHEN WEIHUA in Luxembourg
chenweihua@chinadaily.com.cn

As 14-year-old table tennis player Aaron Sahr from the Luxembourg national youth team was practicing, Chinese Olympic gold medalist Yan Sen watched closely and offered his advice.

The table tennis training camp, which concluded on Sunday in the Luxembourg National Sports Institute compound, was the 26th held by the China Table Tennis College Europe, or CTTC-E. It has drawn some 2,000 players and coaches from around the world since its establishment a decade ago.

"The Chinese are helping very much," said Sahr, adding that many of his problems have been fixed through the training camps.

"My dream is to represent Luxembourg and Luxembourg will win many medals."

Lukrecija Juchnaite, a teenage player from Lithuania, agreed.

"I like the training camp. I learned a lot of new things, like strategy and techniques, and to

bring it home," she said. She added that every player wants to be as good as Zhang Yining, referring to the world and Olympic champion who was also coaching at the camp.

Zhang also observed the young players and offered her advice. She has been coaching at the CTTC-E for about eight years.

She said many young European players are quite good, but they would be better with comprehensive training and coaching. She added that some players who were trained in the CTTC-E years ago have become excellent players in Europe and the world.

Enjoying the process

"It doesn't mean everyone should become world champion because there is only one. But they must tap their potential and enjoy the process, and that's the key," she said.

Zhang and Yan were both hailed as excellent coaches by CTTC-E on Monday when it marked its 10th anniversary in a ceremony at the Luxembourg Ministry of Sports.

"The small ping-pong table con-

nects China on one side and the world on the other. With ping-pong balls whiffing back and forth, they build a bridge of friendship between China and Luxembourg and between China and Europe," CTTC President Shi Zhihao said.

Andre Hartmann, president of the Luxembourg Table Tennis Federation, recalled the friendly exchange and cooperation with the Chinese side since he was a player in the 1970s and 80s.

He praised CTTC-E for bringing the best table tennis players and coaches together.

"It was for us the high moment to have the CTTC Europe in Luxembourg ... This is really a big success," he said.

Heinz Thews, from the Luxembourg federation, has participated in the CTTC-E since its establishment in 2014. He said the training camps have fantastic coaches, and the atmosphere is friendly, high-performance oriented, but relaxed.

"Very successful," he said. "All the players like to come back, so we have a very good reputation."

Truce vital as Israel-Iran rift sparks tensions

Experts call for commitment to avoid conflict from expanding further in region

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
jan@chinadailyapac.com

Continued commitment to achieving a permanent cease-fire in the Gaza Strip and ending the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe remains the top priority for the world despite recent tension between Israel and Iran, analysts said.

They added that Israel's strategic maneuvers "represent a calculated policy of distraction," with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu becoming increasingly desperate for respite amid the domestic upheaval, legal challenges and dwindling support from traditional allies over Israel's military campaign in Gaza.

Israel's cabinet handling the Gaza conflict met for hours to discuss potential responses to Iran's "unprecedented" missile and drone retaliation over the weekend following the bombing of the Iranian consulate building and killing of Iranian officers in Damascus on April 1.

Amid a meeting with pilots at the Nevatim Air Base, which suffered minor damage from Iranian missiles, Israel Defense Forces' Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi said on Monday that a response is imminent. Xinhua News Agency cited a report by Israel's N12 TV news.

Arhama Siddiqi, a research fellow at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad in Pakistan, told China Daily that Israel's "strategic maneuvers" represented "a calculated policy of distraction", albeit perceived as provocations by some.

"Prime Minister Netanyahu, amid internal upheaval and looming legal challenges, appears increasingly desperate for a respite," Siddiqi said.

External pressures on Israel are mounting, even from its traditional allies, against the backdrop of shifting political landscapes, notably as the US approaches elections. While

overt support for Israel persists, recent US calls for an immediate cease-fire underscore the intricacies of diplomatic maneuvering."

She also noted that regional actors, particularly those from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, had been actively seeking to prevent escalation, aware of the economic ramifications.

"Despite Israel's attempts at diversion, concerted efforts to contain the conflict underscore a collective commitment to safeguard regional stability and economic interests," she said.

"As countries prioritize economic goals, Israel's success in diverting attention remains tenuous, contingent upon the collective resolve to prevent further escalation."

Mohammad Salami, a nonresident fellow at the International Institute for Global Strategic Analysis in Islamabad, said the situation in Gaza "may be neglected." With Israel contemplating its response to Iran's weekend strikes, the region could enter into a deep conflict, he noted.

"Developments in Gaza in light of the recent rocket attack depend on two parameters: Israeli countermeasures and the type of reaction of the world community," Salami told China Daily.

"Given the reluctance of the United States to enter into a conflict with Iran, it is unlikely that this will happen, however, one cannot be certain. On the other hand, the international community may give concessions in order to appease and support Israel so that the region does not become tense."

Salami said Israel may use any concessions as leverage in Gaza and pursue its goal of eliminating Hamas. In this case, "innocent Palestinian citizens will be killed and the situation in Gaza will become more tense," he said.

CHINA DAILY USA

NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888 Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899

Advertising: 212-537-8916

Follow us on: twitter.com/chinadaily facebook.com/chinadaily

usa.chinadaily.com.cn

These materials are distributed by China Daily Distribution Corp. on behalf of China Daily Beijing, China. Additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg, Suite 1106 529 14th Street NW Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249 Fax: 202-662-7247

SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900, San Francisco, CA 94104

Tel: 415-348-8288 Fax: 415-348-8388

SEATTLE

701 Fifth Ave, Suite 4200

Seattle, WA 98104 Tel: 206-922-2868

CANADA | TORONTO

471 Yonge Street, 10th Floor Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8

Tel: 416-481-5706

CHINA DAILY (ISSN

0748-6154) is published daily except weekends by China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 - No. 750

Announcement

Zhang Zhiying (deceased) is the property owner of premises located at No. 36 Miaoqiang Street, Kangqiao Town, Pudong New Area, Shanghai [Review Form of Homestead Use Right, Certificate No.: DHHYJH No. 52], and the relevant obligees include Zhuang Peixin, etc. According to the HJGH (2014) No. 942, and the Decision of the People's Government of Shanghai Pudong New Area on Housing Expropriation (PFZJZ [2021] No. 013), the said premises have been included in the expropriation scope of the "Urban Village" renovation land parcel (Block A) project in Hengmian Old Street, Kangqiao Town, Pudong New Area.

Currently, the Project is in the stage of concrete implementation of the decision of expropriation compensation. However, due to the failure to contact the relevant obligees of your household, it is impossible to serve the relevant instruments of housing expropriation, nor to negotiate with your household. Please request the relevant obligees of your household to contact with the Housing Expropriation Implementation Organization within 7 days from the date of publication, and provide valid housing ownership (property right) certificate, proof of identification, contact address and contact information, so as to ensure the service of relevant instruments of housing expropriation for negotiation on the matters of compensation for the housing expropriation. If it is overdue, we will announce the matters related to the compensation for the housing expropriation of your household through the public notice board of this base according to the regulations.

Contact time: Monday to Friday, 09:00-17:00; Contact address: No. 2201, Kangshen Road, Pudong New Area, Shanghai; Contact person: Ji Qiang; Contact Tel: 86-1376-1465-288, Supervision Tel: 86-1312-7599-753

Housing Expropriation Implementation Organization: Shanghai Pudong Second Housing Levy Service Office Co., Ltd.

Annex I:

Service of Notice (1)

Zhang Zhiying (deceased), Zhuang Peixin and others (households): According to the HJGH (2014) No. 942, and the Decision of the People's Government of Shanghai Pudong New Area on Housing Expropriation (PFZJZ [2021] No. 013), the said premises have been included in the expropriation scope of the "Urban Village" renovation land parcel (Block A) project in Hengmian Old Street, Kangqiao Town, Pudong New Area. The Project is now in the stage of concrete implementation of the decision of expropriation compensation. It is hereby notified that the relevant instruments will be served directly to the co-owners who can be served directly, and that the co-owners who receive the instruments should forward such instruments to the other co-owners and negotiate on a household basis. Hereby notified.

Shanghai Pudong Second Housing Levy Service Office Co., Ltd. April 17, 2024

BUSINESS

JOIN THE CONVERSATION; FOLLOW US ON TWITTER · CHINA DAILY

HIGHER GROUND

High-tech manufacturing, fixed-asset investment strong

Sluggish property sector, consumer confidence main drags during Q1

By WANG KEJU
wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

China's fixed-asset investment, a pivotal growth driver, grew at a faster-than-anticipated clip in the first quarter amid a big bet on manufacturing and high-tech sectors, thus getting the economy off to a solid start this year, analysts said on Tuesday.

The real estate sector, however, is still a major drag on China's economy as business and consumer confidence remain weak, they added, calling for more robust government support to help address falling sales and rising default risks facing property developers.

Fixed-asset investment, as shown by data released by the National Bureau of Statistics on Tuesday, grew 4.5 percent year-on-year in the first three months to over 10 trillion yuan (\$1.38 trillion), above analysts' expectations, which had projected an increase ranging between 4.2 percent and 4.3 percent.

The accelerated growth rate in the first quarter was primarily supported by increased investments in infrastructure and manufacturing, which climbed by 6.5 percent and 9.9 percent year-on-year, respectively, said Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International.

As the weather warms up and projects resume after holidays, construction progress across various localities picked up pace, leading to a boost in infrastructure investment, Wang said, adding that the issuance of 1 trillion yuan in special treasury bonds at the end of last year has provided ample funds for various local infrastructure projects.

Meanwhile, the recovery in global



An employee checks intelligent manufacturing equipment at a tech company in Ganzhou, Jiangxi province. ZHU HAIPENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

demand, particularly in sectors such as electronics, automobiles and machinery, translated into increased orders and higher profits for manufacturers. As a result, investment in industry maintained a relatively high growth rate, Wang said.

In particular, the high-tech manufacturing sector witnessed a first-quarter investment growth rate of 10.8 percent, surpassing investment growth in overall manufacturing, according to the bureau.

The country's policy support fostering new quality productive forces and large-scale equipment upgrades has boosted businesses' demand for advanced computing technologies, digitization efforts and the adoption of cutting-edge office equipment, said Li Chao, chief economist at Zhesang Securities.

Going forward, banking and insurance institutions should enhance their medium- to long-term financial support for equipment upgrades and technological

improvements, as outlined in a notice jointly issued on Tuesday by the National Financial Regulatory Administration, Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and National Development and Reform Commission. Efforts will be made to leverage the role of national production-financing platforms, to effectively align financial resources with the financing needs of industrial transformation. Moreover, the country will expand credit loans specifically tailored for strategic emerging industries such as artificial intelligence and aerospace, the notice said.

While other sectors are showing signs of growth, the sluggish performance of real estate investment raises concerns about implications for the overall economy.

Data from the NBS showed that investment in property development during the first three months dipped 9.5 percent year-on-year, with commercial housing sales

plunging 27.6 percent.

Several top-tier cities in China, including Beijing and Shanghai — as well as some second-tier cities — have recently relaxed their property policies, leading to increased activity in the new home market, said Wang.

However, overall recovery of the real estate sector remains sluggish due to insufficient purchasing power on the demand side and persistently low industry expectations, Wang added.

China still has significant room for policy adjustments including allowing for the potential reduction of home purchase restrictions and the lowering of mortgage rates, Wang said.

Given the complex and challenging external environment and insufficient domestic effective demand, it is essential to maintain a certain level of intensity in infrastructure investment, said Wu Chaoming, deputy director of the Chasing International Economic Institute.

more broadly should normalize as well," he said, adding China has a lot of pent-up demand.

For example, the household savings rate is quite high in China and, over time, a fall in the savings rate should boost spending, especially as the property sector stabilizes, he said.

"It's important to remember that the adjustment in the real estate sector affects household confidence. Therefore, any housing market improvement will translate into accelerating consumption as well."

He also said "the worst of the cycle is likely behind us" for the property market, although a quick fix is not in sight.

"It may take a while before the property market fully recovers. At the same time, the structure of China's economy is also changing, becoming less dependent on real estate so that the challenges in the sector matter less and less over time for overall economic growth."

Ouyang Shijia contributed to this story.

Ernie Bot helps Baidu double down on AI push

By FAN FEIFEI in Beijing and WANG XU in Shenzhen, Guangdong

Chinese tech heavyweight Baidu Inc said on Tuesday its large language model and ChatGPT-like chatbot Ernie Bot has garnered more than 200 million users since its debut in March 2023.

The company said it is ramping up efforts to bolster commercial application of the generative artificial intelligence technology.

On Tuesday, Baidu showcased a suite of AI models and development toolkits to empower individuals with accessible and easy-to-use tools to create AI applications at the Create 2024 Baidu AI Developer Conference in Shenzhen, Guangdong province.

Robin Li, co-founder, chairman and CEO of Baidu, said at the event that the Ernie LLM has now emerged as China's leading AI foundation model with the broadest range of applications. LLMs refer to AI models fed with huge amounts of text data for use in a variety of tasks, ranging from natural language processing to machine translation.

Li said the Ernie model has achieved an obvious upgrade with improved performance in code generation, code interpretation and code optimization in recent months, and its capabilities reach a world-leading level.

The inference performance of Ernie model has improved by 105 times compared with the one launched last March, and its inference cost has been reduced to only 1 percent of the previous version, he said. Furthermore, more than 85,000 enterprise clients have used Baidu's enterprise-level LLM platform Qianfan to create 190,000 AI applications.

"AI is catalyzing a revolution in creativity. In the future, developing an AI application will be as straightforward as creating a short video. Everyone can be a developer and create," Li said.

Li also said the multimodal LLMs that integrate different types of content like text, images, speech and video into AI models are key to the future development of AI technology.

This approach has been largely regarded as essential for realizing artificial general intelligence or AGI, which is a theoretical AI system with capabilities that rival those of a human, Li said.

Charlie Dai, vice-president and

principal analyst at Forrester, a research firm, said as one of the leaders in the AI software market in China, Baidu has made substantial progress in the technological evolution of foundation models, which are becoming critical for the next-generation AI applications, adding the company is expanding the business ecosystem of generative AI technology.

At the event, Li also noted that "the most significant use for large visual models is in autonomous driving systems". Baidu's goal is not just about teaching AI to create video but also about enabling AI to comprehend real-world dynamics and predict future events, which are critical for driving autonomously.

He said the company has utilized extensive data collected from over 100 million kilometers of testing on complex city roads in China to develop the visual model for its autonomous driving platform Apollo.

The multimodal LLM is an undeniable future development direction for generative AI technology, said Lu Yanxia, research director at market consultancy IDC China, adding the LLMs necessitate higher demand for data and knowledge in professional fields, and for talent that can fine-tune specialized models based on diverse industrial demands.

She said Chinese tech companies should pool more resources into improving computing power, algorithms and quality of data to gain a competitive edge in the global AI chatbot race.

Pan Helin, a member of the Expert Committee for Information and Communication Economy, which operates under the aegis of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said the Ernie model made achievements in some specialized application scenarios like AI programming, while emphasizing more efforts should be made to bolster the vertical industrial application of LLMs in a wider range of sectors.

A report from McKinsey & Co, a global consultancy, said that generative AI will add between \$2.6 trillion and \$4.4 trillion in annual value to the global economy, resulting in a significant impact across all sectors of industry.

Contact the writers at fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

HSBC sees steady, gradual recovery

By LIU ZHIHUA
liuzhuhua@chinadaily.com.cn

The Chinese economy is on track to grow "around 5 percent" this year as per the government's target, supported in particular by robust infrastructure and manufacturing investment, and consumer spending is expected to pick up as well over the course of the year, said HSBC Chief Asia Economist Fred Neumann.

In an exclusive interview with China Daily, Neumann said: "The data for the beginning of the year have been encouraging... China's economy is likely to deliver a steady, gradual recovery. The policy setting is mildly supportive of a further pick-up in growth, and the drag from a deflating property sector should gradually fade over time."

The economist said he expects the Chinese government to roll out



Fred Neumann

measures incrementally to further boost economic recovery, focusing on specific areas like the housing market, rather than opt for a broad-based stimulus.

"Stimulating housing demand and supporting developer finances — these remain two important approaches to stabilizing the property sector. Over time, improvement in sentiment in the property market should also support consumption," he said.

He said financial markets may be underestimating the degree of policy support that has already come through over the past year, including fiscal easing and targeted support measures for the housing market.

"We expect these measures to gain increasing traction over the

course of this year. If needed, the government also retains sufficient room to ease fiscal policy further to support demand and achieve its growth target," he said.

In the past few months, economic recovery momentum has grown stronger. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Tuesday that China's GDP expanded by 5.3 percent year-on-year to 29.63 trillion yuan (\$4.09 trillion) in the first quarter, after a 5.2 percent rise in the fourth quarter of last year. On a quarter-on-quarter basis, China's GDP grew by 1.6 percent in the first quarter.

Neumann said deflation pressures in China are underpinned by a short-term decline in demand relative to the supply potential of the economy and "appear more cyclical than structural".

"Once demand recovers, especially when the real estate market is starting to improve, price pressures



Attendees learn about Baidu's products at the Create 2024 Baidu AI Developer Conference held on Tuesday in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Briefly

PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 2 billion yuan (\$281.5 million) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.8 percent on Tuesday. The move aims to keep liquidity reasonable and ample in the banking system, the People's Bank of China said in a statement. A reverse repo is a process in which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

China a key importer of Vietnam's seafood

China was one of the three larg-

est importers of Vietnam's fishery products in the first quarter of this year, together with the United States and Japan, Vietnam News Agency reported, citing data from the Vietnam Association of Seafood Exporters and Producers. The products' exports to the Chinese mainland and the Hong Kong special administrative region increased by 15 percent year-on-year, according to the report. China was the biggest importer of Vietnamese tra fish, white-legged shrimp, lobster, anchovies and crabs. China also received seven times more lobster exports from Vietnam in the first quarter compared to the same period in 2023.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

China Energy hits record in renewables output

By ZHENG XIN
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

China Energy Investment Corp's renewable power generation capacity touched a record during the first quarter of this year, as the company accelerated its green energy transition while ensuring domestic energy security.

The company, also known as China Energy, saw a 34.7 percent year-on-year increase in newly installed capacity for new energy during the first three months, with a corresponding 23.2 percent rise in clean energy electricity generation compared to the same period last year, company spokesman Huang Qing said during a news conference in Beijing on Tuesday.

China Energy has been stepping up investments in renewable energy projects, including wind, solar and hydropower. It has launched 80 key projects nationwide with a total investment of 400 billion yuan (\$55.27 billion) in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, Ningxia Hui autonomous region, and Qinghai and Hebei provinces, he said.

Chinese energy companies' increased focus on renewable power generation aligns with global efforts to combat climate change, while helping to diversify the nation's energy mix and reducing dependence on fossil fuels, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

Leading traditional energy companies are strategically pivoting

toward cleaner and more sustainable energy sources, which is also stimulating innovation and technological advancements in the renewable energy sector while fostering economic growth, Lin said.

With a total installed capacity of 2.32 million kilowatts, Maerdang hydropower station, the highest-altitude facility of its kind on the upper reaches of the Yellow River operated by China Energy, has been connected to the grid and started operations earlier this month. It is expected to generate more than 7.3 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity each year.

The station, located 3,000 meters above sea level along the Yellow River in Qinghai province, is also the core of the company's first integrated clean energy facility in Qinghai to

include hydropower, wind power, solar power and energy storage.

It will take advantage of the abundant clean energy in the western region of China while benefiting the energy-hungry eastern region, the company said.

The construction experience and technological progress achieved by the design, building and installation processes of the Maerdang hydropower station will further benefit future hydropower projects in regions such as the Xizang autonomous region, it said.

China Energy achieved a record in installed renewable energy projects last year, with power generation capacity in 2023 reaching 320 million kW, with renewable energy accounting for 35.5 percent of the total.

BUSINESS



Yutong electric buses are seen at a parking lot in Malta's capital Valletta on Friday. XINHUA

Chinese electric buses hit road in Malta

VALLETTA — A leading tourist transport operator in Malta has added four electric buses produced by Chinese manufacturer Yutong Bus Co Ltd to its fleet, which is in line with its commitment to go green and curb emissions.

Privately owned Zarb Coaches Ltd formally launched the buses during a ceremony on Friday in Malta's capital Valletta, and they formally started operating on Saturday.

Zarb Coaches' CEO and Managing Director Emanuel Zarb said it was truly a momentous occasion for his company, founded by his grandfather in 1947 with just one bus.

It now operates a fleet of 25 buses that all run on diesel and are used to transport school children in the morning and tourists during the day. The company also owns and operates 25 mini buses and 25 taxis.

Zarb said he was looking forward to using the new vehicles and reaping returns on his investment.

Zarb Coaches is the partner of Yutong Bus in Malta and it has already placed orders for fully electric buses for other companies.

They are advanced when compared to the buses of other companies, he said following the launch.

The 12-meter new buses, each with a capacity to carry 51 passengers, arrived in Malta from Zhengzhou, capital of Central China's Henan province, where the global bus manufacturer Yutong Group is headquartered.

Zarb Coaches is among the first privately owned business entities to import fully electric buses into Malta. Some 30 Chinese King Long electric buses are already running across the country, serving public transportation needs.

Malta Transport Minister Chris Bonett said the government has a policy to decarbonize public transport and was providing incentives for private companies to invest in electric vehicles.

"Green is the way we have to go as an economy ... we hope that other companies will take the example of Zarb Coaches and invest in more electric vehicles, decarbonizing and making fresher air for everyone," he said. Bonett said other Chinese brands

of electric vehicles were also available in Malta and were already running on the roads. "It shows that Maltese consumers and companies and even the operator of public transport are finding Chinese vehicles very reliable."

Malta supports Chinese innovation, including in the production of clean energy, he said. "If things turn out well, we will have more investment from China in Malta which is very good for us."

Chen Guihua, counselor of the Chinese embassy in Malta, said that both countries were sharing market opportunities and promoting mutual development under the Belt and Road Initiative.

China-made electric buses introduced to the Maltese public transport fleet offer environmentally friendly options for the local people, Chen said.

"After years of development, China has become a global leader in new energy technologies and equipment manufacturing. It plays a crucial role in energy transformation and tackling climate change," said Chen.

China and Malta should strengthen cooperation, overcome obstacles and promote clean energy collaboration, including off-shore renewable energy cooperation, to achieve mutual benefits and win-win outcomes in green and low-carbon energy transformation, he added.

Ma Jiabo, regional manager of the Europe division of Yutong Bus, said Yutong has pioneered the development of battery electric buses since 1997 and has so far sold over 180,000 such vehicles worldwide, not only advancing transport solutions but also contributing significantly to economic and social welfare.

In Europe alone, about 2,200 Yutong new energy buses are operating in several countries, including Britain, France, Denmark and now Malta, Ma said.

"Our goal is to support Malta in its journey toward a greener future and offer new choices and fresh vitality for both public and tourism transport," Ma said.

XINHUA

EMAG bullish on business in China market

German machine tool firm to further invest in nation; plans R&D facility

By LIU YUKUN
liuyukun@chinadaily.com.cn

EMAG Group, a German machine tool manufacturer, anticipates a doubling of delivery volumes from Chinese factories within the next three to four years, with several million euros of investment in the pipeline, said its executives.

"This is the strategy we are implementing — continuous investment in China. We express our confidence in the Chinese market through action," said Mathias Klein, chief sales officer of EMAG Group.

Markus Clement, global CEO of EMAG Group, said the group is also considering establishing a research and development center in China, noting the country's evolving position in becoming a major player in global automotive manufacturing.

"China is playing an increasingly significant role in supporting EMAG's global structure, particularly amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. We are confident in further collaboration with Chinese customers as they expand globally," Clement said.

The remarks came after Chinese automakers, the downstream industry of machine tool manufacturing, are facing critical challenges including the European Union's anti-subsidy investigation into Chinese-made electric vehicles and United States' subsidies for the production and sale of clean energy power facilities in the region to support the development of local enterprises.

"EMAG is poised to support its Chinese partners not only within China, but also across international markets, including Europe and emerging regions like Southeast Asia," Clement said.

EMAG saw about 152 million euros (\$161 million) in net sales in China in 2022, a surge of nearly 54 percent from the previous year.

The group's commitment to investing in China resonates with broader trends among German companies, as indicated by a recent survey conducted by the German Chamber of Commerce in China. The survey revealed that

“

China is playing an increasingly significant role in supporting EMAG's global structure ... We are confident in further collaboration with Chinese customers as they expand globally.”

Markus Clement, global CEO of EMAG Group

nearly 80 percent of German companies plan to maintain their current investment levels in China, recognizing its critical role in staying competitive both domestically and globally.

While currently only 5 percent of respondents perceive Chinese companies as innovation leaders, a significant 46 percent anticipate their ascendancy within the next five years. This underscores the growing recognition of China's innovation capabilities and its potential to lead in various industries.

German companies' strong interest in investing in China was demonstrated by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's visit to China this week — his second such visit in 17 months — as he arrived with a large number of business leaders from across different sectors.

Maximilian Butek, the East China executive director of the German Chamber of Commerce in China, underscored German companies' interest in leveraging China's innovation ecosystem to drive growth and maintain their competitive advantage. Sectors such as electric vehicle batteries and autonomous driving present significant opportunities for collaboration.

The latest statistics from the Ministry of Commerce further corroborate this sentiment, with German investment in China surging by 19.8 percent year-on-year in the first two months.

Wanglaoji to set up more herbal tea museums abroad

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

Guangzhou Wanglaoji Health Industry Co Ltd has unveiled its international brand identity and is planning to establish more herbal tea museums overseas, the company said, as the natural plant-based beverage maker aims to boost its global footprint.

The company, based in Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province, opened its second herbal tea museum on New York's iconic Fifth Avenue last week, marking another solid step in the international presence of its brand.

Through photos, physical objects and multimedia displays, the museum vividly describes the development of Chinese herbal tea and the Wanglaoji brand, condensing the historical evolution of Chinese herbal tea, and conveying a strong health philosophy and herbal tea culture.

Prior to the opening, the company

also unveiled its international English brand identity WALOVI in Los Angeles earlier this month.

"Through an extensive production portfolio, we are catering to the varied demands of a global consumer base," said Weng Shaoquan, chairman of Wanglaoji.

North America is a key overseas market for Wanglaoji, with annual sales increasing significantly since it started exporting in 2013, according to Weng.

Wanglaoji has entered the mainstream channels and chain supermarkets in North America, such as Costco and H Mart, with its e-commerce operations having already expanded into platforms like Amazon, YamiBuy and Wee.

"We believe Wanglaoji will establish even closer connections and interactions with consumers in the United States and the rest of the world, invigorating the international market with vitality and helping more international consumers

enjoy natural plant beverages from China," said Weng.

Wanglaoji has achieved international recognition as one of the leading natural plant drink brands in the world, as the company has already bolstered its core herbal tea operations, developing a distinctive line of health-focused plant beverages.

Following its first overseas herbal tea museum, which was inaugurated in 2018 on Grand Street in New York, Wanglaoji plans to establish 56 herbal tea museums worldwide, aiming to promote the market influence of Chinese herbal tea, according to the company.

Over the years, Wanglaoji's sales network has covered more than 150 countries and regions, achieving commendable results in markets in North America, Australia, Europe and Southeast Asia, according to Weng.

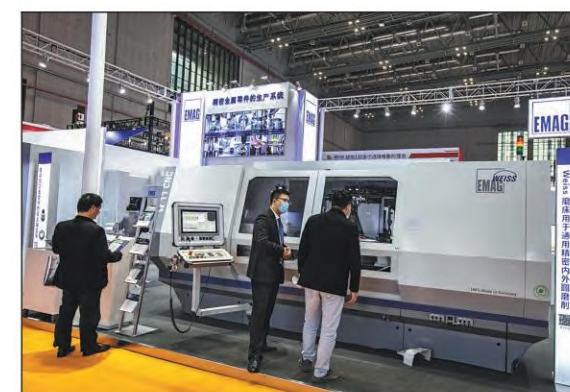
In 2023, industry research and consulting organization Frost & Sullivan certified Wanglaoji as the No 1

natural plant-based drink in the world.

In 2019, at the Fortune Global Science and Technology Forum, Wanglaoji joined hands with Switzerland's SGS and the World Federation of Societies of Traditional Chinese Medicine to release the world's first international standard for herbal tea beverages.

In the process of accelerating its global branding strategy, the company also released its international brand identity in Milan and Bangkok early this year.

"We want to seize the new opportunities of economic and trade cooperation between China and Europe and Southeast Asia, to bring WALOVI into more overseas local markets through more in-depth and wider cooperation and turn Wanglaoji into a global super beverage brand," said Li Chuyuan, chairman of Guangzhou Pharmaceutical Holdings Ltd, parent company of Wanglaoji.



Visitors check out EMAG products during a trade fair in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Oil consumption back to 2019 levels

By LIU YUKUN

China's petroleum refining capacity is entering a new expansion phase with 85 million metric tons expected to be added from 2024 to 2027, experts said.

Around 35 million tons of outdated petroleum refining capacity will be optimized to boost high-quality development of the industry, they added.

The forecast was made during the launch ceremony of the Blue Book on the Development of China's Petroleum Distribution Industry, jointly held by commodity information service provider JLC Network Technology Co Ltd and the China

Petroleum Circulation Association. Sun Renjin, secretary-general of the expert committee of the CPCA, said: "With the continuous expansion of petroleum refining capacity, the production of finished oil products will also continue to increase. However, future growth space for refining capacity is limited. Coupled with multiple factors such as strict control of new capacity additions, the growth rate of finished oil production may slow down."

The remarks came on top of rapid growth of finished oil production last year, or a 16.4 percent year-on-year increase to 428.358 million tons.

Finished oil consumption was

also on a fast track of development, which Sun said had returned to 2019 levels, driven by economic recovery, with transportation, warehousing and postal industries being the main force, accounting for 62.5 percent of total finished oil consumption.

"With the continuous recovery of the economy and steady progress in high-quality development, demand for finished oil products will continue to grow. However, under the backdrop of low-speed growth in the number of fuel vehicles, gradual normalization of international routes and increasing efforts in new energy substitution, the consumption of finished oil products will

“

With the continuous recovery of the economy and steady progress in high-quality development, demand for finished oil products will continue to grow.”

Sun Renjin, secretary-general of the expert committee of the China Petroleum Circulation Association

return to the normal growth track of low-speed growth," Sun said.

"It is estimated that the consumption of finished oil products will

exceed 400 million tons in 2024," he said.

By categories, Sun said oil consumption from fuel vehicles may decrease under the backdrop of rapid development of the new energy vehicle industry. With the recovery of the domestic and international aviation sector and the gradual increase in the number of flights, it is expected that demand for jet fuel will continue to increase, and the growth rate will return to normal.

Sun said constructing a new energy system along with promoting digitalization and intelligent transformation will be inevitable choices for businesses in the petroleum industry. He said the regulatory system for the industry will also be further strengthened and improved. In recent years, China has stepped

up efforts promoting the green and low-carbon transformation of the energy industry and strengthening clean and efficient development and utilization of fossil fuels.

Last year, the National Development and Reform Commission, along with three other departments, issued guidance proposing for the first time to study the establishment of a database monitoring carbon emissions from petroleum refining enterprises and carbon footprints of related products.

The guidance emphasized improving energy utilization efficiency, reducing pollutants and carbon emissions, and further optimizing the industrial structure. At the same time, a number of market regulation plans have been introduced to cover market operations, taxes and gas stations.

BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

Firms have high hopes for low-altitude biz

More efforts needed to improve rules, standards for safe operation of eVTOLs

By FAN FEIFEI
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

China's low-altitude economy, which is regarded as a strategic emerging industry, is poised to see speedy growth in the coming years, fueled mainly by investments in related infrastructure construction, policy support from authorities and commercial applications in diverse scenarios like passenger transport, tourism and logistics, industry experts said.

They noted the country's emphasis on developing the low-altitude economy is conducive to bolstering urban industrial upgrades, fostering new economic growth drivers and alleviating urban traffic congestion, adding that the sector boasts huge market potential and promising development prospects.

However, more efforts should be made to improve the rules, standards and relevant regulatory policies regarding safe operation of unmanned aerial vehicles and other low-altitude flight activities, as well as accelerate the construction of ground takeoff and landing airports and airspace management systems, they added.

Although currently there is no official definition for the "low-altitude economy", it largely refers to a new economic space utilizing low-altitude airspace below 3,000 meters to carry out various airborne activities. These flight activities include a comprehensive range of undertakings focused on both manned and unmanned aerial vehicles, including aircraft manufacturing, low-altitude flight operations and integrated services.

The market scale of China's low-altitude economy reached 505.95 billion yuan (\$69.9 billion) in 2023, up 33.8 percent year-on-year, and is expected to surpass 1 trillion yuan in 2026, according to a report released by market research firm CCID Consulting.

Revenue from the electric vertical takeoff and landing sector rose 77.3 percent year-on-year to 980 million yuan last year, the report said. This segment is expected to see wider commercial application in fields like aerial sightseeing and tourism in 2024.

The report estimates that the eVTOL sector will maintain rapid growth in the next few years, with the market scale hitting 9.5 billion yuan in 2026, fueled by the accelerated issuance of airworthiness certifications by authorities. The revenue of the country's civilian drone sector stood at 117.4 billion yuan last year, an increase of 32 percent year-on-year, it added.

Referred to as air taxis, eVTOLs don't require traditional airports or runways. Similar to helicopters, they take off vertically and transition into fixed-wing flight mode in the air, and offer a promising air traffic and sightseeing option while traversing Chi-

na's congested big cities.

The low-altitude economy, which plays a key part in nurturing new quality productive forces and serves as a new growth engine, has been written into this year's Government Work Report for the first time.

Several provincial-level regions nationwide have unveiled plans to develop the low-altitude economy and build up related industrial clusters in their government work reports in 2024.

Chinese manufacturers of unmanned aerial vehicles, commonly known as drones, are ratcheting up resources to promote the development of the low-altitude economy and expand the application of drones in a wide range of sectors, such as manned transportation, aerial tourism, aerial logistics, agriculture, geological surveying and mapping, public security and even disaster relief.

EHang Holdings Ltd, a Chinese autonomous aerial vehicle tech firm, is stepping up efforts to bolster the commercial use of eVTOL aircraft in aerial sightseeing and tourism.

The company announced in early April that it had obtained a production certificate for its EH216-S passenger-carrying pilotless eVTOL aircraft. The certificate, issued by the Civil Aviation Administration of China, is the world's first production certificate granted in the global eVTOL industry, marking another significant step toward mass production of eVTOL aircraft and follow-up commercial operations.

Previously, the EH216-S had obtained the type certificate and the airworthiness certificate from the CAAC. With a length of 6.05 meters, a width of 5.73 meters and a height of 1.93 meters, the aircraft has a maximum flight range of 30 kilometers and a maximum speed of 130 kilometers per hour.

The low-altitude economy and related sectors present a significant market opportunity for urban air mobility development, and serve as a new engine for future growth in China, said Hu Huaqiang, founder, chairman and CEO of EHang.

Hu said the company hopes to introduce safe and reliable pilotless eVTOL aircraft to the global market, thereby offering safe, autonomous and eco-friendly air mobility services to everyone.

EHang recently sold some of its EH216-S models via a livestreaming room on Alibaba Group's online marketplace Taobao. The Guangzhou, Guangdong province-based company has also inked strategic partnerships with some local governments to jointly create a low-altitude economy industry ecosystem.

The certified two-seater EH216-S has successfully completed its inaugural commercial flight demonstrations in Guangzhou and Hefei, Anhui province. The move signified another major milestone toward normalizing



Growers get training to use unmanned aerial vehicles to protect crops in Mengcheng county, Anhui province, in March. HU WEIGUO / FOR CHINA DAILY



The inaugural demonstration of an eVTOL cross-city and cross-bay route takes place in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, in February. WEN ZI / FOR CHINA DAILY

EH216-S flights for airborne sightseeing at local scenic spots.

China aims to establish a new development model for the general aviation industry characterized by high-end, intelligent and green features by 2030 and form a trillion-yuan-level market in general aviation equipment, according to a recent action plan issued by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and three other government departments.

By 2027, new-generation general aviation equipment with unmanned, electric and intelligent features will realize commercial

application in urban air transportation, logistics distribution and emergency rescue, the plan said.

Xpeng AeroHT, a flying car unit of Chinese electric vehicle maker Xpeng Motors, said its flying car will be available for preorders in the fourth quarter of 2024, with delivery to individual users commencing in the fourth quarter of 2025. The vehicle boasts a two-part design, seamlessly switching between terrestrial and aerial modes.

AutoFlight, a Chinese eVTOL aircraft developer, completed the world's first intercity demonstration

flight in Guangdong province in February. The company's five-seater eVTOL aircraft could be a faster option for passengers shuttling between Shenzhen and Zhuhai as it takes just 20 minutes compared to a three-hour car ride currently.

AutoFlight has recently delivered its first Prosperity eVTOL aircraft to a customer in Japan, which marks the first global delivery of a civilian eVTOL aircraft weighing over a ton.

Global market consultancy Roland Berger estimates there will be up to 3,000 air taxis in operation by 2025 worldwide, and this figure will increase exponentially to 100,000 by 2050. However, several technological, infrastructural and legal hurdles remain.

Yu Zhanfu, a partner at Roland Berger, said eVTOL aircraft need to go through full verification regarding safety and technological stability in sparsely populated areas or scenarios such as natural landscape tourist destinations in the early stages before they can truly enter the urban air mobility segment.

Compared with traditional helicopters, eVTOL aircraft are smaller, lighter and require less space for takeoffs and landings. They also have lower operating costs, which will give a big boost to their popularity, Yu said. However, they still face technical challenges and uncertainties in various weather and geological conditions.

The CAAC said the number of registered unmanned aerial vehicles or drones in China rose to 1.27 million by the end of 2023, an increase of 32 percent year-on-year.

There were 19,000 enterprises engaged in operating these UAVs or drones. The civilian drones flew a total of 23.11 million hours in the country last year, up 11.8 percent from a year earlier, according to the CAAC.

DJI, the world's largest commercial drone manufacturer by market share, has invested heavily in industry-level drones, which have been

widely used in the fields of agriculture, energy, aerial transport and public security, and created great economic and social value.

"The emergence of industry-level drones has reshaped people's lives and production modes, as well as promoted the development of various industries," said Zhang Xiaonan, strategic director of DJI, highlighting that although such drones are still in the initial stage of development, their applications will be more extensive in the future as related technologies advance.

The Shenzhen-based company has been devoting a great deal of attention to farming sector drones in hopes of helping agricultural workers improve the efficiency of sowing seeds and spraying fertilizers and pesticides, as well as increasing the use ratio of intelligent agricultural equipment.

Zhang said DJI will continue to promote the large-scale application of drones in aerial photography, agriculture, inspection and mapping, as well as transportation, and continuously expand new application scenarios to bolster the growth of the low-altitude economy.

Han Jun, deputy head of the CAAC, said as a strategic emerging industry, the low-altitude economy has a long industrial chain, covering sectors such as aircraft R&D and manufacturing, low-altitude flight infrastructure construction and operation, and flight services.

Han said that the CAAC is promoting the construction of a low-altitude flight service system and seeks to simplify application and approval procedures for low-altitude flight plans.

Yang Jincai, director of the Shenzhen Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Industry Association in Guangdong province, said apart from traditional application scenarios such as agriculture, forestry, crop surveys, security monitoring, geographic mapping, as well as emergency rescues and logistics, the application scope of the low-altitude economy will be more extensive and diverse in the future.

However, the sector is still in its initial stage of development in China due to security considerations, and there is a lack of effective supervision and emergency response mechanisms regarding low-altitude flight activities, which also presents some difficulties for urban low-altitude airspace management, Yang said.

He called for efforts to further improve the design and planning of low-altitude airspace to make full use of airspace resources and meet the needs of various aviation activities, strengthen supervision and management of flight activities, and maintain the order of airspace.

Yang Sumei, an associate professor at Guangzhou Maritime University, said more efforts are needed to accelerate the construction of low-altitude infrastructure alongside intelligent management and operating platforms, as well as establish applicable rules and standards to better regulate the fast-developing sector.

Driverless delivery shot in arm for logistics sector

By FAN FEIFEI

Chinese technology companies are ramping up efforts to adopt drones and driverless delivery vehicles in logistics and delivery activities, as part of a broader push to boost logistics efficiency, reduce logistics costs and improve user experience in the fiercely competitive marketplace.

Industry experts said that compared with traditional delivery practices, unmanned deliveries feature lower delivery costs, larger carrying capacity and greater safety records, while also providing a viable alternative to address some challenges, including rising labor costs and a shortage of couriers.

Chinese e-commerce giant JD has accelerated its layout in delivery drones and intelligent logistics solutions, especially last-mile deliveries of parcels. The Beijing-based company has used innovative drone technology to reach consumers in some of China's hard-to-reach remote areas for distribution purposes.

The drones can take off automatically from regional delivery sta-

tions, follow a predetermined route to villages or rural areas, land at designated drop-off points and present orders directly to customers, thus significantly shortening delivery time and reducing logistics costs.

The company's self-developed logistics drones have also been applied in some disaster relief work to deliver essential supplies.

Online service platform Meituan has made major strides in drone usage. As of the end of December, the company's drone delivery services had landed in office areas, commercial districts, scenic spots and residential communities in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, and Shanghai, fulfilling more than 220,000 orders.

Meituan has recently inked a partnership with 7-Eleven convenience stores in Guangdong to provide drone delivery services. Customers are able to select from over 3,000 different products at the drone landing site in Longgang district, Shenzhen. Items can be delivered to the landing site in as little as four minutes after being packaged.

Courier and logistics company SF Holding said it has rolled out various types of drones for delivery services, with a maximum payload of 25 kilograms and a flying distance of 100 kilometers.

Pan Xuefei, a senior analyst at market research firm International Data Corp, said the application of drones for delivery services is still at an initial stage, and they are mainly used to improve delivery efficiency in some remote mountainous terrains and sparsely populated areas. "We still need time to see large-scale applications," Pan said.

Dada Group, a Chinese on-demand delivery and retail platform, has expanded its unmanned delivery network in collaboration with JD Logistics, the logistics arm of JD, and White Rhino, an autonomous delivery vehicle developer.

Its autonomous delivery open system has been adopted by Seven Fresh, JD's supermarket chain, Yonghui Supermarket and Walmart's Sam's Club, as the company aims to normalize the scalable use of unmanned delivery vehicles in carrying out on-demand delivery services.

The system can distribute orders automatically for supermarkets, manage package loading, maintain the normal operations of orders through its human-machine interaction technology, dispatch the unmanned vehicles and plan routes to ensure the vehicles efficiently fulfill online orders.

Experts said there is a surging demand for grocery delivery services in China. According to a report from market consultancy iResearch, Chinese consumers are increasingly embracing on-demand consumption and purchasing, with fruits, vegetables, dairy products, meat and eggs figuring among the most commonly purchased categories.

In addition to satisfying consumer demand for instant deliveries, the adoption of autonomous delivery vehicles can potentially reallocate couriers' working time by releasing them from parcel delivery and giving them a chance to spend more time on customer service and the maintenance of vehicles, experts added.

Damo Academy, a research institute of Chinese tech heavyweight



SF Holding's driverless delivery vehicle dispatches packages at a residential complex in Xiong'an New Area, Hebei province, in January. WANG XIAO / XINHUA

Alibaba Group, has rolled out its Xiaomanly unmanned delivery vehicles to address last-mile delivery challenges.

These vehicles have L4 self-driving capability and automatically calculate optimal routes and avoid obstacles when delivering parcels. L4 autonomy means vehicles can drive themselves in most conditions without a human backup driver.

Lu Zhenwang, CEO of Shanghai-based Wanqing Consultancy, said currently, unmanned delivery services have been deployed in some des-

ignated areas and scenarios, such as hotels, supermarkets and universities, considering the limitations of the current autonomous driving technologies and complicated traffic situations.

Lu said Chinese tech giants have invested heavily in the intelligent logistics sector, covering driverless vehicles, drones and robots, to gain the upper hand amid fierce competition. However, he added that it will take a long time for unmanned delivery services to become commercialized on a broad scale.

COMMENT

Editorials

China-Germany cooperation not a 'risk', but a guarantee for stable relations

After visiting Chongqing, a key southwest manufacturing base, and Shanghai, the national financial hub, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz arrived in Beijing to meet with President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang.

This is the German leader's second visit to China since taking office in December 2021, and the first by a Western leader this year. The visit is worth the attention it has garnered because it carries a lot of weight for both China and Germany, as well as the European Union, the broader West, even the entire world. That is because what the two sides manage, or fail, to accomplish may have a substantial impact on the orientation of international relations for many years to come.

Germany, a key member of the EU, the G7, and NATO, has, as called for by Brussels, been recalibrating its China policy within the EU framework that defines China as a "systemic rival". But that is only one side of the coin, it is also the largest functional economic and trade interface between China and the broader West.

Many have therefore pinned their hopes on Scholz's meetings in Beijing proving fruitful, because preserving robust China-Germany economic and trade ties and maintaining friendly relations has never been as important. Synergy and reciprocity must prevail in these troubled times, as it would demonstrate there is a positive alternative to the doom and gloom that is being created by those intent on holding to a divisive and antagonistic course.

In their meeting on Tuesday, China's top leader told Scholz that cooperation between China and Germany was not a "risk" but a guarantee for stable ties and an opportunity for the future.

That Chancellor Scholz came with a bumper delegation of government ministers and business executives suggests that he views things the same way. It also evoked the Angela Merkel years. Merkel, who visited China a dozen times as German chancellor, the most among all Western leaders during their tenures, is cherished in Chinese memories as a friendly, pragmatic Western leader, and there is a hankering that under Chancellor Scholz's watch, Germany will continue to be a touchstone for mutually beneficial cooperation.

Indeed, for all the noises about "de-risking" and reducing "dependencies", and a conspicuous slump from 2022, China remained Germany's No 1 trading partner for the eighth straight year in 2023, with a trade volume of more than 250 billion euros (\$265.3 billion). Undermining such a mutually beneficial relationship, especially in such challenging times, would be akin to the two sides deliberately shooting themselves in the foot. Germany saw its economy shrink 0.3 percent last year as a result of inflation, high interest rates and sluggish exports. The 0.2 percent growth it anticipates for 2024 would be out of the question without the support of such a productive relationship.

Nonetheless, Germany will have to withstand great pressure to sustain its trade relations with China, not to mention continuing to invest in the country. After all, the United States is intensifying its endeavors to press its allies and partners to decouple from China. While the EU itself is intent on reducing its "dependency" on the country, and has launched multiple investigations into alleged unfair Chinese trade practices. This calls for tremendous political courage on the part of Scholz, and for the two countries to develop bilateral relations in an all-round way from a long-term and strategic perspective, as the Chinese leader told his guest.

The big picture is certainly clear for those willing to see it. And ignoring it may lead to debilitating outcomes. There is no fundamental conflict of interests between China and Germany, and neither poses a security threat to the other, as his host reminded Scholz. Hopefully, Chancellor Scholz and his Chinese hosts can work together to strengthen ties and in doing so inject more stability and certainty into the world.

Calming tensions in the Middle East

Within hours of Iran's drone and missile attack on Israel on Sunday, China initiated intensive diplomatic mediation efforts involving Saudi Arabia, Iran and Israel, seeking to use its balanced relations with these countries to calm the situation in the Middle East.

Iran has stated that its military action was in response to Israel's airstrike on its consulate in Damascus, Syria, and it deems the matter to be concluded, so there is no reason why a lid cannot be kept on the tensions, if all parties in the region refrain from acting rashly as China is urging.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi's talk by telephone on Monday with Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud testifies to Riyadh and Beijing having a solid foundation on which to coordinate efforts to exert influence on Teheran and Tel Aviv, whether directly or indirectly, so as to prevent a further escalation of tensions.

Wang also talked by telephone with his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on the same day, in which he condemned the attack on Iran's embassy as a serious violation of international law. He recognized the restraint Iran demonstrated in its response, which was not aimed at any neighboring country, and Teheran's willingness to continue to pursue peace and stability in the region.

Until the conflict erupted in Gaza, the realization of the common aspiration of countries in the region for a regional environment conducive to development had seemed to be on the cards after the China-brokered reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Beijing believes that Teheran, having made its point, can avoid further actions that aggravate the tensions while safeguarding Iran's sovereignty and dignity. And although Israel has an advanced defense system, the losses it incurred from Iran's measured retaliation on Sunday should be enough to convince Tel Aviv of the potentially dire consequences of opening a new front against Iran. Such a development would be in no country's interests, including the United States, which has so far been reluctant to use its influence to exert any meaningful pressure to rein in Israel's aggression in Gaza.

China is deeply concerned about the current escalation of regional tensions. It urges all parties concerned to maintain maximum restraint. The latest diplomatic efforts of Beijing should also be regarded as an integral part of its endeavor to help broker a cease-fire in Gaza and secure a lasting solution to the Palestinian issue and a continuation of its bid to stabilize the region as a whole.

This round of escalation of tensions is nothing but the latest spillover effect from the conflict in Gaza. The world should be more vigilant against the longstanding frictions in the region causing sparks to fly due to hotheaded decisions and reckless moves, since these have the potential to ignite a tinderbox of troubles.

Attention should continue to be focused on the root cause of regional chaos: the long-term prevention of the Palestinian people realizing their legitimate national rights, which is the longest-lasting injustice in modern times.

That's why Wang rightly pointed out that the top priority for the time being is to strictly implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 2728, immediately achieve an unconditional and lasting cease-fire, protect civilians, and ensure humanitarian relief can reach the besieged Palestinians in Gaza who are in dire need of it.

The international community should take more active actions to support the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and the convening of a larger, more authoritative international peace conference that formulates a realizable timetable and road map for the implementation of the two-state solution.

The longer the conflict in Gaza drags on, the more possibility there is that a stray spark will ignite a wild fire.

CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at:

China Daily
15 Huixin Dongjie Chaoyang District,
Beijing 100029
News: +86 (0) 10 6491-8356
editor@chinadaily.com.cn
Advertisement: +86 (0) 10 6491-8631
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mobile/daily.html

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

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

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036
+1 212 537 8888
editor@chinadailyusa.com

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

Luo Jie



Opinion Line

US passes itself off as victim of cyberattacks to smear China

A report released by the National Computer Virus Emergency Response Center on Monday says intelligence agencies in the United States used the unfounded excuse of "Chinese cyber threat" to smear China in exchange for US government funding.

In February, a US congressional committee held a hearing on the alleged cyber threat from China, claiming a Chinese State-sponsored hacking organization, "Volt Typhoon", had launched a series of activities affecting critical infrastructure sector networks across the US. China's joint investigation team conducted a traceability analysis and found that the allegations were unfounded, having been made purely with the intention of maligning China.

In May last year, Microsoft released a technical analysis report claiming that the "Volt Typhoon" hacker organization was backed by the Chinese government. Next, the cybersecurity authorities of the "Five Eyes" allies issued a joint advisory citing the report and hyped it up. Neither the advisory nor the report pro-

vided a detailed analytical process for source tracing of the cyberattacks. But that did not stop them from claiming that "Volt Typhoon" was a State-sponsored Chinese cyber actor.

Analysis by Chinese technical teams shows that "Volt Typhoon" does not bear the characteristics of a State-backed hacker. On the contrary, its activities bore the signature of a ransomware or cybercriminal group. Therefore, it was baseless to call "Volt Typhoon" a China-backed hacker on the basis of such ambiguous factors.

Tracing the source of cyberattacks has long been an international problem, given that attackers always hide their true identity and geographic location, such as by using virtual private networks, or launching attacks by hijacking infected computers as relay points. However, the US always makes use of this difficulty to pass itself off as the "victim" of cyberattacks. Once it manages to gain the support of international public opinion, the US next uses this as a political chip to put pressure

on other countries in international disputes, and seek excessive benefits.

In recent years, China's public security organs have noticed cyberattacks on the websites of the Northwestern Polytechnical University, the Wuhan Earthquake Monitoring Center and other institutions by the US National Security Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency, showing that the US is the real "hacker empire".

At present, cyberattacks are mainly cross-border crimes, and all countries need to strengthen cooperation under the framework of Interpol, share intelligence on cybercrime and coordinate governance, to jointly combat cybersecurity threats, rather than forming "exclusive cliques" among a few countries. The US should know full well that protecting critical infrastructure is a common concern of all countries, and maintaining peace and stability in cyberspace serves the common interests of China, the US and other countries around the world.

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

Online influencers need to exercise self-control

Had a woman surnamed Xu, who has tens of millions of followers on social networking sites, marked a video clip in which she claimed she found a Grade 1 student's winter holiday homework in a restaurant in Paris, as "fictional", the story would have made for a good, even laughable, joke.

But instead, she claimed the story was real, even fabricating the student's name, Qin Lang. There were some hiccups when someone cast doubts on Qin's non-existent school, but Xu kept it going as long as she could, claiming later she had found Qin's mother so the matter was closed. She even produced what she claimed was her WeChat conversation with Qin's mother.

The police fell for her story and wast-

ed their time and resources investigating all students named Qin Lang in the mentioned region. When they found out that the whole thing was fabricated, they imposed a penalty on Xu and her company. Her accounts on various social media platforms have since been blocked, leading to her losing hundreds of millions of yuan going by what she charges for advertisements.

The incident underlines the need to ensure online influencers don't share false information or start rumors to get more likes and publicity.

Currently, short videos are extremely popular, but there is no way to regulate what is being posted. As a result, staged quarrels between a woman and her "mother-in-law" are sometimes passed

off as news.

It is equally necessary to curb the impulse of internet celebrities to publish false information.

It was in this backdrop that the National Education Refutation Platform, managed by the Ministry of Education, was officially launched in March to identify rumors and provide clarifications.

Bloggers need to not only exercise self-control, but also enhance their social media literacy. The platforms should also strengthen their supervision, and enforce relevant laws and regulations, so that in the future, essential resources are not spent in looking for someone who doesn't exist.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Colleges can harness digital devices for learning

The School of Management of Qufu Normal University in Jining, Shandong province, has issued a regulation banning the use of mobile phones, tablets, laptop computers and other electronic products in class to "eliminate the adverse impact of mobile phones and other electronic products on the classroom".

In 2023, Changsha University of Science and Technology, Changchun University and many other higher education institutions vowed to tighten classroom discipline requirements, banning mobile phones and some other electronic devices, excluding laptop computers, in class.

The School of Management at QNU was the first to ban students using laptop computers in class. However, many college students find using tablets and laptops in class can improve

the efficiency of classroom learning. Compared with primary and secondary schools, the learning environment of universities should be more open and inclusive. College learning needs more inspiration, discussion and information, which electronic products, if properly used, can provide for some students.

It should not be assumed that all students have their studies adversely affected by bringing digital devices into the classroom. After all, many teachers also use computers in the classroom today in their teaching. It doesn't make sense to force students to give up their devices when teachers no longer rely solely on chalk and blackboards.

In recent years, the Ministry of Education has vigorously implemented the national education digitalization strategic action, and many places have begun to explore ways to digitalize education. These teaching practices make it difficult for schools to completely

reject electronic products in class.

At the same time, it can also be seen that the key to electronic device use in class is how to use them. The devices themselves don't have original sin. How to make sure they better serve the educational purposes should be the focus of classroom discipline regulations.

Students should be encouraged to use all possible means to explore the frontier of the knowledge world. It is more advisable to raise the awareness of college students on how to better use digital gadgets in the digital age.

As for the final effect of the ban on the use of electronic devices in class, the School of Management of QNU should scientifically assess how much it can help realize its intended objectives. The final decision should be made according to the assessment results. In the process, the school should also seek the opinions of the students.

— BEIJING NEWS

COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | China-Germany Relations

Editor's note: China and Germany have huge potential for win-win cooperation in both traditional fields such as machinery manufacturing and automobiles and emerging fields including green economy. As such, the two sides should engage in mutually beneficial exchanges. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Liu Zuokui

Cooperation only certainty for Germany

All eyes are on German Chancellor Olaf Scholz who just concluded a three-day visit to China from Sunday. That Scholz was accompanied by Environment Minister Steffi Lemke, Agriculture Minister Cem Ozdemir, and Transport Minister Volker Wissing shows how important the visit is for both sides.

The historical trajectory of Sino-German relations shows pragmatic cooperation has served as the cornerstone of bilateral ties. Conversely, endeavors veering toward ideological confrontation have disrupted and undermined their partnership. Anchored by the tenets of economic globalization and interdependence, Sino-German relations have thrived, buoyed by a robust mutual strategic trust and open communication.

Economics and trade are the linchpin of Sino-German relations. Over the past half a century, Germany has emerged as one of China's foremost trading partners in Europe, with bilateral trade accounting for one-third of the total China-European Union trade. And the fact that German investments in China constitute a third of total EU investments underscores the symbiotic nature of their economic interdependence.

The two countries' automobile and energy sectors serve as exemplars of successful industrial collaboration, exemplified by CATL's significant investments in Germany. Even amid escalating geopolitical tensions, German businesses continue to express confidence in the Chinese market and its economic potential, as evidenced by a 4.3 percent year-on-year increase in direct investments in 2023, which reached a record 11.9 billion euros (\$12.9 billion), according to IWI institute. Also, German investments in China accounted for 10.3 percent of its total foreign investments in 2023, the highest since 2014.

Besides, the "Business Confidence Survey 2023-24" the German Chamber of Commerce released in January shows that more than 90 percent of German companies operating in China plan to continue to do so, with more than half of them saying they intend to increase their investments. Not for nothing has China been Germany's most important trading partner for eight straight years.

There is still ample potential for economic cooperation between China and Germany, especially in digital and green economies, as well as in electric vehicles, clean energy, biopharmaceuticals, and artificial intelligence.



The author is deputy director of the Institute of European Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

China-Germany relations have been successful, because the two sides practice pragmatic cooperation and win-win collaboration for mutual benefit, promote globalization, uphold multilateralism, and are committed to building a community of shared interests through their cooperation.

But the litany of crises, from financial meltdowns to geopolitical upheavals the EU has been grappling with, have given rise to conservatism and extremist ideologies, leading to a discernible shift in its foreign policies. In particular, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has dramatically reduced, if not ended, the peace and growth dividends Europe, especially Germany, had been enjoying for more than 70 years.

As a result, the development landscape has undergone significant changes. Relying on Russia's cheap energy supply, the United States' security assurances, and China's inexpensive goods, the EU, and German economies, had maintained relatively good growth despite the challenges.

But now Germany's international development environment has changed, because the severing of energy supply from Russia due to US and European sanctions against Moscow has drastically increased Germany's energy bill, hurting its economic competitiveness. And given its concerns over excessive reliance on the US for security, Germany has been making substantial investments to boost security to minimize the "threat" posed by Russia.

In such circumstances, the only certainty for Germany is cooperation with China.

However, this cooperation is also subject to changes given the complex international and domestic situations. And Germany's oscillating policy toward China is bound to cast a shadow over future economic cooperation.

After the EU's report, "EU-China: A Strategic Outlook", in 2019 defined China as a "partner", a "competitor" as well as a "systemic rival", there has been a noticeable shift in the EU's policy toward China, with ideological and broad security factors coming more into play.

Following the Russia-Ukraine crisis, the EU followed the US in adopting a "de-risking" strategy toward China, which has significantly impacted Germany, leading to the adoption of new security and China policies in 2023.

On July 13 last year, the Scholz government passed its first comprehensive China policy, which advocates for "systemic rivalry" with China and emphasizes the necessity of reducing economic dependence on China. Simultaneously, it stresses the importance of China and Germany continuing their cooperation on global issues such as free trade and climate change.

However, Scholz has emphasized that Germany has no intention of "decoupling" from China despite the new policy. Instead, he said, Germany is committed to continuing cooperation with China. The second visit of Chancellor Scholz to China is the first one after the adoption of the new policy last year. Some foreign media have suggested that Germany seems to be shifting its focus toward Southeast Asian countries in an attempt to reduce its dependency on China. However, this approach is impractical and runs counter to Germany's interests.

It is in the interest of both Germany and China to deepen cooperation, because "decoupling" or "de-risking" is not in the interest of either party. Sino-German relations will benefit from deepening pragmatic cooperation.

As two economic powerhouses, China and Germany must seize the opportunity to recalibrate their partnership on a trajectory of mutual benefit and sustainable growth. By charting a course anchored in mutual respect and shared interests, the two sides can navigate the complexities of the current geopolitical landscape and forge a path toward a future defined by cooperation and prosperity.

Moreover, the growth of the Chinese economy will create considerable opportunities for Germany, too. So the two sides should engage in fair competition, not indulge in a zero-sum game, and strengthen cooperation for mutual benefit.

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

Liu Zhongwei

Charting a new course in Sino-German ties

The visit of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz is very important because Scholz's delegation includes several federal ministers and a large number of business leaders from across different sectors.

This is Scholz's second visit to China. In November 2022, he led a German big business delegation to China. The 2022 visit was not only Scholz's first to China as German chancellor but also the first visit by a European leader to China after the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. It was also the first face-to-face meeting between the top leaders of the two countries since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Scholz's second visit to China in one and a half years shows he is keen to strengthen relations with China. However, the personal efforts of Scholz and the eagerness of German enterprises to engage in dialogue and cooperation are not enough to elevate Sino-German relations to newer heights in the new era. To write a new chapter in Sino-German relations, the German government and strategic community, too, have to adopt a forward-looking attitude toward China, build a strategic consensus on bilateral ties and follow a foreign policy independent of the US.

Germany should also stop devising its China policy based on ideology. In this regard, Scholz, who was vice-chancellor and finance minister in former chancellor Angela Merkel's government, has advocated inheriting as well as adjusting Merkel's policies, reflecting his pragmatic attitude toward China.

Yet Scholz's is a coalition government of three major parties: the Social Democratic Party, the Green Party and the Free Democratic Party. There are significant differences among the three parties in terms of China policy. From example, Green Party and Free Democratic Party politicians have been hyping up the "China threat" theory and advocating for a tough stance against China, in particular, reducing Germany's economic dependence on China.

They also demand that Germany's China policy reflect that China is an "economic competitor" and "systemic rival". In fact, during Scholz's first visit to China, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (a Greens leader) publicly criticized Scholz's China policy for being too mild, saying China's values differ from Germany's, which disrupted the normal development of bilateral ties.

Baerbock's contention sounds similar to what many US politicians have been saying and the US' China policy is based on. In order to raise Sino-German ties to newer heights, the Scholz government has to stop aping the US' China policy, especially because China-US relations have undergone the most extensive changes after Donald Trump became US president in January 2017.

The US has basically devised a comprehensive strategy toward China, which it sees as its "strategic competitor". And as an important member of NATO, Germany has always regarded its alliance with the US as the cornerstone of its foreign policy. In fact, its positions on economic and security policies, global issues and values are largely consistent with those of the United States.

In terms of its China policy, Germany, as a Western country, is also deeply influenced by the US' China policy which emphasizes the element of competition. So while developing relations with China, Germany constantly reminds itself to be vigilant against China's strength. This is the reason why Germany, after Scholz became chancellor, has broken the tradition of preferring dialogue with China to fine-tune its Asia policy and made the "Indo-Pacific" region a new focus of its foreign policy, which reflects its US-style Cold War thinking.

As a pillar of European integration and a major world power, Germany is capable of and should break free from its dependence on US foreign policy, work out an independent foreign policy, including a China policy free of US influence, and promote the comprehensive development of Sino-German relations for the benefit of not only the two countries but also the rest of the world.

Elevating Sino-German relations to newer heights requires creating more favorable conditions for bilateral economic cooperation and making full use of the cornerstone of Sino-German economic and trade relations.

In recent years, Sino-German relations have been able to withstand US-orchestrated disruptions and the changes brought about by the election of a new German government and international developments, largely because of mutual trust and a solid economic and trade foundation.

The fact that Sino-German economic cooperation is yielding positive results is proved by the record 11.9 billion euros (\$12.7 billion) German direct investment in China last year. Therefore, under the new historical conditions, China and Germany should engage in in-depth discussions on major issues such as the security of global industry and supply chains, and further strengthen economic and trade cooperation.

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



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

Ann Buel

The diverse agenda of Scholz's visit to China

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's visit to China is expected to strengthen economic and trade relations between the two sides, because apart from several senior federal ministers, a large business delegation is also accompanying the German chancellor.

This is Scholz's second visit to the country. His first visit was in November 2022. The Chinese leaders have reiterated that as responsible major countries, both China and Germany should not only bolster bilateral relations and set examples of win-win cooperation, but also safeguard the world order and uphold multilateralism while working together to address global challenges.

Scholz's visit comes in the wake of what many perceive as improving Sino-US relations, and normal working relations between China and the European Union. The visit also comes at a time when the achievements of China are becoming increasingly prominent.

In this context, Violeta Bulc, former EU commissioner for transport, working with the Europe-Asia Center in Brussels, recalled the impressions of her recent visit to China, by saying that the cities and the countryside are clean, vehicles in the cities are all electric, street food, restaurant food is excellent, affordable, available everywhere, infra-



The author is a former official of the European Commission.

structure is growing as we speak and it is modern and over-designed.

She also said that China is gaining international influence via trade, lobbying, yet always strengthening its internal market first, sharing prosperity with the masses, while stressing the peaceful nature of China, which prefers using negotiations and soft power to resolve differences.

Another European, Norwegian diplomat Erik Solheim, recently said that China invested \$890 billion in clean energy in 2023, which was as much as the combined investment of the rest of the world in fossil fuels. It's the same as the total economy of Turkey or Switzerland. Green investment was the main driver of economic growth in China in 2023.

Scholz's visit is important also because the two sides discussed the Ukraine crisis to find a way to help end the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In fact, Ukraine is seeking China's support and has invited representatives from the country to a global meeting in Switzerland, possibly in June, to discuss a peace formula.

Also, French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne recently said France expects China to play a role in ending the conflict.

But more than anything else, the Chinese and German sides focused on economic and business relations during their meetings. That the business leaders accompanying Scholz on the trip include Roland Busch, chief executive of Siemens, and Ola Kaellenius, CEO of Mercedes-Benz, and Oliver Zipse, leader of the BMW Group, shows Germany is keen on deepening economic ties with China.

This is understandable because China remains extremely important for German industries, especially carmakers, which operate several local joint ventures with Chinese partners in what is the world's biggest auto market. Accordingly, German direct investment in China rose to a record 11.9 billion euros (\$12.7 billion) in 2023, showing that German enterprises and investors continue to plough money into a country that Germany calls a "systemic rival".

Explaining the record increase in German direct investment, Chinese scholars insisted that German investors and businesses do not want to miss the series of opening-up measures and favorable policies that China has taken of late.

Despite the EU launching an anti-

subsidy probe into electric vehicles (EVs) from China, Beijing and Berlin should strengthen coordination on the issue, as the two countries have already forged a "symbiotic relationship" in the EV industry chain.

However, Chinese scholars said the German economy is in serious trouble because of the outflow of industries and capital, and the Scholz government needs to halt this outflow to dispel opposition attacks.

The auto industry is a pillar of the German economy, and losing the Chinese market would be disastrous for it. Germany lags in new manufacturing areas, especially in digital and green restructuring and upgrading, which makes its cooperation with China crucial.

On the other hand, the foreign trade office of the German Chamber of Industry and Commerce said the United States is set to overtake China as the top trading partner of Germany by 2025 in view of the continuing growth in German exports to the US.

So quite expectedly, the focus of the talks between the Chinese and German sides should be on creating opportunities for bolstering trade, given the less-polarized global attitude toward China.

The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

GLOBAL VIEWS



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

ZHANG YUYAN

Stimulating potential

New quality productive forces of an open economy can create new advantages

Developing new quality productive forces is an important path to respond to profound and complex changes in both the international and domestic environments and to achieve healthy, stable and rapid economic development. Compared to traditional productivity, new quality productive forces emphasize high technology content and innovation-driven development.



In the growth model proposed by economist Robert Solow, economic growth is determined by the input of labor and capital plus a residual value, namely the part of the economic growth rate that remains after subtracting the growth rates of labor and capital inputs. This residual value was later termed the "Solow residual value".

Since it contributes to economic growth, the Solow residual value transforms into total factor productivity, which refers to the part of economic growth that cannot be simply explained by the quantitative increase in labor and capital inputs. Analyzing the basic components of the Solow residual value can, to some extent, provide us with a key to understanding new quality productive forces.

A basic fact revealed by economics is that sustained and rapid economic growth comes from the continuous improvement of labor productivity. The direct driving forces behind productivity enhancement are technological progress, specialized production, and trade, while the indirect driving force is institutional conditions. It is easy to understand how technological progress leads to productivity improvements. Market exchanges can occur spontaneously, but large-scale, widely participated division of production and reciprocal exchange require universal and effective institutional conditions, such as the protection of property rights and the honoring of contracts.

Assuming there is no technological progress, individuals, businesses, or countries can create and obtain trade benefits through the "exchange of what one owns for what one lacks", "exchange of abundance for scarcity" and "exchange of one's expertise for one's ineptitude", thereby achieving more efficient use of resources and a general increase in economic welfare. The underlying logic of classic trade theory lies here. The "three exchanges" mentioned here come from the Chinese classics *Huainanzi* (Great Words From Huainan) and *Shiji* (Records of the Grand Historian) in the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24).

Regarding the benefits of division of labor, Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776 offered a detailed analysis. The author observed the production and division of labor in a small British pin factory, finding that productivity had increased by hundreds of times due to simple division of labor, which is decisively influenced by the depth and breadth of the market. The author emphasized that without a formal judicial and administrative system to give people a sense of security over their property rights and confidence in people's

adherence to contracts, a country's commerce and manufacturing could seldom develop for long.

The focus on developing new quality productive forces should primarily be on three key components of total factor productivity. The first is to encourage technological innovation. The second is to continuously expand the market size to make the division of labor and specialization more detailed and the potential trade benefits greater. The third is to further enhance the protection of property rights and contracts, and expand their coverage, that is, to ensure the market plays a decisive role in resource allocation and better utilize the role of government. The "quality" in new quality productive forces should and must include the quality of institutions. In fact, in promoting economic growth, these three elements interact with and are inseparable from each other.

Economic growth potential can be explored from both incremental and stock perspectives. To increase increments, on the one hand, countries or enterprises can increase investment in scientific and technological innovation research and development to generate more scientific and technological innovations; on the other hand, they can steadily advance institutional innovations primarily focused on rules and standards, especially innovative institutional outcomes that align with international high-standard economic and trade rules.

Innovation does not simply mean increasing technological investment; it also means ensuring the quality of the investment, that is, truly making the best use of people and resources under full consideration of market demand and objective conditions, so that the wealth growth brought by new quality productive forces better meets people's needs. At the same time, relying on legal and institutional protections for property rights, division of labor, trade, and market expansion can proceed smoothly.

The key to unleashing potential and revitalizing stock lies in further removing systemic and institutional barriers, forming effective incentives, and significantly reducing transaction costs. The far-reaching Industrial Revolution was driven by the use and popularization of James Watt's steam engine. However, Watt did not invent the steam engine but improved it. In fact, the steam engine appeared decades before Watt, but it was not widely used until the Watt era. The most critical reason was that wages in Britain were much higher than in continental Europe at the time, making it profitable to use machines instead of labor.

Today's world shares many similarities with the situation more than two centuries ago, mainly manifested in the profound changes in the relative prices of production factors such as knowledge, data, innovation ability, and related institutional conditions compared to other factors.

From the perspective of developing new quality productive forces, increasing increments and revitalizing stock is both a development proposition and a reform proposition. Specific measures, such as the comprehensive removal of foreign investment access restrictions in the

manufacturing sector, were included in this year's government work report. Introducing foreign investment and encouraging the flow of capital, technology, talent and other resources essentially expands market capacity. Increased external market competition may pose risks and challenges for individual enterprises. However, this is also an indispensable path to enhance the competitiveness of enterprises and jointly elevate the productivity and welfare of China and the world.

The next step involves pushing for deeper reforms through greater openness. First, substantial efforts should be made to accelerate the construction of a unified national market. While aligning with international rules and standards, a highly efficient, standardized, fair competition and fully open national unified market should be built.

Second, further intensify unilateral openness. In response to the China-EU Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, which has been stalled due to political issues, China could consider implementing it unilaterally and selectively, using this as a lever to build an open world economy and to pry open China-EU economic and trade relations. Proactive steps have already been taken, such as implementing unilateral visa exemptions, zero tariffs and reducing the negative lists among other openness measures on a large scale. China has made commitments to open its service industry, allowing European investors to invest in medical services in certain Chinese cities.

Third, aim for higher levels of rules and standards, such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement, and actively participate in negotiations with the goal of joining these organizations. Negotiations can help promote understanding and comprehension of the current global economic and trade system while benchmarking with these standards can guide the evolution of domestic industries and advance domestic reforms.

In addition to "bringing in", openness also involves "going global". It can be considered to extend the domestic circulation overseas to better coordinate the domestic and international dual circulations. China and Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar have high economic and trade interdependence, share a long history of cultural exchanges, and have established mechanisms such as the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation. Perhaps in policy or institutional design, a certain degree of "national treatment" could be considered to be granted to the five countries. Although there are still many steps to take, it may still be a way or direction beneficial for high-quality opening-up.

The author is an academic member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, director of the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the CASS and chief expert of the National Institute for Global Strategy at the CASS. 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*.

LU FENG

Countering 'overcapacity'

US politicians are likely to adopt a tough stance on the trade imbalance with China ahead of the election

During the COVID-19 pandemic, severe inflation in the United States and Western countries necessitated their increased imports from China, leading to their being relatively tolerant about China's growing trade surplus. However, as inflation began to ease, the issue of their trade imbalances with China has resurfaced.

Last summer, US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo singled out China's substantial subsidies for chip investments, which, she argued, led to an oversupply of mature and legacy chips. Similarly, US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen cautioned that "China is too large to export its way to growth, and its economic policy choices have far-reaching consequences". She questioned China's "overcapacity" in the clean energy industry again during her visit to China in April.

China's Government Work Report, released in March, recognizes the economic progress made in 2023 but underscores several challenges, including "overcapacity in some industries" and "China's external environment (has become) more complex, severe, and uncertain". Overcapacity is not a new issue in China. The country grappled with widespread overcapacity back in the late 1990s due to intensified economic transition. However, this old issue has taken on new dimensions, especially against the backdrop of major power competition and the evolving dynamics of geoeconomic relations.

It should be noted that the demand for chips, new energy vehicles and power batteries continues to grow rapidly. Especially, NEVs and batteries and their core components, which belong to technologically-advanced emerging industries, promise even greater potential for future growth. Therefore, assessing whether supply capacity in these industries exceeds demand requires careful consideration of these characteristics.

Unlike the traditional focus of discussions on overcapacity — textile and home appliance industries, for example — the sectors discussed above are characterized by their high technological and capital intensity. These sectors predominantly belong to the mid- and high-end industries, some even within the realm of the emerging and cutting-edge industries, shifting away from low-end supplies. The sectors in the new wave of overcapacity are large in scale, typically involving markets worth hundreds of billions of dollars. The impact of any subsequent adjustments due to overcapacity in these sectors would be profound. Additionally, certain industries, such as automobiles, petrochemical raw materials, and chips, have traditionally been pillars of developed econo-

mies with strong international competitiveness. Overcapacity in these industries could provoke more sensitive and complex reactions in these countries than in previous instances.

The surge in investment, triggered by shortages of certain goods during the pandemic, is a distinct cause of the new wave of overcapacity. The pandemic's asymmetric impact on supply and demand led to temporary shortages of some goods in many countries. This was particularly pronounced in the United States and the European Union, where unprecedented macroeconomic policy stimuli inflated demand amid severe inflation, sparking widespread global investment. Data from Statista.com show that the average annual investment in the global semiconductor sector from 2020 to 2023 reached \$148 billion, approximately two and a half times the average of \$59 billion per year over the previous two decades. The sharp increase in investment has translated into an abnormal growth in capacity. When market demand cannot match such swift growth, it inevitably results in overcapacity.

China's manufacturing sector has seen accelerated upgrades and capacity expansion, highlighting the long-term achievements of China's economic catch-up. However, a combination of factors has led to weak domestic demand growth, resulting in a scenario of "strong supply, weak demand" that hinders the full utilization of domestic capacity. This, coupled with the pandemic-induced surge in external demand, has prompted a swift enlargement of China's trade surplus in industrial goods. In recent years, China has increased its investments in the semiconductor industry. Additionally, significant investments have been made in large-scale chemical projects. Over the past three years, China's average trade surplus in industrial goods has risen to over \$1.6 trillion, nearly double the 2010-2019 average of over \$860 billion. In the last two years, the trade surplus in industrial goods accounted for more than 30 percent of the total value added of the domestic industry. Strong growth of investment capability in the more advanced sectors and competitiveness in the global market are encouraging achievements, but they may also present a new challenge in keeping a necessary balance between supply and demand.

The new wave of overcapacity is poised to have multifaceted impacts on both the domestic and international economic landscapes. In October 2023, the EU initiated an anti-subsidy investigation into its imports of battery electric vehicles from China. In recent years, the US has increasingly relied on unilateral mechanisms afforded by its domestic laws when initiating trade conflicts. Given that 2024 is an election year, it is likely that US politicians will adopt a tough stance on China to garner votes,

focusing particularly on the issues of overcapacity and the trade imbalance.

First, considering the distinct characteristics of the new wave of overcapacity, it is imperative to adopt measures that are synchronized domestically and internationally. After years of development, China's industrial technology and production capabilities have achieved significant milestones, positioning a number of sectors at the global forefront. Yet, there is still a notable disparity compared to major developed nations, and some key sectors exhibit obvious supply shortages. This underscores the necessity to continuously invest in innovation and cultivate new quality productive forces. Meanwhile, attention should also be paid to the balance between supply and demand and the suitability of production capacity in the development of high-tech and emerging industries, and to avoid excessive redundancy of supply capacity or even overcapacity.

Second, it is essential to adopt proactive macroeconomic and structural reform measures to stimulate domestic demand, correct the imbalance characterized by "strong supply and weak demand", and enhance domestic capacity utilization. Deepening reforms to refine and enhance medium- and long-term income distribution policies is crucial. This involves gradually raising the proportion of household income in the national income distribution structure, which will fundamentally increase consumer demand.

Third, securing a fair share of the international market through equitable competition is a fundamental right of Chinese enterprises in an open environment. We need to rightfully oppose protectionist measures implemented by trading partners under the guise of overcapacity. These measures violate international economic and trade norms, and China reserves the right to take reciprocal measures to safeguard the legitimate interests of its enterprises and the development of its domestic industry.

Fourth, the new wave of overcapacity may exacerbate strains on the international economic and trade framework. As an emerging major country, China can play a more proactive role in multilateral economic, trade and financial institutions, as well as the G20, to foster a constructive global response to the new wave of overcapacity. Upholding the international economic and trade rules and order is not only beneficial to the global economy but is particularly advantageous for emerging powers.

The author is a professor of economics at the National School of Development at Peking University. The author contributed this article to *China Watch*, a think tank powered by *China Daily*. The views do not necessarily reflect those of *China Daily*.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

LIFE

All about Gen Z

Z WEEKLY

Late night learning for new skills

In Wuhan, night schools provide varied classes, encouraging relaxation, friendship, and a love for learning outside of work.



Clockwise from top: Gong Benyi demonstrates latte art to his students at the night school. Students attend a dancing class. Yuli (left) demonstrates makeup techniques to her students. Students attend an African drumming class.

By LIU KUN in Wuhan and LIXINRAN liukun@chinadaily.com.cn

Organized and initiated by the Wuhan Youth League Committee, a variety of classes, including latte art, makeup, African drumming, and calligraphy, have been offered in district cultural centers and com-

munity hubs since last November. This initiative follows extensive research into the needs and interests of young people.

Wang Chengcheng, 26, is a student attending the latte art class at the Night School for Youths at a community hub in Wuhan, Central China's Hubei province. She heavily relies on coffee to get through the day, explaining that her coffee intake varies

depending on her workload: once or twice a week when things are light, but increases to one cup a day when she's busy.

"I've tried frothing milk myself, but I've never attempted latte art before. Our instructor could craft intricate designs like lions, pandas, and monkeys. It's truly an art," she said.

After a few classes, she can now draw a

heart on her latte. "I've discovered there's so much more to coffee than just a beverage," she said.

Zhang Cheng, a 38-year-old middle school art teacher, joined the calligraphy class. "When I was a child, I studied to improve myself. But now I'm studying for pleasure and relaxation," she said.

Zhang had minimal practice in calligraphy, mostly with her amateur father during her childhood.

"I'm basically a beginner, but there's no pressure in these classes. We're not forced to study here or have any requirements to fulfill; the whole environment is lighthearted and relaxing," she said.

Zhang also mentioned that her instructor, Cheng Weihong, was very patient and provided individual guidance to each student.

Cheng is a member of the Hubei Provincial Calligraphers Association with over 20 years of teaching experience.

"A friend introduced me to teach here, and I was told that a lot of young people are eager to learn more about traditional Chinese culture and calligraphy," he said.

According to Cheng, the majority of his students are eager and focused young women in their 20s and 30s, most of whom were beginners in this subject.

"I believe that practicing Chinese calligraphy not only allows them to explore Chinese culture and aesthetics but also offers a meditative experience," he said.

Yuli (pseudonym), 35, instructs the makeup class and brings 11 years of industry experience to her role.

She pointed out that makeup isn't just for celebrities on stage but is important for everyday individuals as well. Her student, Cheng Huan, a 24-year-old kindergarten teacher, agrees.

"I can pick up quite a bit about makeup from lifestyle platforms like Xiaohongshu, but there's no one there to tell me where I might have gone wrong with my eyeliner," said Cheng Huan, emphasizing her desire to learn more about skincare techniques targeting specific problems.

All the students who attend night school have day jobs before these "extra hours", and the same goes for the instructors. Zhang, for example, spends over 10 hours teaching at school before coming here as a student in the evening. She finds the change of environment and her role in the classroom to be refreshing.

"The classes offered here help alleviate my stress and lift my spirits. They are not tiring at all," she said. "In addition to calligraphy, I've also tried out courses like African

drumming, balloon art, and weaving."

Gong Benyi, a 28-year-old who works as an instructor at a coffee academy during the day and as a latte art teacher at the night school, expressed his passion for coffee.

"As soon as I start talking about coffee, I perk up instantly, even when I'm feeling tired. Sharing about coffee culture and giving demonstrations always get me excited."

Both students and teachers appreciate the relaxed yet passionate atmosphere at the night school.

Gong recalled a time when the power went out during class. "We couldn't operate the machines without electricity, so the students improvised by turning on the flashlights on their phones as I talked about the more theoretical stuff," he said. "I was really touched by their dedication to learning."

Yuli mentioned that on one occasion, her class went over the scheduled time because students kept asking questions.

"I was more than happy to answer them," she said. "I've been invited to teach makeup techniques at large companies before, and those classes were often more formal and tense. Here, the students are more outgoing and relaxed, with a diverse range of makeup styles to explore."

Wang said that coming to the Night School for Youths has helped expand her social circle and allowed her to make new friends.

For Zhang, it has brought her closer to her co-workers. "In the past, we only talked about work. But since we started taking night school classes together, we've found more shared topics and have gotten to know each other better," she said.

Not only have these students formed friendships among each other, but many of them have also become friends with their instructors.

"It has been rejuvenating to interact with these youngsters," said Cheng Weihong. "We would talk about their lives and exchange views on traditional culture, which has been quite interesting. I'm impressed by the depth of their thinking and their passion for Chinese culture and calligraphy."

Yuli also said that she has gained a lot from her teaching experience.

"More and more people are devoting increased attention and time to their appearance, and I'm glad that night schools serve as a platform of exchange for both students and makeup teachers like me," she said. "As they improve in their makeup skills, I also learn about their needs beyond makeup, such as hair and overall styling."

By understanding this, Yuli believes that she can provide more useful guidance to her students and fellow makeup artists down the line.

"I hope that in the future, more practical classes can be added to the curriculum, and the class sizes can expand to accommodate more people."

Social Media Digest

Feline frenzy

Cat memes have been popular worldwide for decades, but recently, cat meme videos have taken Chinese social media platforms by storm. These short clips often weave engaging narratives using adorable cat memes, sometimes blending in well-known dog or human memes.

On Feb 29, a single mother from Japan, who had been living in China for years, uploaded a lighthearted cat meme video about her evolving perspectives of the country.

Her account quickly gained traction as her followers grew from zero to 356,000 on Chinese video platform Bilibili. Since then, a growing number of people, many with little to no video editing experience, have started creating similar content.

On Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, the cat meme hashtag has received over 70 million views. People make these videos to share both joyful moments as well as painful memories, which usually



Cat meme videos have become a phenomenon on Chinese social media platforms. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

prompt other internet users to leave comments of encouragement while also sharing similar experiences.

The "cat meme narrative", with its distinct and captivating nature, caters to people's desire for a quick emotional resonance.

"We can find solace and bits of laughter in these videos, both through the stories themselves and the inclusion of those adorable furry cats," wrote a young Chinese netizen.

Cinematic treasures

"I'll never let go. I promise," uttered Rose DeWitt Bukater, played by Kate Winslet in the 1997 blockbuster *Titanic*, while floating on an ornate wood panel.

The very panel on which the actress lay was recently auctioned for a total of \$718,750 in Dallas, United States.

According to a news release from Heritage Auctions, the five-day event brought in \$15.7 million across almost 1,600 lots.



The ornate wood panel featured in the 1997 film *Titanic* was recently auctioned for \$718,750. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The wood panel, pivotal in the farewell scene of Jack and Rose, claimed the highest bid.

Many of the most coveted lots were props from *Titanic*, including the ship's helm wheel (sold for \$200,000), Rose's waterlogged chiffon dress (\$118,750), and the ship's brass engine order telegraph (\$81,250).

Other notable expensive movie props in history include Darth Vader's mask and helmet from *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), which fetched over \$1 million including the premium in 2019, and Audrey Hepburn's dress from *My Fair Lady* (1964), sold for \$3.7 million in 2011.

Joe Maddalena, executive vice president of Heritage Auctions, highlighted the growing interest among collectors in films from the 1980s and 1990s. "Collectors are finally rewarding these artifacts as what they are: cultural artifacts akin to the fine art of old," he said in a statement, according to NPR.

LI XINRAN

LIFE



The Gratis members organized a workshop titled "100 Ways to Enjoy a Weekend in a Big City Without Spending Money" for young people in Shanghai in December 2022. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The rise of urban free-rangers

A group of young urbanites challenges consumerism by exploring free weekend activities, redefining wealth beyond money, **Gui Qian** reports.

How do you typically spend your weekends? For many, it might involve gathering with friends, dining out, watching movies, or shopping.

This was once the routine for Chen Lingyi, a 27-year-old from Shanghai. But three years ago, fresh out of university and starting her career, Chen was startled to find that even after trying to save money for several months, her bank account was still basically empty.

Reflecting on her spending habits, Chen realized that every aspect of city life seemed to demand money, and "leisurely weekends" had practically become synonymous with "consumption".

"Walking on the streets, it felt like every shop window had its own price tag," she said.

However, cities are abundant with resources, so Chen started to wonder whether there were alternative ways to utilize urban spaces beyond consumerism.

Driven by curiosity and a determination to make a change, Chen and 26 friends established The Gratis interest group in May 2022. They launched a social experiment project titled "100 Ways to Enjoy a Weekend in a Big City Without Spending Money".

The group members dubbed themselves "free-range chickens", drawing inspiration from chickens that naturally forage for food, living off farm leftovers or pecking at small insects in open grasslands, resulting in a firmer meat texture due to their constant movement.

"When we came across the term 'free-range chicken', we were thrilled because it aligned perfectly with our identity," Chen recalled.

Unlocking free weekends

The 27 "free-range chickens", all in their 20s and from diverse backgrounds, including students, designers, architects, artists, and scholars, shared a common inquiry: Is spending money the prevailing approach to weekend activities nowadays? Why are lifestyles consistently intertwined with consumption? How has urban space evolved?

By distributing questionnaires to the public, they uncovered numerous surprising ways to enjoy weekends without spending money, such as dancing and exercising on a park lawn with a speaker, hosting book clubs and movie screenings at home, collecting stones by the river, interacting with small animals on the roadside, volunteering at temples, or even becoming a hair model for a free haircut.



“Any small act that disrupts the routine can be considered a creative activity. Just stir up a bit of trouble for yourself, like joining a dance in the streets.”

Chen Lingyi, founder of The Gratis interest group

“This approach shows a reluctance to truly engage with the city, opting instead to follow certain conventions and routines. Personally, I prefer not to have a predetermined destination or schedule.”

Zhang Congzhi, a graduate student at the University of Hong Kong

Chen herself also began to pay closer attention to the free resources around her. She discovered that some flower shops offered free flowers to passersby, and some coffee shops or barber shops displayed signs like "Free Coffee" or "Free Haircut", offering practical training opportunities to their new staff.

Among these ideas and tips, the purpose of not spending money was the main topic of consideration for The Gratis members.

"Not spending money doesn't mean not giving anything. Rather, it makes us realize that money is not the only currency," said Zhang Congzhi, 23, a graduate student at the University of Hong Kong.

A Ting (pseudonym), another member of

the group, hopes that the satisfaction of not spending money won't come from the excitement of "taking advantage" or "finding bargains", but from an awareness and control over one's desires and choices.

Chen quoted Kevin Kelly, co-founder of *Wired* magazine, who said, "Access is better than ownership." Kelly argued that free things don't generate a strong sense of ownership, and not owning things frees people from the responsibilities of care, maintenance, organization, cleaning, and storage.

Behind these perspectives lay the personal stories, research, and reflections of The Gratis members. Feeling that there was so much to share on this topic, they collectively produced a magazine titled *Spending Time*

Alone Without Spending Money.

This magazine is not for sale; instead, it is freely distributed to various locations such as bookstores, libraries, coffee shops, and co-working spaces. Currently, over 80 venues offer this magazine, covering major cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen, as well as smaller towns including Zhangzhou in East China's Fujian province, Lijiang in Southwest China's Yunnan province, and Huangshan in East China's Anhui province.

Formula of leisure

The Gratis members boiled down their experiences to a formula for enjoying weekends in big cities without spending money. This blueprint involves four core free resources: urban spaces, public services, sharing of goods, and creative activities.

Zhang, a social science major with a focus on Media Culture and Creative Cities, delved deep into people's interactions with urban environments. He discovered that modern urban spaces often cater to consumer behavior, leading people to naturally trust places designed for consumption.

For example, he conducted a survey on park toilets and found that despite many meeting sanitation standards, people still subconsciously perceived them as unclean, preferring to use restrooms in shopping malls.

Hong Kong's community libraries provide another interesting example. Zhang pointed out that they coexist with vegetable markets within buildings, typically situated on the top floors. However, he observed that many of the seats were often left unoccupied. "People's use of public spaces is very limited," he said.

Zhang emphasized the importance of true communication and interaction between individuals and their urban environments. He mentioned that for many young people, the act of traveling has become quite mechanical: they follow guides, snap a photo upon arrival, and then move on.

"This approach shows a reluctance to truly engage with the city, opting instead to follow certain conventions and routines. Personally, I prefer not to have a predetermined destination or schedule," Zhang said.

He shared a memorable experience from last summer when he gained a fresh perspective on his hometown, Rizhao, East China's Shandong province, through walking. It took him 2.5 hours to walk from the westernmost to the easternmost coastline of this seaside town. Along the way, Zhang noticed how two rivers divided the city and how the

living environments of the local residents varied in different neighborhoods.

For Zhang, open urban spaces not only provide opportunities for leisure activities without spending money but also bring the joy of exploration and contemplation.

As for the second element in the prescription — public services — it offers even more benefits to city residents. People can easily find affordable or even free night school courses and community dining halls in many cities.

The philosophy of the group, "access is better than ownership", promotes the sharing of goods, prolonging their lifespan and usefulness while also saving money. Chen regularly shares her wardrobe with friends and often hosts exchange parties to swap idle items, skills, and even knowledge.

The last element, creative activities, emphasizes human initiative. "But don't feel pressured as if you have to do something grand," Chen explained. "Any small act that disrupts the routine can be considered a creative activity. Just stir up a bit of trouble for yourself, like joining a dance in the streets."

Looking back at the past year and a half of carrying out their program, Chen realized that she has developed a new understanding of managing money.

"Most of us never learned how to manage our relationship with money during high school or university, so I was very anxious at first when I had little savings. But now, I understand that one's attitude toward money is like a spectrum, with uncontrolled spending on one end and extreme frugality on the other," she said.

Looking ahead, she expressed a desire to participate in more activities and to release a second magazine, with the goal of establishing a healthy relationship with money.

"Through collaborating with other 'free-range chickens', I've discovered that the camaraderie we share is what motivates me," Chen said.

Zhang also highlighted how his participation in The Gratis project had opened him up to meaningful communication with others. He came to understand that the bond between people goes beyond financial exchanges and is, instead, rooted in a shared sense of creativity.

"We've committed to try our best to enhance public spaces, making life more comfortable for everyone. This, in turn, also enriches our personal lives, leading to countless moments of joy and fulfillment," he said.

Contact the writer at guiqian@i21st.cn

LIFE

Restoring the past

A couple at the Hubei Provincial Museum dedicate their lives to conserving China's cultural heritage through traditional craftsmanship and modern conservation methods.

By LIU KUN in Wuhan
and MENG WENJIE
liukun@chinadaily.com.cn

At the Hubei Provincial Museum, there is a notable couple: Zhao Xiaolong, the husband and a specialist in restoring ancient Chinese calligraphy and paintings, and Zhang Xiaolong, the wife and an expert in cultural relic analysis.

Both born in Wuhan, the capital city of Central China's Hubei province, in 1988 — the Year of the Dragon — they share not only similar names but also a passion for preserving China's cultural heritage.

Growing up near the museum, Zhao had a deep love for history and antiques, often crafting small items like tinny tables and bird cages with wood or cardboard. This interest, coupled with his skillful hands, paved the way for his current profession. In 2010, he became a restorer at the museum.

Zhang, on the other hand, had limited knowledge of history since she studied polymer materials at university. Upon graduation, Zhang, like many of her classmates, chose to apply to several chemical companies. However, when she saw the museum's recruiting notice for specialists in relevant subjects, she decided to explore this new opportunity.

"Previously, I knew little about history. It wasn't until I came here that I started to learn and appreciate it more," she said.

Working at the museum, Zhang realized that relic preservation required knowledge and talents from both humanities and sciences as well as other multiple disciplines.

"While humanities specialists uncover relic information from a historical perspective, my role in relic analysis leans more toward scientific and technical proficiency," she said.

Zhao and Zhang both joined the museum in 2010, but their paths didn't cross until they attended the first pottery restoration training class in Hubei in 2012. It was then that they realized that their skills — Zhao's restoration techniques and Zhang's expertise in relic analysis — complemented each other.

They soon became collaborators at work, and then life partners.

According to Zhao, before restoration begins, relics must be thoroughly examined to identify the causes of damage and establish appropriate repair plans, and he would often invite Zhang into this process.

"Technological assistance aids me in selecting repair materials with greater accuracy," he explained.

Even with modern technology, traditional craftsmanship remains central to relic restoration. As the third generation of restorers since the museum's founding in 1953, Zhao emphasizes the continuity of techniques passed down through generations. "The skills my master taught me were handed down from his master in the 1950s," he said.

While restoration techniques have remained largely unchanged, the materials used have improved over time. Zhao explained that, in the past, restorers relied on potentially harmful substances like potassium permanganate or oxalic acid to eliminate mold from paintings. Nowadays, they employ a low-temperature liquid oxy-

gen flushing method to remove mold. This method may leave some stains, but because it is stable, it not only prevents further mold corrosion but also minimizes the need for aggressive treatments that may damage the original paper.

Throughout his decade-long career, Zhao has restored over 300 pieces and framed

over 500 works of calligraphy and paintings.

According to him, in addition to patience and concentration, restoration work may also demand physical strength. For example, some relic pieces can be quite large, requiring restorers to scale heights to access them. "The restoration of each piece typically takes around half a year," Zhao said.

One of his most memorable projects was restoring an ancient painting by Huang Shen (1687-1772), a renowned painter of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). When Zhao first received the piece, he recognized the challenge it presented: it was over three meters high and severely damaged, making it nearly impossible to unfold. Given its significant

economic and historical value, the restoration task was both daunting and crucial, ultimately taking three years to complete.

While restoration work is essential, it is not the end goal of relic protection. To ensure the long-term preservation of these antiques, preventive conservation is just as vital. This is the field that Zhang, as a cultural relics analyst, is currently exploring.

According to her, previously, many relics were in urgent need of restoration. However, as restoration efforts have advanced, preventive conservation — another aspect of relic preservation — has received increased attention.

Zhang's daily work involves examining relics before restoration, assisting in making restoration plans, and evaluating completed restorations. Once the restored relics meet the required standards, she and her colleagues draft precautionary guidelines to ensure suitable environments for their proper storage.

For undamaged relics, Zhang closely monitors environmental conditions and implements proactive measures to prevent any potential damage. This includes regulating temperature, humidity, light exposure, and air pollutants.

"Different relics have varying humidity requirements," she explained. For example, bronze artifacts require humidity levels of 40 percent or lower, while lacquered wooden artifacts are best preserved at 60 to 70 percent humidity. Other materials, such as pottery and paintings, have less strict standards, ranging between 50 and 60 percent humidity.

"Whether it's before or after restoration, or for undamaged relics, preventive conservation work is continuous and essential," she said.

Zhang's work also includes relic digitization, preserving images, and creating audiovisual records of relics. "In doing so, even if the relics themselves disappear someday, future generations can still learn from these materials about our ancestors' thoughts and culture," she explained.

In addition to their regular duties at the museum, Zhao and Zhang also actively promote relic preservation to the public. Zhao frequently participates in community lectures on the restoration of ancient calligraphy and paintings. He also teaches restoration techniques at Hubei College of the Arts, offering students a hands-on experience in the field.

Zhang has observed a growing interest in relic preservation among young people, fueled by the popularity of cultural and historical films and TV shows like *Masters in the Forbidden City* and *National Treasure*. However, she notes that many people, after gaining a deeper understanding of the industry, find it somewhat tedious due to the repetitive nature of the tasks and a perceived lack of creativity. So, she advises these eager young individuals to temper their expectations.

"This line of work requires not just a passion for history but also considerable patience," Zhao said. "Even with your best efforts, you may not see immediate or substantial rewards. However, dedication over time is crucial for relic preservation to truly thrive."



Below: Zhang Xiaolong cleans the surface of a porcelain vase. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Middle: Zhao Xiaolong works on the restoration of an artifact. LIU ZHONGCAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Bottom: Zhao Xiaolong (left) and his wife, Zhang Xiaolong, examine a piece of relic using a specialized instrument. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Special letters sent and specially received

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

Every year, hundreds of international students travel thousands of miles to study in China, leaving their homes and native languages behind. As some of them immerse themselves in intensive Chinese language study at Tongji University in Shanghai, one unique assignment helps them bridge the miles that lie in between — writing a letter home in Chinese.

The letter-home activity has become an annual tradition in Tongji's pre-university Chinese program. After months of studying vocabulary, grammar, and composition, students from all over the world are tasked with composing a letter to their families, written entirely in Chinese characters.

"At first, this activity was operated in a few classes. But when other students saw the letters on display, they took the initiative to write home letters on their own," explained Zong Qian, associate dean of the International School of the university.

Crafting a personal letter requires more advanced skills compared to simple classroom writing exercises, said Zong. "We were

hoping to give them an authentic reason to put their language learning into practice."

As the letters started coming in, the teachers were impressed and touched by the students' efforts to express emotions across cultures. Zong noted that most of the students had zero prior Chinese ability before arriving in Shanghai for the first time just months ago.

"We realized that these letters offered a special window into the students' experiences and growth in China," said Zong. "The letters were very moving to read."

Chipo Bard Shanzuwa Chintu from Zambia wrote about her adjustment to life in Shanghai: "Before I came to China, I was a little upset about having to leave my home. But now I'm so happy here. I think Shanghai is beautiful and safe. Learning to write Chinese characters is very challenging but rewarding."

Neth Chanranuth from Cambodia described his progress after settling in: "Time flies and my Chinese language ability has improved a lot. I've gradually adapted to life in China. Although I'm very busy with intensive studying, I feel rather happy overall. I have an excellent class with skilled

teachers. I've also made some new friends and even joined the university karate club."

The university plans to publish a collection of these home letters from students, including some of the responses received from their families. Zong believes this reunion through writing has special significance.

"Although today's students can instantly communicate with their families online, there is something more permanent and traditional about handwritten letters that allow experiences to be recorded and remembered," Zong explained, adding that students' families are willing to get to know about their loved ones' lives in China in such a traditional way.

One example was when a father in Turkmenistan wrote to his daughter, Jennet Gurbangulyeva: "I'm sure of one thing — we were not mistaken in choosing for you to study in China. I can say that my main expectation came true — you have fallen in love with this country. I think without this love for China, its people, and rich culture, even hard work would not have helped my daughter achieve such results in learning the Chinese language in such a short time."

A grandfather in Panama expressed his

expectations to his granddaughter, Fu Jiawei: "We hope you can continue learning more about Chinese culture while studying there. In doing so, you will not only win honor for our family but also set a good example for your younger brother and sister."

For the students themselves, home letter writing proved to be an invaluable milestone in embracing their adopted language and surroundings.

Neth said that during video calls, he and his family usually only have casual conversations to catch up on events, but when writing a long letter, he can really convey how much he misses them. "Since I had never written letters before, the words ended up being more thoughtful and touching for my family to receive," he said.

For Fu, who has Chinese ancestry but was born and lived in Panama, writing a letter in Chinese was initially "weird". However, she could see how proud her grandfather was after receiving the letter. "Although China is geographically far from my country, Chinese culture has always been present in my life. One major reason I came to study here was to understand my grandpa's beloved China and ancestral roots better."

Chintu also thinks that letters are a more special way of communication. "Once they are received, that physical paper held in hands becomes a lasting memory one can revisit again and again, reminiscing over the heartfelt words that initially moved them," she said.



Online
Watch the video
by scanning
the code.



International students at Tongji University in Shanghai read the home letters they wrote in Chinese. GAO ERJIANG / CHINA DAILY