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Ancient jadeware carves a blueprint of earliest societies

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Gathering of goods

Expo showcases nation's firm resolve to promote high-level opening-up

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Nation to keep expanding market access

More efforts to bolster China's intl business and enhance people-to-people exchanges

By CAO DESHENG, ZHONG NAN in Beijing and QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou

China will step up its efforts to align with high-standard international economic and trade rules, continue to expand market access, and implement measures to ensure national treatment for foreign-funded enterprises, Premier Li Qiang said on Wednesday in Guangzhou, Guangdong province.

Li made the pledge when addressing a symposium attended by representatives of overseas buyers on the sidelines of the ongoing 135th China Import and Export Fair, also known as the Canton Fair, in the provincial capital.

As of Wednesday, a total of 107,722 overseas buyers from 212 countries and regions had attended the fair, marking a 23 percent increase in their numbers compared with the last spring edition of the biannual event.

The premier said that China will continue to enhance services for foreign investors and strengthen intellectual property protection, effectively safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of foreign-funded enterprises in the country.

More efforts will be made to facilitate people-to-people exchanges for the purpose of international business and to provide support for foreigners who live and work in China, he said.

Established in the spring of 1957, the Canton Fair is hailed as China's No.1 trade fair and the barometer of the country's foreign trade.

Li said the history of the Canton Fair is a history of enterprises from various countries sharing opportunities in China and achieving mutual benefit as well as win-win outcomes, and it is also a microcosm of China's continuous expansion of opening-up and active integration with the international market.

Looking to the future, the premier said that China will firmly expand high-level opening-up and promote trade and investment liberalization and facilitation, injecting greater stability into global trade and the world economy with the certainty of its own development and providing broader room for enterprises from various countries to grow further.

Executives from overseas companies such as Inter IKEA, Walmart, Auchan, Kesko and Kawan Lama attended the meeting.

The participants expressed their confidence in the prospects of the Chinese economy, saying they are willing to continue expanding their businesses in China through the Canton Fair platform and make positive contributions to advancing free trade and maintaining stability in the global supply chain.

Steve Neumeyer, president of International Products 90, an importer based in the United States, told China Daily that the Canton Fair provides the products that he needs for his customers, and that he will continue to try to expand his business in China.

"I found that the Canton Fair has facilitated digital payments for foreign visitors this year, adding more payment options for them. ... This is fairly convenient for us," Neumeyer said.

Frangelica Liang, a member of BritCham Committee who didn't attend several editions of the fair in the past few years, said she was surprised by what she saw at the current exhibition.

"I was amazed ... (it was) an amazing range of high-end manufacturing products, from consumer electronics, industrial tools to AI-equipped healthcare facilities, new energy vehicles — all showcasing the new page of China's high-end manufacturing," said Liang. "I believe the fair will embark on a new journey for global trade and the manufacturing industry."

Zhang Qingfu, vice-president of Haier Overseas Electric Appliances Corp, a subsidiary of Chinese home appliances giant Haier Group, said that at this year's fair, many Chinese exhibitors have showcased their green and low-carbon products and solutions, actively securing foreign trade orders and expanding into international markets.

Participating in the Canton Fair is not only about securing orders, but also about promoting new products to foreign clients, observing new market trends and broadening connections with overseas merchants, Zhang added.

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Visitors check out a kiosk featuring new energy vehicles on Tuesday at the 135th China Import and Export Fair, also known as the Canton Fair, in Guangzhou, Guangdong province. CHEN CHUHONG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

History destroyed



Top above: Firefighters work on Tuesday at the scene of a massive blaze that gutted the 17th century Old Stock Exchange in Copenhagen, Denmark. The fire ripped through the famous landmark, causing the building's iconic dragon-tail spire to collapse. Passersby rushed to help emergency services personnel to save priceless paintings and other valuables from the burning structure. MADS CLAUD RASMUSSEN / RITZAU SCANPIX VIA AP **Above:** A view of the Old Stock Exchange in Copenhagen, Denmark, on Jan 28, 2019. LINDA KASTRUP / RITZAU SCANPIX VIA AP

New delisting rules to help protect investors

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

Securities regulators' emphasis on dividend payment and stricter implementation of delisting rules will by no means weigh on A-share small-caps or impair market performance, but rather will be conducive to the sustainable and sound development of the capital market by elevating companies' quality, said officials and experts.

Responding to recent concerns over the guideline on delisting as well as exchanges' revised listing rules, Guo Ruiming, head of the department of listed company supervision of the China Securities Regulatory Commission, the country's top securities watchdog, said

on Tuesday night that the concerns arise from a "pure misreading".

The guideline and revised rules aim to eliminate "zombie companies" and "black sheep" from the A-share market, but are "not targeting the A-share small-caps", said Guo.

The China Securities Regulatory Commission released a guideline on Friday stressing stricter implementation of the stock market delisting rules and dividend payments.

Also on Friday, the Shanghai and Shenzhen exchanges began to solicit public opinion on their revised listing rules, which have raised the bar for listing and further regulate delisting and stakeholders' share reduction.

Prices of micro-cap companies spiked 9.68 percent on average on Wednesday, recovering most of Tuesday's 10.55 percent loss. The benchmark Shanghai Composite Index closed 2.14 percent higher, and the Shenzhen Component Index was up 2.48 percent.

Zhao Wei, an analyst at Founder Securities, said that a large number of A-share micro-to-small-caps promise much growth potential and are thus of much investment value, especially those focusing on technology advancement. The investment value of these companies has increased despite a 16-percent price slide since the beginning of April, he said.

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WORLD WATCH
By Betty Yuan

April 10 meeting a milestone in cross-Strait relations

For compatriots who have long been participating in the process of peaceful reunification of the two sides across the Taiwan Strait, April 10 is a day of great significance in the history of cross-Strait relations.

I felt very inspired and excited on seeing the meeting between Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, and former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party, Ma Ying-jeou, in Beijing.

My memory flashed back to Nov 7, 2015, when the two met in Singapore. I believe the friendly exchanges that took place nine years ago have played a role in making another meeting happen again — a more important, eye-catching and much-needed one for the sake of healthy development of cross-Strait relations.

To bring cross-Strait relations back to normal requires vision, painstaking efforts, leadership and a strong sense of responsibility. I definitely see the resolve and devotion in Xi when it comes to handling the Taiwan question. As always, I have strong faith in him.

In 2023, Ma led a group of young Taiwanese to visit the mainland, after stepping down from the Kuomintang party (KMT) and government posts. As a former leader of the Taiwan island, Ma seems to have chosen his way to contribute to the great cause of peaceful reunification.

Regarding the Xi and Ma meeting on April 10, I believe there are several breakthroughs that are worthy of recognition and further discussion.

First and foremost, this is the first time that the Chinese mainland hosted a meeting between its incumbent leader and a former Taiwan leader on Chinese mainland territory. Take another look at the meeting venue where the two sides sat, exchanging greetings while facing each other across the table. Didn't the table look like the Taiwan Strait — shallow and narrow, that can be easily crossed?

Secondly, the meeting highlighted the importance and necessity for both sides to adhere to the 1992 Consensus, the one-China principle, and oppose "Taiwan Independence".

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NINGXIA CITY BURIES ITS COAL MINING PAST FOR INDUSTRIES OF THE FUTURE

Shizuishan embraces green, advanced technologies, looks to innovation

By SUN SHANGWU, HU DONGMEI and CHEN MEILING in Shizuishan, Ningxia



Once known for environmental damage caused by excessive coal mining, Shizuishan in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region is transforming itself into a leader of industrial innovation with cutting-edge green technologies at the forefront.

Ningxia Binze New Energy Technology Co is one of the companies at the cutting edge of these innovations. At its gas-processing plant in Pingluo county, vast volumes of industrial exhaust containing carbon monoxide are being treated and

transformed into value-added products such as fuel and animal feed. This modern-day alchemy is not only profitable, but also good for the environment.

The city is a major production base for ferroalloy, calcium carbide and silicon carbide, and generates 3 billion cubic meters of industrial exhaust gas annually. In the past, the gas was used as thermal energy, which put pressure on the environment.

Nowadays, a large amount of that exhaust gas is sent to Ningxia Binze New Energy Technology's processing plant via a network of pipelines. The plant processes 400 million cubic meters of gas produced by arc furnaces every year, which reduces damaging carbon dioxide emissions by 240,000 metric tons.

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Ningxia: Ecological protection prioritized

From page 1

After undergoing multiple processes such as fermentation using microbes, distillation, dehydration and protein separation, the gas is eventually transformed into high value-added products including non-grain ethanol fuel and fungal protein, which can be used to feed animals. As a result of the processing, 60,000 tons of non-grain ethanol fuel and 6,600 tons of protein feed are produced annually.

The processing method owes a lot to the latest advances in biological technology, which have played a significant role in the green transformation of Shizuishan's industries.

"We expect to help Shizuishan become an important non-grain raw material production base for clean liquid fuels and the capital of industrial exhaust fermentation in the northwestern region," said Zhang Haibo, chairman of the company, adding that it wants to contribute to the ecological protection and high-quality development of the Yellow River Basin.

Jia Wei, the company's general manager, added that the fungal protein produced annually is the equivalent of 200,000 tons of grain, and conserves approximately 36,700 hectares of arable land.

The ethanol fuel can be added to gasoline to help reduce vehicle exhaust emissions. It can also be used as a chemical raw material and processed into green products such as aviation fuel, packaging material and clothing, Jia said.

In 2023, the company's industrial output value was 220 million yuan (\$30.4 million).

New path

Shizuishan has taken a new path to high-tech manufacturing after the mines started shutting down in 2017 as the country moved toward greater ecological preservation.

Located on the north side of the Helan Mountains, Shizuishan mushroomed in the 1960s to cater to the growth of the coal mining industry, which made up 90 percent of the city's industries. Major mining operations to extract coal and silica from the mountains started in the 1950s.

However, excessive mining led to severe destruction of the mountainous terrain. Exposed sand and gravel turned vegetation sparse, shrunk the habitats of wildlife and made the ecology of the environment extremely fragile.

The Helan Mountains National Nature Reserve covers 1,312.6 square kilometers, and accounts for 27 percent of Shizuishan's total area.

"Due to unregulated mining, the Helan Mountains area has been heavily damaged, with numerous coal washing plants and coal storage yards causing serious air and groundwater pollution," said Zhang Guoxin, director of the ecological restoration department of the city's natural resources bureau.

In 2016, an environmental protection inspection team from the central government reported the situation and urged the regional government to rehabilitate the mountain terrain.

Since 2017, a total of 39 coal mines and 61 others have been closed, with 146 sq km of damaged area restored. Only one mine is still operating, and annual coal production has decreased from 20 million tons to 2 million tons, according to the bureau.

"In recent years, Shizuishan has prioritized ecological and environmental protection as a key aspect of its overall development. The number of days with excellent air quality has steadily increased," said Chu Wei, Party secretary of Shizuishan.

No coal, no worries

In 2007, Shizuishan was designated as one of the nation's first pilot cities for resource exhaustion, and over the past 17 years has explored new innovative development based on its industrial advantages.



Clockwise from top:

A bird's-eye view of Ningxia Binze New Energy Technology Co plant in Shizuishan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region; a production line of photovoltaic glass at a factory of Ningxia Jinjing Group; a workshop producing reducers at a factory of Ningxia Tiandi Benniu Industrial Group.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Symbols of change

In the center of Ningxia Wear Casting Co's exhibition hall, a large high-speed railway sleeper is a potent reminder of successful technological innovation.

The sleeper has stringent requirements for structural strength, mechanical performance and manufacturing technology.

"The machining precision requires that the dimensions of several key components are within a range of 5 micrometers, which is one-tenth the diameter of a human hair," said Wang Xiaoning, the company's chairman.

Technology to achieve this level of accuracy was previously dominated by foreign companies, but domestically made sleepers can do the same tasks and also provide large cost savings, he said.

The company's sleeper beams are used for various models of high-speed and bullet trains. It's currently developing sleeper beams for high-speed trains with a speed of 450 kilometers per hour. Once key technological breakthroughs are made, they can also provide support for increased speeds of domestically produced bullet trains.

In March last year, another innovation was introduced by Weir Casting — a one-piece die-cast aluminum alloy battery tray for new energy vehicles. The new tray met structural requirements for being lightweight and robust and did away with the previous manufacturing process, which required multiple welding points for component casting. This technology can be tailored according to the manufacturing requirements of various NEVs, the company said.

Weir Casting's industrial output value reached 140 million yuan last year.

Ningxia Tiandi Benniu Industrial Group Co, a large coal mining equipment producer, is also producing technological innovations and provides heavy-duty scraper conveyors for about 30 percent of the country's coal mines.

Liu Qinghua, deputy general manager of the company, said its ultralong working face intelligent scraper conveyor equipment had reached

international advanced level.

A complete set of the equipment can automatically control the conveyor's operating speed based on the amount of materials being moved.

The company is establishing two digital production manufacturing bases in Yinchuan, the regional capital, and Shizuishan. It has also set up a research and development center in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, and integrated technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality into intelligent mines to achieve unmanned mining.

Future industries

Shizuishan's advances are seen as an example of Ningxia promoting its economy by turning to new quality productive forces.

In recent years, Ningxia has been promoting industrial transformation and upgrading, and has cultivated a group of manufacturing champions focusing on basic industrial technologies, basic components and key materials.

"Ningxia will cultivate and develop emerging and future industries such as AI, intelligent manufacturing, hydrogen energy and new

energy storage and semiconductor materials. The number of enterprises, output value proportion and project investment are all expected to more than double," said Li Yuhua, director of the Regional Development and Reform Commission.

Ningxia's GDP growth reached 6.6 percent last year, ranking fifth in the country. In 2023, the rapid growth of new materials and clean energy industries drove a year-on-year increase of 44.5 percent in the value added of high-tech manufacturing enterprises with a designated scale in the entire region, data from the commission showed.

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Workers produce monocrystalline silicon rods at a workshop of the Ningxia Zhonghuan Solar Materials Co in Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Yinchuan cementing role as silicon hub

By HU DONGMEI and CHEN MEILING in Yinchuan

Yinchuan, capital of Ningxia Hui autonomous region, is developing into a base for the nation's silicon materials and aims to boost China's electronic information industry.

Silicon is the most widely used semiconductor material, and its production and usage are indicative of the level a country's electronics industry is at.

Semiconductors are used in integrated circuits, consumer electronics, communication systems, photovoltaic power generation, lighting, high-level power conversion and other fields.

Most electronics products including computers, mobile phones and digital recorders, have semiconductors at their core. Semiconductors are also fundamental components for the development of emerging industries such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, the internet of things and virtual reality.

Many top companies in the semiconductor sector have settled in Yinchuan, including Ningxia

Zhonghuan Solar Materials Co, which has one of the world's largest monocrystalline silicon smart factories. The company manufactures monocrystalline silicon rods, which can generate 70 gigawatts of solar power annually when the plant is running at its full production capacity.

Sixty percent of Ningxia Zhonghuan Solar Materials' operations are unmanned and 40 percent are controlled by a centralized intelligent operating mode. The entire production process, from the arrival of raw materials to the delivery of finished products, is automated.

Ningxia Dunyuanjixin Semiconductor Technology Corp has an annual production capacity of 100,000 quartz crucibles, which are used in the manufacturing of semiconductors. The company also produces 3,600 metric tons of quartz sand, and 40,000 silicon components, with an annual output value of up to 1 billion yuan.

The fully automatic soldering machine developed by Ningxia XN Automation Equipment Co Ltd has broken dependence on imported photovoltaic string soldering

machines and has been recognized as the national manufacturing industry champion in its category.

In 2023, the photovoltaic industry of Yinchuan achieved a total industrial output value of 48.36 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 2.6 percent, data from local authorities showed.

In addition to photovoltaic industry, Yinchuan is also considered the ideal hub for emerging industries such as silicon wafers, graphene and industrial sapphire, said Zhao Xuhui, Party secretary of Yinchuan.

"Leveraging the advantages of Ningxia's climate, electricity and policies, Yinchuan is vigorously developing new material industries with a focus on photovoltaic materials, sapphire materials, new semiconductor materials and battery materials," he said.

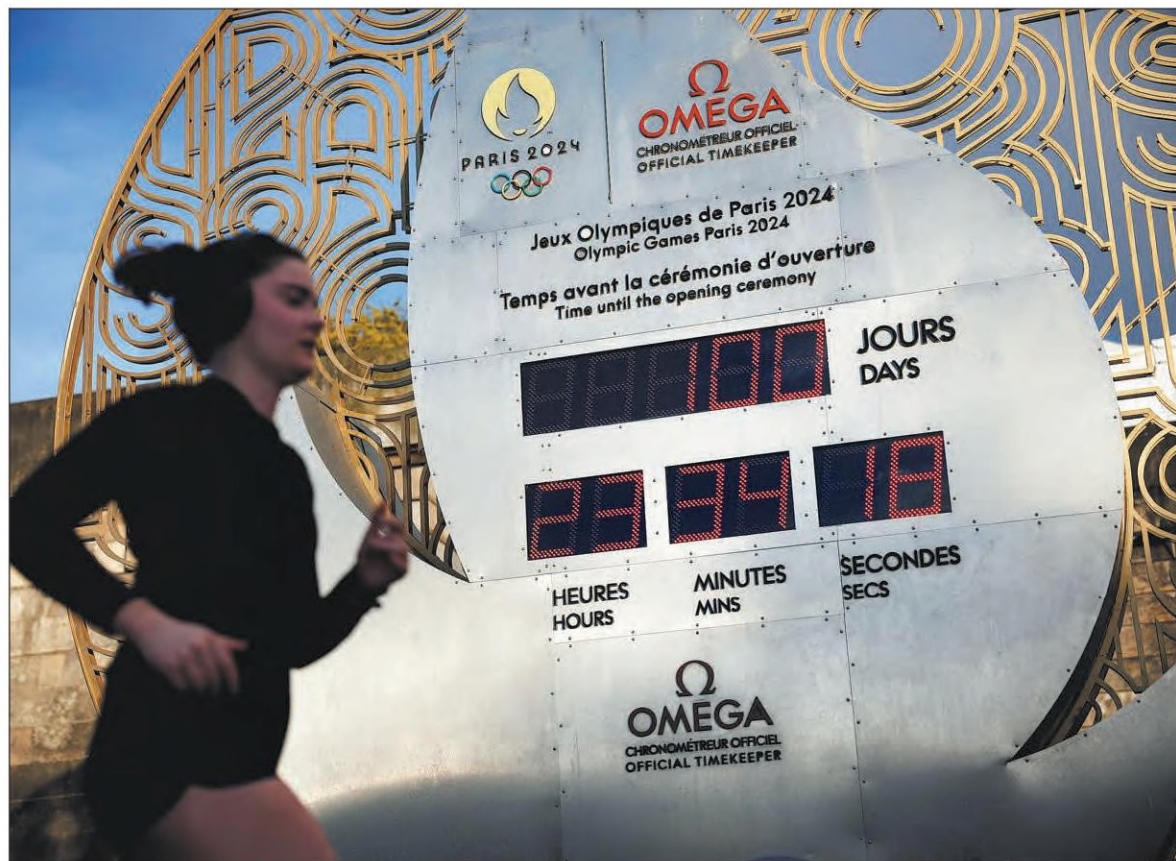
"Yinchuan will further focus on the development of advanced and efficient monocrystalline silicon photovoltaic products and technologies. The goal is to build 'China's New Silicon Valley' and to support the autonomous region in constructing a 'mega factory' and a 'mega base' for new materials," he said.



Left: A worker makes components at a workshop of Ningxia Wear Casting Co. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY
Right: Workers wrap products at a factory of Ningxia Jinjing Group in December. YUAN HONGYAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

Keeping time



A runner passes on Tuesday the countdown clock near the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France, that shows there is 100 days to go for the opening ceremony of the 2024 Olympic Games in the French capital. BENOIT TESSIER / REUTERS

Beijing-Washington military ties key to stability

By JIANG CHENGLONG
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The Chinese defense minister urged his United States counterpart in a video call to "explore the way for the two militaries to get along," with experts saying the high-level military talk was the latest effort by both sides to prevent military crises or conflicts against the backdrop of China-US tensions.

Dong Jun, minister of national defense, held a video call on Tuesday night with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, according to a statement released by the ministry on Wednesday.

It was the first official dialogue between the defense chiefs since the senior Chinese military official took office at the end of last year. The previous talks between Chinese and US military chiefs were held in November 2022, during the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus in Cambodia.

Stressing that the leaders of both sides are committed to promoting the stability and improvement of bilateral ties, Dong said the military ties are crucial for implementing the consensus of the two heads of state, stabilizing the development of China-US relations, and preventing major crises.

In November, President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden reached consensus on a series of issues while meeting in San Francisco, including an agreement to

resume high-level military communication on the basis of equality and respect.

Dong stressed that the Chinese and US militaries should explore ways to get along, proposing some basic principles that "put peace as the priority, stability as the key, and trust as the foundation".

Based on equality and mutual respect, both sides should construct military ties that "feature nonconflict and nonconfrontation, conduct practical cooperation, and gradually accumulate mutual trust", providing a cornerstone for stabilizing the development of bilateral relations, he added.

Zhou Bo, a senior fellow at Tsinghua University's Center for International Security and Strategy, said the defense chiefs' video call was in line with the consensus reached by the leaders of both countries during their San Francisco meeting.

However, the two countries and their militaries need to explore a suitable way of interaction, he said.

"Due to the current low level of mutual trust between the two militaries, trust must be built up step by step to prevent military conflicts between China and the US, which neither side desires," he said.

A researcher at the People's Liberation Army's Academy of Military Sciences, who asked to remain anonymous, said that the US currently views China as a strategic competitor, which has led to sustained tension.



... trust must be built up step by step to prevent military conflicts between China and the US, which neither side desires."

Zhou Bo, a senior fellow at Tsinghua University's Center for International Security and Strategy

"In this context, China and the US need to find a way to prevent military conflicts or armed clashes," he said.

However, the researcher underscored the significance of high-level defense talks, noting that the willingness of both sides to engage in dialogue has in itself demonstrated their desire to manage crises and avoid entering a state of war or conflict, which would not be in the interest of either side.

"If both sides have no contact, they will perceive each other from the worst possible scenario, making it very easy to enter a state of war or conflict," he said.

Defense Minister Dong reiterated China's positions on the Taiwan question and the South China Sea.

He underscored that the Taiwan question is a core interest of

China and never brooks any infringement, saying that the PLA will not tolerate any "Taiwan independence" separatist activities or external indulgence and support.

Dong said the current situation in the South China Sea is generally stable, and countries in the region have the willingness, wisdom and capability to resolve issues.

The US should recognize China's firm stance, respect China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea, and take concrete actions to maintain regional peace and the stability of China-US military relations, said the senior defense official.

Also on Wednesday, Li Xi, spokesperson for the PLA's Eastern Theater Command, said that the PLA monitored and responded lawfully to a US P-8A anti-submarine patrol aircraft flying through the Taiwan Strait on Wednesday.

The researcher at the People's Liberation Army's Academy of Military Sciences said that US actions in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea are part of its overall strategy to contain China, signaling that the US presence in the Western Pacific is long-term.

"The US verbally claims to uphold peace and security in the region, but in reality, it is safeguarding its own interests and those of its allies," he added.

China, US to boost financial relationship

Two sides had 'professional, pragmatic, candid and constructive' discussions on diverse issues

By ZHOU LANXU, LIU ZHIHUA and LIU ZIZHENG

China and the United States are strengthening financial cooperation through the China-US Financial Working Group, a positive and essential step for preventing global financial crises and injecting stability into the fragile global economy, experts said.

They commented after the China-US Financial Working Group held its fourth meeting on Tuesday in Washington, DC. The meeting was co-chaired by Xuan Changneng, deputy governor of the People's Bank of China, and Brent Neiman, assistant secretary of the US Department of the Treasury, with financial regulators participating.

The PBOC, China's central bank, said on Wednesday that the two sides had "professional, pragmatic, candid and constructive" discussions on topics such as monetary policy and financial stability, financial supervision cooperation, institutional arrangements in financial markets, cross-border payment and data, sustainable finance, anti-money laundering efforts, countering the financing of terrorism and financial infrastructure.

The working group was established by the two sides in September to strengthen communication on financial topics.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen met with the Chinese delegation, and the two sides agreed to continue to maintain communication, according to the PBOC.

The meeting came shortly after Yellen visited China earlier this month, when the two sides agreed to continue to conduct exchanges on financial stability, sustainable finance, anti-money laundering and other issues under the framework of the financial working group.

Liu Ying, a researcher at the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies of Renmin University of China, said the meeting was of great significance in delivering a positive signal that China-US economic and financial ties are steadily recovering.

Liu said: "In recent years, the relationship between China and the US has experienced significant fluctuations. The fact that the two sides are continuously engaging through the financial working group indicates that their bilateral relationship is moving toward stabilization and recovery, bringing a certain level of stability and certainty to the world economy."

The China-US meeting came at a time when global stock and bond markets are under pressure, as recent US inflation reports showed persistent price pressures and Fed officials have hinted that US monetary policy may need to be restrictive for longer.

Liu Chunsheng, an associate professor at the Central University of Finance and Economics' School of International Trade and Economics, said that against such a backdrop, it is of particular significance for China and the US to strengthen exchanges concerning monetary policies and financial stability.

"This will help the two sides better understand each other's monetary policy moves, strengthen mutual trust and work together to address any potential financial stresses," Liu said.

According to the US Department of the Treasury, the two sides held a technical exchange in March to discuss each jurisdiction's approach to financial stability oversight and make plans for technical exercises on financial stability.

Liu from Renmin University of China said that if the US does not lower interest rates, that could exacerbate global financial fragility by intensifying the pressures of local currency depreciation and capital outflows in other economies. It also could sustain the stress within the US banking system and increase the vulnerability of elevated US government debt, she said.

Therefore, the world's two biggest economies "need to and must" strengthen communication for macroeconomic policy coordination, Liu said, adding that the US side should keep China updated on its monetary policy decisions, while the Chinese side should help ensure that the US avoids implementing beggar-thy-neighbor monetary policies.

Also on Tuesday, the China-US Economic Working Group held its fourth meeting, during which officials from both sides exchanged views on topics including the macroeconomic situations of the two countries as well as the world, balanced growth, and future communication arrangements, the Ministry of Finance said on Wednesday.

China expressed concerns over US trade and economic restrictions against China and provided further responses on the production capacity issue, the ministry said.

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China's Vice Minister of Finance Liao Min (right), People's Bank of China Deputy Head Xuan Changneng (left), and US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen pose on Tuesday during the 4th meeting of the China-US economic working group in Washington, DC. SAUL LOEB / AFP

Stocks: Long-term investments see more confidence

From page 1

Experts from SDIC Securities conceded that some less-competitive A-share micro-caps may be eliminated amid the regulators' tighter grip on public companies' quality. But that will lead to an overall leveling-up of asset quality in the Chinese capital market, they said, adding that micro- to small-cap companies specializing in niche markets and generating

stable returns will be favored by the market.

Sun Jinju, vice-president of Kaiyuan Securities, said that the requirement for the dividend payment of listed companies will inject more confidence into the stock market and strengthen the concept of long-term investment.

Chen Li, chief economist at Chuancai Securities, said that as the China Securities Regulatory Commission further clarifies

delisting rules in its latest guideline, the idea of rational investment will be more widespread, and quality companies will be able to get more reasonable valuations.

Public companies will attach greater importance to their prime operation and long-term planning, and investors' interests will be better protected, and both of these factors will lead to the sound development of the stock

market, Chen added.

Yang Delong, chief economist at First Seafont Fund, said that as incremental household savings came to 60 trillion yuan (\$8.3 trillion) in China over the past three years, a large part of that will be directed to the capital market once opportunities arise.

A slow and long bullish A-share market driven by economic transformation can be expected, said Yang.

Visit: More dialogues, exchanges needed for better understanding

From page 1

Xi spent a lot of time during the meeting talking about how the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to the Chinese nation. Moreover, he stressed that people on both sides of the Strait share the same bloodline, culture and history.

Very encouragingly, Ma reiterated his pledge to the 1992 Consensus, and urged the young

generation in Taiwan to understand their China roots and respect the Chinese tradition. In my opinion, to create a sense of common identity and belonging is crucial for compatriots on both sides. We need to continue dialogues and exchanges of this kind to achieve better understanding. Ultimately, we need to all feel proud of being Chinese, and are willing to be part of the great cause of peaceful reunification.

Ultimately, we need to all feel proud of being Chinese, and are willing to be part of the great cause of peaceful reunification.

Thirdly, I am confident that this 11-day trip to the mainland and experiences along the way will have a far-reaching impact on the minds of the 20 young Taiwanese. They saw the spectacular scenic spots, joined the solemn ceremony to honor ancestor Yellow Huangdi, met amiable compatriots in different places, tasted the goodwill and kindness ... all the eye-openers and firsthand impressions will

help shape and refine their perspectives, and make them think about the cross-strait relationship. Just like Xi has hoped, "young people from both sides will learn from each other, enjoy each other's company, and walk with one heart with each other, taking the baton passed on to them by history and contributing to the realization of national rejuvenation".

Ma Ying-jeou said he believed

in Sun Yat-sen and his Three Principles of the People, so he must be familiar with Sun's saying of "The country must be unified and the nation can be revived". Although there will be difficulties and obstacles, Ma is expected to shoulder the historic responsibility and undertake the national mission of peaceful reunification.

The author is Founding Member of the Chinese Peaceful Unification of Northern California. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA



From left: Teachers guide students in using virtual reality headsets during a training session at a center dedicated to students' mental health in Jiaxing, Zhejiang province, in May. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY
Students play a game in a sandbox at a school-based mental health room in Huzhou, Zhejiang, in October. YI FAN / FOR CHINA DAILY A middle school student opens a letter from a volunteer in Xinyu, Jiangxi province, in April last year. More than 700 students from the city participated in the program, which invites adult volunteers to bond one-on-one with students via letters to help with their mental health. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Efforts called for on students' mental health

Systemic pressures around education leading to negative outcomes for nation's youth

By ZHAO YIMENG
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A recent high-profile case concerning three middle school boys who allegedly killed a classmate has sparked discussions on the mental health of left-behind children in China.

A seventh-grade student surnamed Wang in Handan, Hebei province, was killed on March 10, and the suspects were taken into custody the next day, according to an official statement.

It is alleged that the suspects, who went to the same school and are all under 14 years old, had bullied the victim for a long time. Media reports said they are children of migrant workers.

Zong Chunshan, director of the Beijing Youth Legal and Psychological Counseling Service Center, said left-behind children lack proper family education during critical stages of their development, which may result in psychological issues and behavioral deviations.

They are prone to negative emotions such as anxiety and depression, Zong told China National Radio.

He said the academic performance of left-behind children does not reflect their psychological health, adding schools should provide emotional care and educational guidance to these children to establish effective communication channels.

On March 18, the National Advisory Committee for Students' Mental Health advocated the promotion of greater awareness concerning the physical and mental health of children and adolescents.

The foundation of students' mental health lies in the family, with a focus on the school and support from society, the committee said in a notice released by the Ministry of Education.

It proposed fostering a warm and loving family atmosphere, making the home a safe harbor for children's healthy growth. Parents are encouraged to overcome excessive peer comparison and expectations, discard aggressive methods and reduce their control over their children.

It also suggested making the school a joyful playground for students' positive development and establishing a coordinated service network to ensure that all of socie-

ty cares for and supports students' healthy growth.

The committee was established in November to boost the country's ability to tackle students' mental health through consultation and assistance in decision-making.

Resources from various fields, including education, health and nonprofit organizations, should be integrated to boost the development of adolescents' mental health, said Qiao Zhihong, secretary-general of the committee.

Led by the Ministry of Education, it is responsible for the research, consultation, monitoring, evaluation and scientific popularization of mental health work in universities, middle schools and primary schools.

The mental health issues of students, particularly among younger age groups, are growing prominently due to increasing pressures related to academic performance, employment and other factors, according to the 2023 Annual Blue Book on Mental Health in China.

A rural children's mental health survey conducted in 2021 by professor Chen Zhiyan and her team from the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Psychology, showed that the detection rate of depression among children was only 25.2 percent.

According to data from the National Depression Blue Book (2022-23), 30 percent of the 6,670 surveyed depression patients were under 18, with half of them being students.

Moreover, 41 percent of depressed students have had to take a break from schooling due to the chronic and debilitating nature of mental illnesses, the blue book said.

However, some parents still have a limited understanding of depression and have strong feelings of shame. Others may only focus on their children's behavioral manifestations without considering the underlying emotional and psychological factors.

They may simplify the issue as a lack of interest in studying, adolescent rebellion or weak willpower.

Xu Ling, a political adviser and the vice-president of Guangdong Polytechnic Normal University, said she has found that collaboration among families, schools and society in tackling mental health issues of adolescents has failed to form a unified force.



Above: A mental health doctor gives a lecture to primary school students in Donglin town of Huzhou, Zhejiang province, in November. XU YU / XINHUA
Left: A student tries a virtual reality spinning session that helps relieve users of negative emotions at a mental health center in Jiaxing, Zhejiang, in May. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Xu said schools prioritize exam-oriented education and talent cultivation over extracurricular activities. Insufficient physical activities and labor education have led students to easily fall into the trap of "self-isolation, loneliness, anxiety and depression."

"Moreover, there is a shortage of dedicated psychological counselors in schools, and teachers are not capable of identifying students' emotional crises, let alone effectively intervene," Xu said.

Many parents have excessive requirements for their children's academic achievements, with a focus on quick success, leading to conflicts between parents and

children that have even escalated into suicidal incidents, she added. "Society has yet to form a strong force to effectively support the healthy growth of adolescents," Xu said.

Because of the lack of professional personnel and resources, mental health services provided by grassroots institutions need to be improved urgently, she said. Cultural products such as online games, movies and animations that are filled with violence and vulgarity may also contribute to criminal behavior or self-harm, she added.

Political adviser Ding Zuohong said the side effects of the internet

The diagnoses of children's depression may be inappropriately expanded to psychological diseases because of limited time for treatment or unprofessional methods, he added.

Ding proposed strengthening frustration education in schools, teaching young students how to effectively manage negative emotions.

"We could train children's psychological resilience to frustration from kindergarten, while adjustments could be made in family education," he said.

It's essential to engage children in outdoor activities and sports to prevent internet addiction. "In addition, we should guard against the abuse of sleep aids and related drugs," he added.

Political advisers in the education sector made multiple proposals to address the concerns over students' mental health issues during the group meeting of the recently concluded two sessions, Xinhua News Agency reported.

Liu Aiping, Party secretary of the China International Youth Exchange Center, said at the meeting that the emphasis that "it is a life failure if you don't get into a prestigious university" should be rectified to alleviate the anxiety of students, parents and teachers.

Ma Jinglin, principal of Beijing No 4 High School, suggested building a management system involving the family, school and hospitals to ensure smoother communication concerning students' mental health.

Gao Jinfeng, the principal of an education group in Taizhou, Jiangsu province, said the education ministry could initiate with other departments the building of an individual mental health archive for every student in the country.

Authorities responded to those concerns during the meeting. The education ministry has listed 20 major tasks regarding the issue, including establishing a platform to monitor students' mental health.

The Cyberspace Administration of China said more effort will be focused on online guidance for teenagers' mental health. The National Health Commission will continue training professional psychologists and strengthening the popularization of mental health knowledge, it said.

Proposal suggests big data, regular assessments used for psychological screening

By WANG XIAOYU
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During a visit to a middle school targeting troubled youths in February, Zhang Zhiyong, a national political adviser, got to see firsthand how a healthy education environment that promotes communication and all-around development plays a fundamental role in supporting the mental well-being of students.

"A variety of extracurricular books were available all over the campus, and music was deployed as an important tool to soothe students and give them a sense of security and control," said Zhang, director of Beijing Normal University's National Education Survey

Center and a member of the standing committee of the Central Committee of the China Association for Promoting Democracy.

The Ugly Duckling School, located in suburban Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan province, is named after the Danish fairy tale character who grew from being an "ugly duck" into a "beautiful swan." Since it was established in 2011, the school has received nearly 3,000 teenage runaways, dropouts and students who have not been able to fit in at regular schools due to emotional issues.

"The school puts great emphasis on nutrition, sleep and exercise, and about one-third of courses are carried out outdoors," said Zhang. "Meanwhile, each student there joins

in at least two club activities to help them explore and find self-worth."

Zhang has incorporated his front-line observations into a proposal submitted by the China Association for Promoting Democracy to this year's recent two sessions — the largest annual political event in China — as psychological and behavioral problems, as well as mental illnesses have affected an increasing number of youngsters in recent years.

Data released by the National Health Commission shows that about 17.5 percent of children and adolescents in China have mental disorders.

Zhang said that rapid socioeconomic development has made some youngsters less motivated

and at a loss for what their purpose is in life. The widespread use of the internet and mobile phones has also reduced their real-life interactions.

"The education system that is solely oriented toward academic grades and acceptance into top colleges has peaked pressure on students and led to severe anxieties among them," he said, adding that limited social interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic have also impacted their mental health.

To tackle worsening mental health problems among the young generation, the proposal submitted by the China Association for Promoting Democracy said that big data and other advanced technologies can be used to provide

smarter and more efficient platforms for mental health services, and think tanks, psychology committees and associations should be mobilized to provide professional and high-level services.

In the meantime, an online drive aimed at spotting students at high risk of mental disorders should be set up so that early warning signs can be promptly detected and forwarded to relevant authorities to handle.

The proposal also calls for carrying out regular assessments of teenagers' mental health, integrating mental health education into school teaching and stepping up the development of pediatric psychiatry departments at hospitals. "Guidelines should also be for-

mulated from the perspectives of schools, families, healthcare institutions and psychological counseling service providers to eliminate any blind spots," it said.

The proposal emphasizes building a healthy education environment for teenagers.

For instance, local authorities should crack down on irregular actions at school such as giving extra academic courses that take up students' sleep and resting hours.

More efforts should be made to engage school students in off-campus activities and to encourage their exposure to other aspects of society.

Advocacy campaigns should also be launched to eliminate discrimination against mental health patients, the proposal said.

CHINA

A GATHERING OF GOODS



A work at a jewelry exhibition cleans cabinets at the expo on Saturday. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY

The 4th China International Consumer Products Expo was held in Haikou, Hainan province, from April 13 to 18. Over 4,000 brands from around the world participated in the event, showcasing products such as food, clothing and household appliances. The event is China's first significant international expo this year and the largest consumer event in the Asia-Pacific in terms of scale, underlining China's firm resolve to promote high-level opening-up and welcome global enterprises. Here are some photos of the variety of goods on display at the expo from home and abroad.



Visitors walk by the booth run by biomaterials company Bloomage Biotech at the expo on Saturday. SU BIKUN / FOR CHINA DAILY



An exhibitor introduces Irish whiskey to guests on Saturday. KANG DENGLIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



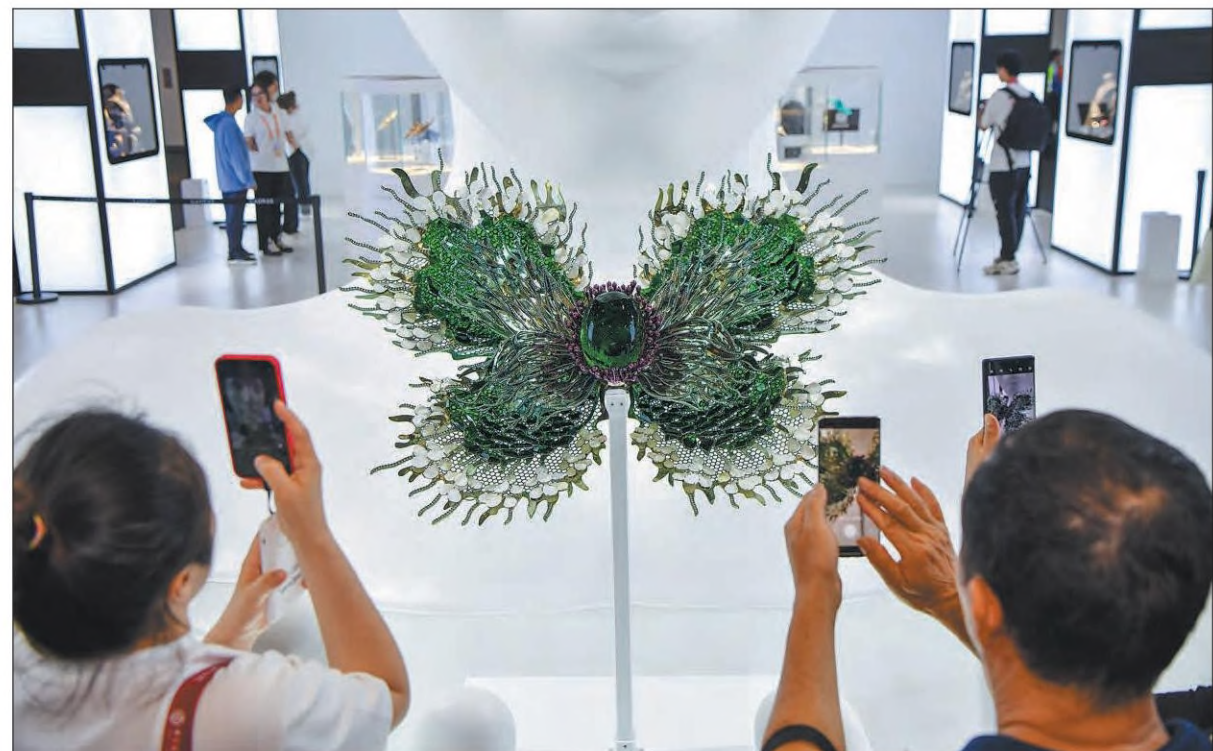
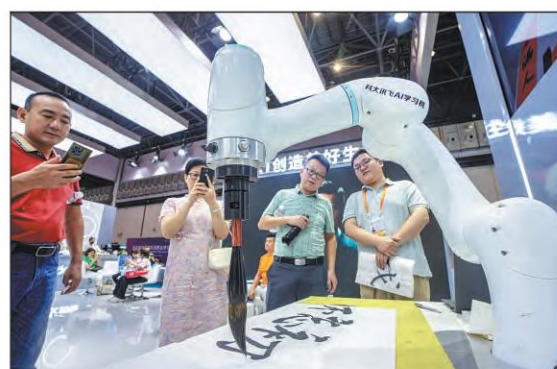
A Bank of China exhibitor explains contactless payment on Sunday. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY



Jewelers set up their exhibits at the expo on Saturday. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY



Visitors watch a robot dance at the expo on Sunday. YUAN CHEN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Clockwise from top: The national pavilion of Italy attracts visitors at the expo on Saturday. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY A butterfly made from recycled industrial materials — circuit boards, nuts, discs and gears — draws visitors at the expo on Monday. LUO YUNFEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE Visitors take photos of a robot writing Chinese calligraphy with a brush at the expo on Tuesday. YUAN CHEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

WORLD

China-Egypt relationship 'at its best', says envoy

By MO JINGXI
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China and Egypt are now at the peak of their bilateral relationship after a golden decade of leapfrogging development, and more progress is expected to be made as they continue to deepen cooperation, China's Ambassador to Egypt Liao Liqiang says.

The two countries have consolidated their political mutual trust, achieved fruitful results in practical cooperation and jointly safeguarded the legitimate rights and interests of developing countries over the past 10 years, Liao said in an interview with China Daily.

"The development of bilateral relations has entered the fast lane and is now at its best," he said, highlighting the fruitful Belt and Road cooperation between the two countries.

Egypt was among the first countries to respond to the Belt and Road Initiative proposed by China in 2013. In 2016, a memorandum of understanding was signed to boost bilateral cooperation under the initiative.

The two countries have joined hands in building Egypt's first electrified light rail transit system, establishing Africa's largest vaccine storage center in the country and constructing a huge cement plant that boasts six production lines, among others.

In addition, the China-Egypt TEDA Suez Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone, a demonstration project set up in 2008 that aligns the BRI with the development of the Suez Canal Corridor Project, has attracted 145 companies with an investment of more than \$2 billion.

"China and Egypt, both of which are representatives of major developing countries and emerging economies, have provided strategic stability to a changing and turbulent world through their cooperation," Liao said.

Egypt was the first African country and the first Arab state that established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China.

Development vision

"For China and African countries, walking side by side on their respective paths toward modernization will create a favorable environment for realizing our development visions," he said.

He said he believes a new chapter for a China-Africa community with a shared future will be created this fall during the meeting of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in China.

Liao, who is also China's representative to the League of Arab States, said more than 200 large-scale projects have been carried out by China and Arab countries under the framework of Belt and Road cooperation, with the results benefiting nearly 2 billion people on both sides.

The Arab League was the first regional organization to sign a cooperation agreement with China on BRI, and China has signed bilateral cooperation documents on the initiative with all 22 Arab countries.

"China and Arab countries enjoy broad prospects in terms of pushing forward all-around cooperation and working together to realize their respective national rejuvenation," Liao said.

On Jan 1, five countries, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, joined BRICS, marking a historic expansion of the bloc's membership.

"In a broader sense, BRICS expansion reflects the collective rise of the Global South and a world evolving faster toward multipolarity," Liao said.

"At a time when the world pattern is undergoing profound changes and human society is facing multiple challenges, it is of great significance for China and Arab countries to strengthen cooperation," he said.

Car 'pool'



A portion of a road collapses in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, after heavy rainfall on Tuesday, damaging vehicles. Authorities and communities across the UAE were clearing debris on Wednesday after at least one person died in a rare torrential storm. CHRISTOPHER PIKE VIA GETTY IMAGES

Sino-Thai relations to get lift

By YANG WANLI
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China and Thailand enjoy deep cultural connections and the bond will be further strengthened and developed as the two nations enter a new stage of their long-standing friendship, said experts.

"Historically, the cultural exchange between China and Thailand has been rich and multifaceted," said Bhokin Bhalakula, the former speaker of the Thai Parliament.

"Our mission, set against the backdrop of ancient camaraderie and a modern dynamic between Thailand and China, is guided by a multifaceted strategy to enrich and expand our cultural dialogue."

Bhokin was addressing a two-day Thai-Chinese Cultural Forum organized by the newly established Thai Chinese Culture Promotion and Development Association. He was designated as the association

chairman at its inauguration ceremony on Monday.

"The establishment of the association marks a new chapter in our shared history. It is a step forward in promoting cultural exchanges and forging lasting bonds that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries," said Bhokin.

He highlighted several major tasks that will be conducted in the near future, including organizing cultural exchange events, fostering collaboration in cultural and creative industries, engaging youngsters in cultural exchanges, and utilizing new media for cultural dialogue.

"Culture is a crucial part of mutual understanding," said Fu Zengyou, former dean of the Confucius Institute at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, at the forum in Chachoengsao.

"Her Royal Highness Princess of Thailand, Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, set a great example of Sino-Thai friendship," said Fu. "As the first Thai royal family member to visit China, the princess conducted her 51st visit

to China this month and pushed the two countries' friendship further forward."

At the invitation of the Chinese government, Princess Sirindhorn visited China from April 4 to 10.

Over the past decades, the Thai royal has traveled to almost all provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions in China. She has also published several books on her trips to China, including *Treading the Dragon Land* and *Forward A-Far the Sand Streams*.

Princess Sirindhorn's love for Chinese culture and contributions — such as translating Chinese literature into Thai and promoting Mandarin in all schools in Thailand — has laid a solid foundation for boosting exchanges between people in the two countries, Fu said.

The two nations joining hands to build a China-Thailand community with a shared future shows that the "civilizations of the two countries are developing toward a deeper integration," Fu added.

Ecuador grapples with fresh violence

By JIMENA ESTEBAN
in Buenos Aires, Argentina
For China Daily

Ecuador is once again facing a spike in violence after trying unsuccessfully to clamp down on violent crimes.

The challenges were highlighted during the Easter weekend in late March and early April when 80 violent deaths were recorded in just three days. The spate of violence highlights the daunting task facing President Daniel Noboa, whose efforts to combat violence, including emergency decrees and declaration of an internal armed conflict, have proved inadequate.

"The situation in Ecuador has once again captured international headlines in a negative light," Luis Cordova, a political analyst in Ecuador, said.

Following the assassination of presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio in August, the country has been facing a series of criminal acts, including the armed assault on a television channel in the second-largest city of Guayaquil on Jan 9, he said.

Ecuador has been under a state of emergency since January, after 201 crimes were recorded in the first seven days of the year.

Following the latest violence,

Noboa vowed to double down on his efforts. "We will never give in to delinquency and organized crime ... I am not going to stop," he said.

2023 was the most violent year in the country's history, Cordova said. There were some 7,878 violent crimes reported but only 584 were solved. The homicide rate rose to 46 per 100,000 people.

"Ecuador became the most violent country in Latin America," Cordova said.

Against organized crime

Despite some initial setbacks, the Noboa administration managed to put together a coalition and undertook operations against organized crime, but criminal violence persisted, exacerbated by the escape of Jose Adolfo Macias, alias "Fito", leader of Los Choneros, one of the country's most dangerous criminal organizations, Cordova said.

Fito escaped from prison earlier this year amid violence in the country's prisons.

Experts said the violence will continue until the underlying issues are resolved and practical fixes put in place.

The first problem is "there is no comprehensive security policy outside of the military and police," said Jean Paul Pinto, a security expert in

Ecuador who has worked with police and the nation's intelligence agency.

"There are no other heterogeneous views on security involving the intervention of other ministries or certain aspects of education, social inclusion, and participation of autonomous decentralized governments, the private sector and municipalities," Pinto said.

The failure to meet people's basic needs, education and employment, particularly in border areas, has "created a breeding ground for criminal groups that easily recruit children as young as 8 or 10 years old," Pinto said.

"The problems are foundational. How to get the youths out of criminality, give them opportunities they've never had, so they don't become part of criminal groups."

Adding to the challenges are territorial disputes between criminal gangs. These are groups that often reach into Ecuador from other countries and fight for territory.

"A lot of drugs pass through Ecuador due to its geographic location. So, (the gangs) try to gain territories to accumulate more profits," Pinto said, adding that until drug trafficking is addressed, the violence will "continue endlessly".

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

Joint lab helps Kenya reap rich harvest

Collaboration aims to improve Africa's food security with superior crop varieties

By EDITH MUTETHYA
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A China-Kenya joint agricultural lab in Kenya has bred more than two dozens of superior crop varieties over the past five years, effectively improving food security for farmers across the country.

Established in 2019, the Kenya-China Joint Laboratory for Crop Molecular Biology at Egerton University in Nakuru County has developed 25 crop varieties through molecular breeding, of which 18 have been commercialized. The crops are suitable in different ecological conditions, disease resistant and high yielding compared with traditional ones.

Once the seeds are developed, they are taken to the Agro-Science Park at the university, where seed bulking and commercialization take place.

Among the improved seeds are five bean varieties, three of which have been released in the market and have attracted much attention from farmers because of their advantages.

The most popular one is the Chelalung beans that were released in the market in 2016. In the Kalenjini community, the name loosely translates to mean a warm, beautiful girl who can fetch the highest bride price.

Paul Kimurto, director of Agro-Science Park, said Chelalung can yield up to 25 bags, or 2,250 kilograms, per hectare.

"It's a very adaptive variety. If you grow when there is enough rain, it prolongs the growth and puts in more yield. When the rainfall is short, it quickly accelerates, so it has early maturity characteristic. Hence, farmers don't lose yields," he said.

Anna Wanjiku, a farmer from Matangi Tisa village in Nakuru, was amazed by a bean variety last year. As the August rains arrived, she sowed Chelalung and Tatton beans, another variety under the bulking process and nearing commercialization.

The rain vanished for a month after the crops germinated, then returned. While Wanjiku's other beans succumbed to the drought, the Chelalung and Tatton beans persevered.

Wanjiku reaped a remarkable harvest. From 20 kg of Tatton beans, she collected a bountiful 120 kg. Her investment in 5 kg of Chelalung beans yielded 40 kg.

"In the upcoming rainy season, I will plant each of the variety in a 0.8-hectare land. I'm looking forward to a bumper harvest and consequently, increased income," she said.

Hillary Chelal, a research assistant at Egerton University, highlighted the characteristics of Tatton beans, including their superior yield, prolific pods, self-stripping leaves for effortless harvest, adaptability to diverse altitudes and preference by canneries.

In partnership with agricultural development nonprofit Kilimo Trust, Chelal said they are also promoting water-efficient upland rice and five such varieties have been tested.

Kenya imports about 80 percent of rice, but Chelal said the country has the potential to produce enough rice for its population.

Rising production

Joseph Orendi, program assistant officer at Kilimo Trust, said that through partnering with Egerton University and training farmers on sustainable rice production techniques, they have increased production from 2 metric tons to 3.5 tons per hectare within two years.

With proper management, the rice varieties have the potential to produce 7 to 11 tons per hectare, he said.

"Looking at what we have been able to achieve in the two years, if it is sustained, this collaboration can be able to achieve food security initiative in Africa if replicated to many areas and several food chains," he said.

Liu Gaoqiong, a horticulture professor at Egerton University, said the collaboration between China and Kenya through the lab aims to improve food security in Africa, with its rapidly expanding population and unpredictable weather patterns.

"We are trying to develop different varieties with good yields, good quality and climate-smart. We also plan to bring more agricultural equipment from China to Kenya," he said.

Kimurto said the laboratory is mitigating climate change through the development of resistant crop varieties that are able to grow in areas with low rainfall.

"We have developed four varieties of finger millet that are early maturing (and) resistant to low soil fertility and diseases. We have also developed sorghum varieties that are good for breweries," he said.

Plans are underway to establish the Egerton Agro-Industrial Park with the help of the Nakuru government to accelerate commercialization of improved crop varieties, he said.



Online
Watch the video
by scanning
the code.



Liu Gaoqiong (center), a horticulture professor at Egerton University, talks to Paul Kimurto (left), director of Agro-Science Park at Egerton, in Nakuru, Kenya, on March 22. WU XIAOHUI / CHINA DAILY

Nestle 'breaks guidelines' over sugar in baby food

By JULIAN SHEA in London
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An investigation by campaigners in Switzerland has found that the world's largest consumer goods company, Nestle, has been breaking guidelines about obesity prevention by adding sugar and honey to both cereal products and infant milk in poorer parts of the world.

The Guardian reported a study by campaign group Public Eye that tested samples of Nestle baby food

products from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Although formula products sold in Europe contain no added sugar, and there is none in any products for the 6 to 12 months age group market, added sucrose or honey was found in samples of Cerelac baby cereal and Nido follow-up milk formula.

Obesity is an increasing problem around the world, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, and especially among younger

children, which is why the issue of hidden sugar is such a concern.

According to the World Health Organization, since 2000, the number of overweight children under the age of 5 in Africa has risen by almost 23 percent.

While WHO guidelines in Europe forbid the addition of sugars or sweetening agents in food for children under the age of 3, no other region has similar guidelines.

Nutritional content details on packaging can often be confusing,

meaning consumers are not entirely clear on what is in the foods they are buying.

One of the study's focuses was comparing samples of Cerelac, which makes 40 percent of its global sales from Brazil and India.

Samples from India showed on average more than 2.7 grams of added sugar in every serving.

In Brazil, where it is known as Mucilon, two out of eight samples had no added sugar, but the others had almost 4 grams each, and one sample

from Nigeria had up to 6.8 grams.

Nigel Rollins, a medical officer with the WHO, called the report's findings "a double standard ... that can't be justified".

The Guardian quoted a Nestle spokesperson as saying that recipe variations were down to several factors, including the availability of ingredients where the product was made, and that the company always complied "with local regulations or international standards, including labeling requirements".

Nestle also said it has cut the amount of added sugars in its global infant cereals portfolio by 11 percent worldwide over the past decade.

WORLDUS

US airlines' handling of China route criticized

By MAYZHOU in Houston
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US airlines could be suppressing competition in the direct-flight market between the United States and China because they may be unable to compete for numerous reasons, including shortages of wide-body planes, pilots and maintenance crews.

That could be why the airlines are seeking to limit the number of flights, while they state other reasons, observers said.

Major US airlines urged the federal government last week to pause approving more direct flights between the US and China because they claim that unlike China, they can't fly a shorter route over Russia.

They say Chinese airlines have an advantage by continuing to access Russian airspace, while US carriers stopped flying through Russian airspace at the start of Russia's conflict with Ukraine in February 2022.

The letter, signed by the Air Line Pilots Association, Allied Pilots Association and Association of Flight Attendants, also called for limiting US-China flights "until US workers and businesses are guaranteed equality of access in the marketplace, free from the existing harmful anti-competitive policies of the Chinese government."

"That sounds like price-fixing by not allowing competition," Matthew Schwartz, a computer engineer in Houston who has recently flown to

South Korea, told China Daily. "The US airlines only care about protecting their profits, not the interest of air travelers. Any time competition is limited, consumers suffer."

Schwartz said that US carriers' inability to fly a shorter route isn't China's fault.

"The US imposed sanctions on Russia by barring Russian carriers flying over US airspace in 2022. Russia did reciprocally," Schwartz said. "It's a self-made problem by US policy. We shouldn't be penalizing China for that."

However, US airlines' objection of more flights over China's advantage of flying Russian airspace isn't entirely valid. FlightAware records show Chinese flights recently approved by the US aren't flying over Russia, and only 12 Chinese flights to the US that never stopped operating during the pandemic are still using Russian airspace.

In February, the US Transportation Department (DOT) increased weekly round-trip flights between China and US to 50, effective March 31, up from the previous 35. That means that both US and Chinese airlines are each authorized to fly 50 direct flights a week.

US carriers, however, aren't using all those flights. According to a March report by FlightGlobal, American Airlines, Delta Airlines and United Airlines in February requested and received authority from the DOT to delay resuming weekly flights to China by an additional waiver for 90 days

through October. The DOT can rescind those approvals if carriers fail to operate the flights.

Unable to operate all currently activated flights to China, the US carriers are concerned that the federal government might increase the flights to as many as 100 a week. Prior to the pandemic, each country was allowed to fly more than 150 flights a week.

In requesting the additional waiver, American Airlines told the DOT that "the majority of pre-pandemic frequencies remain un-operated and likely will remain so through at least the 2024 summer season, since US-China passenger demand hasn't recovered to pre-pandemic levels."

But that statement was contrary to the DOT's reason for increasing the flights. The agency said it had made the decision after assessing market conditions and considering public interest.

Many travelers disputed the US carriers' claims, and Schwartz's view was echoed by the overwhelming majority in more than 1,800 comments on Yahoo Finance regarding their request. They accused the airlines of caring only about profits and making consumers pay more.

"These excuses the airlines are using to prevent more flights only have one outcome: higher ticket prices for the consumer," a reader by the name of Joshua wrote on Yahoo. "The only result of fewer flights is higher ticket prices."

Another commenter, William, said that he regularly flew United Airlines to Shanghai in business class for \$6,500 before the pandemic.

"Last month I checked prices and it was \$54,000 for a fully refundable ticket, \$12,400 for non-refundable. Of course they don't want to approve more flights; they're able to hammer us on prices right now," he wrote.

The suppressed competition imposed on Chinese airlines by the US also drives up airfares between the US and other major Asian cities, other travelers said.

"I fly to Asia every six weeks, what used to cost business class pre-COVID is now almost double, \$3,600 vs \$6,500 is what I paid two weeks ago," Shawn wrote. "It's definitely punishing my business travel."

Many readers said that the US airlines' request was precisely the example of anti-competition on which many readers commented.

"This is yet another sign that the American airline industry cannot compete with Chinese airlines in price and quality of service. This is yet another form of protectionism," reader Imurdad said of the airlines' request.

"Keep in mind that US law is also seen as predatory in the aviation industry. When a US carrier declares Chapter 11 reorganization, it's released from debts such as landing, airport fees, navigation fees," reader Michael wrote, adding that most major airlines

including Delta, United and American declared Chapter 11 bankruptcy and avoided paying billions.

The readers are saying that the US airlines lack competitive ability because they are currently facing shortages of wide-body planes, traffic controllers, pilots and maintenance technicians.

Industry insiders said that currently the US carriers don't have enough wide-body planes to operate more extra flights between the US and China. The shortage is due to the US carriers having fewer planes now than in the pre-pandemic era, and they prioritized direct flights to European destinations because those are shorter and more profitable.

According to a 2023 study by consulting firm Oliver Wyman, post-pandemic air travel demand has outpaced the supply of pilots, and the industry is currently short 11 percent, equivalent to roughly 8,000 pilots.

The shortage was due to multiple factors: a wave of early retirements during the pandemic; a shrinking pool of potential pilots from the military; and mandatory retirement age of 65 for pilots that is already older than the general workforce. According to a study by the US Government Accountability Office, about 40 percent of active airline pilots were between the ages of 50 and 64 in 2022.

The pilot shortage is projected to get worse in the near future, with the aging workforce. Oliver Wyman's

latest figures project the gap between pilot supply and demand in 2032 to reach around 13,300 in the US.

The US is also facing a shortage of aviation maintenance workers, Wyman said. The aviation industry is short 24,000 maintenance technicians in North America, which will increase to nearly 40,000 by 2028.

Additionally, the US faces a shortage of ground air traffic controllers. The Federal Aviation Administration estimated in November 2023 that it has 1,000 fewer certified controllers than a decade ago. The agency has resorted to halting departures to ensure safety.

Travelers have felt the shortage. Reader Frederic wrote that the last time he traveled, United Airlines "ruined part of my hard-earned vacation" because of "flight delay due to lack of available crew to swap aircraft."

"American Airlines is always delayed and I had to pay the price of stress every time I flew with them." Another reader complained of a canceled flight due to no pilot.

Their experiences matched the broader picture. A report by the US Public Interest Research Group showed that more than 26,000 formal complaints were filed against US airlines in the first five months of 2023, an increase of 109 percent over the same period in 2022. Last December, the complaints were so numerous that the DOT had to delay the data release.

Retirement-savings crisis looms for millions in US

By BELINDA ROBINSON
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Millions of people in the United States who will retire in the next decade or so face a potential crisis because many do not have any, or enough, savings, experts warn.

At least half of women and 47 percent of men between the ages of 55 and 66 said they have no retirement savings, according to US Census Bureau data. The average age of retirement in the US is 65 for men and 62 for women.

Many approaching retirement have been forced to put saving on the back burner because of the rising cost of rent, inflation, credit card debts, healthcare and low wages.

In a February report, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee found nearly half of all US citizens may be financially insecure in retirement.

"More than half of older Americans have no retirement savings," Bernie Sanders, the 82-year-old chairman of the committee, said.

"More than 50 percent of our nation's seniors are trying to survive on an income of less than \$30,000 a year. That is absurd. Congress must address the retirement crisis facing working class Americans across our country."

A clear-cut system was in place to ensure that most workers could save for retirement involving a pension, Social Security benefits and defined contribution plans, such as a 401(k) plan.

In the mid-1980s, half of all

private sector workers had a pension, but by 2022 that number had dwindled to just 15 percent, figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics showed.

While most retirement savings come via an employer plan, nearly 57 million US people work for a company that does not offer one, according to AARP, an organization focused on people over 50.

Social Security payments provide 90 percent of income for one-fourth of seniors, CNN reported. But the Social Security trust fund faces a 75-year deficit, meaning by 2030, it may only be able to pay some retirees' benefits if the issue is not fixed.

About 68 percent of people who work in the private sector have access to a 401(k) plan, but only 50 percent utilize one.

Richard Alba, a sociologist and distinguished professor emeritus at the City University of New York and at the University at Albany, State University of New York, said: "The population is getting older. That certainly creates some real challenges (especially) with the financial support of older Americans through Social Security or pension systems."

At least 250,000 seniors were homeless at some point in 2019, according to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Many end up in a shelter.

"The numbers are increasing," Lisa Glow, CEO of Arizona's largest homeless center, the Central Arizona Shelter Services, told China Daily about the number of seniors she sees.



Chris Moore, father of Danielle Moore, who died in an Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 737 crash in the safety, holds a picture of her during a Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Investigations Subcommittee hearing on the safety culture at Boeing amid concerns about the assembly of the company's 737 and 777 jets, on Capitol Hill in Washington on Wednesday. EVELYN HOCKSTEIN / REUTERS

Boeing whistleblowers cite planes' safety issues

By AI HEPING in New York
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Two Boeing whistleblowers testified Wednesday before two separate US Senate committees on how the company builds airplanes and the safety of those planes.

Boeing engineer Sam Salehpour repeated what he had recently told media, that he was harassed and threatened after he raised concerns about the safety of the company's planes.

He said that the company is taking shortcuts in assembling 787 Dreamliners that leave sections of an aircraft's skin vulnerable to breaking apart.

"They are putting out defective airplanes," Salehpour, told members of an investigative subcommittee of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

"I have serious concerns about the safety of the 787 and 777 aircraft, and I'm willing to take on professional risk to talk about

them," he said in his opening statement. He said that when he raised concerns, "I was ignored. I was told not to create delays. I was told, frankly, to shut up."

"It really scares me, believe me, but I am at peace," Salehpour told lawmakers. "If something happens to me, I am at peace because I feel like coming forward; I will be saving a lot of lives."

Ed Pierson, a former Boeing manager and the executive director of The Foundation for Aviation Safety, said the lack of paperwork that has been provided to National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigators after a door plug blew out of a Boeing 737 MAX flight by Alaska Airlines in January amounted to "a criminal cover-up."

"Records do exist documenting in detail the hectic work done on the Alaska Airlines airplane, and Boeing's corporate leaders know it too, because they fought to withhold these same damning records after the two MAX crashes," he said in his opening comments.

Pierson said he had personally shared documents related to the missing bolts with the FBI.

Boeing recently said it has searched for records of who worked on the Alaska plane but believes its employees didn't document the work.

Passengers escaped serious injury from the incident, but it led to thousands of flight cancellations and renewed scrutiny of Boeing, which previously had to ground the 737 MAX 8 after deadly crashes in 2018 and 2019 killed 346 people.

Neither Boeing CEO David Calhoun nor any Boeing representatives attended Wednesday's hearings. A Boeing spokesperson said the company is cooperating with the lawmakers' inquiry and offered to provide documents and briefings.

Republican and Democratic senators at both hearings expressed concerns about the testimony.

"This story is serious, even shocking," said Democratic Senator Richard Blumenthal of

Connecticut, the chairman of the Senate permanent subcommittee on investigations. "There are mounting, serious allegations that Boeing has a broken safety culture and a set of practices that are unacceptable."

He said that since the hearing was announced, his committee has heard from other whistleblowers inside of Boeing. He said one mechanic from its nonunion South Carolina factory wrote that when he brought concerns, he was "told that hundreds of others were waiting outside the gates for our jobs."

"Boeing is at a moment of reckoning," Blumenthal said. "It's a moment many years in the making. It's a moment that results not from one incident or one flight or one plane."

At a briefing on Monday ahead of the Wednesday's hearing, Boeing said it has encouraged employees to bring forward safety concerns and since the Alaska air incident they have been doing so in much greater numbers.

Arizona clashes on abortion



Members of the public cheer from the gallery during the legislative session Wednesday at the Capitol in Phoenix. House Republicans have again blocked an effort for the chamber to take up legislation that would repeal Arizona's near-total ban on abortions. MATT YORK / AP

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BUSINESS

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HIGHER GROUND

Better finance for emerging segments

By LIU ZHIHUA
and LIU ZIZHENG

Financial institutions in China are expected to step up efforts for enriching quality financial services for the manufacturing sector, especially strategic emerging segments, to facilitate industrial upgrade and the advancement of new industrialization, experts said on Wednesday.

Their comments came after the country unveiled on Tuesday a circular calling for stronger and better financial support for the manufacturing sector, with 17 items detailing requirements for enhancing supply of financial services, improving the services systems and strengthening risk prevention among others.

Jointly published by the National Financial Regulatory Administration, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and the National Development and Reform Commission, the circular said the country will focus on key tasks to strengthen financial support for the manufacturing sector.

Those key tasks include supporting industrial and supply chain safety and stability, promoting sci-tech innovations for industrial development, facilitating industrial upgrade and optimization of industrial structure, and promoting the intelligent and green development of industries.

Zhou Maohua, a researcher at China Everbright Bank, said that China has been continuously deepening the supply-side structural reforms in the financial sector.



An employee works on an intelligent production line of a textile company in Qingdao, Shandong province. LIANG XIAOPENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

"Financial institutions have been encouraged to provide solid support to the manufacturing sector and key emerging segments such as scientific and technological innovation, and green economy," Zhou said.

"The implementation of the circular will further motivate financial institutions to strengthen their willingness and enhance their services to allocate more resources to the high-end manufacturing sector, thereby significantly adding to the industrial chain resilience in the manufacturing sector and supporting sci-tech innovations, to eventually accelerate new industrialization and development of new quality productive forces."

The circular asked banks to allocate more credit resources to support the development of the manufacturing sector, and continuously increase the proportion of medium- and long-term loans in overall loans extended to the sector.

They should also strengthen the utilization of credit information in the sector, increase credit and reduce

reliance on collateral, it said.

In addition, it asked banks and insurers to strengthen medium- and long-term financial support for the upgrade of equipment and technologies in traditional manufacturing sectors, as well as enhance the role of the national industry-financing cooperation platforms, to promote the efficient matching of financial resources with the financing needs related to industrial upgrade.

It also urged financial institutions to facilitate the cultivation and expansion of strategic emerging industries. With a focus on key industries like information technology, artificial intelligence, the internet of things, biotechnology, new materials, high-end equipment and aerospace, the circular asked them to strengthen financial support and risk prevention, and expand the scale of credit extended to strategic emerging industries.

Insurance funds should work on the premise of keeping risks controllable and, from a commercial perspective, be willing to provide long-

term stable financial support to strategic emerging industries. Such support could be in the form of bond purchases, direct equity investment, private equity funds, venture capital funds and insurance asset management products, it said.

Zhou said he expects financial institutions to further improve their customer service efficiency by optimizing the processes of services access, approval and post-loan management.

In performance appraisals, financial institutions should give more consideration to businesses in the manufacturing sector and innovation-oriented sci-tech enterprises, said Zhou.

Li Peijia, a senior analyst at Bank of China, said the country should help financial institutions further enhance their ability to evaluate risks and value of innovation-oriented sci-tech enterprises by promoting information-sharing within the sector.

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Bolstering demand high on agenda

Local government special bonds key to stabilizing growth, says NDRC

By OUYANG SHIJIA
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China is planning to bolster the economy by funding key projects, boosting consumption and tackling challenges faced by private enterprises, in a bid to hit its annual growth target for 2024, according to the country's top economic regulator.

Liu Sushe, deputy head of the National Development and Reform Commission, said the country will accelerate the issuance and use of local government special bonds and speed up the implementation of the central budget investment plan.

"So far, China has already allocated more than 200 billion yuan (\$27.63 billion) of the investment plan within the central government budget, accounting for over 30 percent of the total plan for 2024," Liu said at a news conference in Beijing on Wednesday.

"The commission has completed the preliminary screening of this year's local government special bond projects. And the Ministry of Finance is currently reviewing the balance of project financing and revenues, and localities are also preparing for projects in advance."

On China's plan to issue ultra-long-term special-purpose treasury bonds for several consecutive years, Liu said the country has drafted an action plan to support its key strategies and enhance its capacities to ensure security in key areas. For starters, the country will issue 1 trillion yuan in ultra-long-term special-purpose treasury bonds this year.

He said the focus will be on achieving greater self-reliance and strength in science and technology, promoting integrated urban and rural development, facilitating coordinated regional development, enhancing the capabilities

of ensuring grain and energy security and spurring high-quality development of the population.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics offer the latest official snapshot of the stabilization of the economy. China's economy beat expectations to expand by 5.3 percent year-on-year in the first quarter, following a 5.2 percent gain in the fourth quarter of last year.

Yuan Da, deputy secretary-general of the NDRC, said, "With announced policy measures taking gradual effect and more policy stimuli in the offing, the economic recovery trend will be further consolidated, giving us more confidence to achieve this year's goals with high quality."

Yuan also said that private enterprises still face difficulties and hurdles, and the NDRC will ramp up efforts to support their development.

"We will help accelerate the legislative process for the private economy promotion law," Yuan said. "More efforts will be made to further tackle issues faced by the private sector and create a better environment."

As the broader economy is still facing both internal and external pressures, Yuan said the country will step up macroeconomic policy support and strengthen countercyclical adjustments, and more efforts will be made to expand domestic demand as well as boost spending on cars, home appliances, cellphones and cultural tourism.

To further boost consumption, Jin Xiandong, director of the commission's office of policy studies, said the focus will be placed on creating more jobs to boost household purchasing power, encouraging new scenarios and businesses for consumption, and developing emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and the internet of things.

Briefly

Anhui sees Q1 foreign trade value up 8.6%

Anhui province's total first quarter imports and exports of goods grew by 8.6 percent year-on-year to 189.08 billion yuan (\$26.6 billion), marking a record high. In the January-March period, the East China province's exports grew 9.8 percent to 126.06 billion yuan, while imports rose 6.4 percent to 63.02 billion yuan, according to Hefei Customs.

China raises gasoline, diesel retail prices

China raised the retail prices of gasoline and diesel on Wednesday based on recent changes in international oil prices. Gasoline and diesel prices will increase by 200 yuan (\$28.16) and 195 yuan per metric ton, respectively, the National Development and Reform Commission announced in a statement.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Intelligent sensor tech firm to boost overseas presence

By FAN FEIFEI
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Guangzhou Asensing Technology Co Ltd, a company that specializes in high-precision positioning technology for autonomous vehicles, is ramping up efforts to expand its presence in overseas markets, including Europe, the United States and Japan, and bolster the intelligent driving industry, a senior company executive said.

Germany, which is home to a large number of world-renowned carmakers, is an important market in Asensing's overseas business roadmap, said Pia Hu, executive president and chief products officer, adding that the company also plans to hike its footprint in other European nations such as France and Italy.

Asensing is committed to developing cutting-edge sensor products for the automotive industry to improve efficiency and the safety of drivers and passengers, Hu said.

The Guangzhou-headquartered company, which was founded in 2014, has inked partnerships with more than 30 vehicle makers, such as Geely Auto, Changan Auto, SAIC Motor and Chinese EV brands including Nio, Li Auto and Xpeng,

to provide self-developed high-precision positioning solutions. It will also provide such technology for multinational automakers such as Volkswagen and Toyota.

"For European clients like Volkswagen, we have a plan to build local production lines in accordance with their requirements. Meanwhile, we may consider establishing production facilities in Mexico if we reach a cooperation agreement with carmakers in the United States," Hu said.

Asensing makes its own chips for high-precision positioning units, she said. "China is at the global forefront of intelligent driving in terms of industrial chain, technological level, industrial applications and user acceptance. Currently, the advanced driver assistance system (ADAS) has become a standard configuration for new vehicles made in China," she added.

According to her, the number of vehicle models and brands with ADAS functionalities in the Chinese market has surpassed that from European countries and the US, while Chinese consumers regard the autonomous driving function as a key factor when they buy cars.

China has introduced a series of policies to promote the development and commercialization of self-

driving technology in recent years. According to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the country supports the commercial application of Level 3 and above autonomous driving systems. Level 3, or L3, means conditional automation, which allows a vehicle to drive by itself without human override under certain conditions.

Hu said LiDAR, which uses laser light to measure distances and map surroundings, high-precision positioning systems and other sensors will be essential parts of intelligent automobiles.

She said that China's auto parts suppliers, represented by smart sensor producers, are gradually taking the lead in the global auto industry, and Chinese suppliers will spearhead the transformation of the automotive industrial chain.

"For international mainstream automobile manufacturers, China is becoming an important market for the procurement of intelligent automotive parts," she said. As Chinese auto brands have accelerated steps to expand in overseas markets, the export of auto parts has also increased.

At present, expenses for research and development take up about 60 percent share of the company's total revenue.

Hu said Asensing will continue to focus on R&D in the domestic market and deliver key parts like chips to overseas production bases for assembly, production, testing and verification. The company accounts for more than 60 percent market share in high-precision positioning technology in China's automotive industry.

Liu Chunsheng, an associate professor at the Central University of Finance and Economics' School of International Trade and Economics, said it is a positive trend that Chinese intelligent auto parts companies are speeding up their globalization plan, and that this will be conducive to expanding their market share.

"By establishing production bases and procurement networks across the globe, these companies can make better use of local resources to reduce manufacturing costs and optimize the supply chain structure," Liu said.

Zhang Xiang, visiting professor at the engineering department of Huanghe Science and Technology University, said the manufacturing costs of driverless vehicle components have fallen, as advances have been made in self-driving technologies and related industrial chains have matured.

Infineon to aid China's green push

By MASI
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German chipmaker Infineon Technologies AG sees abundant growth opportunities arising from China's green transition, as the country's rapid development of new energy vehicles and wind and solar power capacities fuels rising demand for semiconductors, a senior executive said.

Andreas Urschitz, a member of the management board and chief marketing officer of Infineon, said in an exclusive interview with China Daily that he highly appreciates China's target of peaking carbon emissions before 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060.

"A lot of opportunities arise from this. Think about all the area of renewable energies. About 70 per-



Andreas Urschitz

cent of global CO2 emissions stem from the energy sector," Urschitz said. Semiconductors, in particular power semiconductors, sensors and microcontrollers, are essential to build the world's best and most affordable and commercially meaningful wind turbines and new energy harvesting systems that can replace fossil fuels, he said.

"Without chips, zero carbon is impossible," Urschitz said, adding that decarbonization and digitalization are to some extent like twins that are intertwined and depend on each other.

As Chinese energy companies are

scaling up clean solar and wind power capacities to ensure that non-fossil fuels comprise 80 percent of the country's energy mix by 2060 from about 30 percent today, Infineon aims to provide efficient semiconductor solutions to facilitate the green push.

"It creates a lot of growth potential that can be leveraged for many companies on the planet, as semiconductors are a core pillar of enabling these technologies," said Urschitz who grew up on a farm near the Alps in Austria.

According to him, Infineon's latest silicon carbide products "can achieve 99 percentage points efficiency" in the power conversion of a solar power system, which means that the heat from the sun can be directly converted into energy through solar cells with very low losses.

To provide a platform for discussions on technology's role in facilitating global energy transition, Infineon held a "tech for" event in Shanghai last month. It focused on how to better leverage technology for sustainable megacities, including for buildings and mobility, urban planning and living.

As the world's largest automotive semiconductor company, Infineon also sees opportunities in China's fast-growing new energy vehicle sector.

"I believe that China has become a very fast mover, in particular, in the area of electrification, but also automated driving," Urschitz said.

Last year, NEV sales totaled 9.49 million units in China, making up 31.6 percent of new vehicle sales in the world's largest automotive market, according to statistics from the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

At least 40 percent of new vehicles sold in China this year will be



Visitors try out products showcased during an event held by Infineon in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

NEVs, but it will carry smart features that can help NEV makers stand out amid the increasingly fierce competition, experts said.

Ouyang Minggao, an academi-

cian at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said the upward spiral is expected to continue, pushing the figure beyond 40 percent and toward 50 percent in 2025.

BUSINESS

Smart translator boosts trade at Canton Fair

iFlytek's AI device plays significant role for visitors speaking multiple languages

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou
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Smart translators have turned into a boon for Chinese exporters and foreign buyers as far as cross-language communications services go at the China Import and Export Fair.

After scanning a QR code to enter a WeChat mini-program and paying a deposit, exhibitors and buyers have been able to rent smart translation devices developed by Chinese artificial intelligence company iFlytek Co Ltd.

The company has opened rental and sales service for its smart translators at the fair, whose 135th edition opened to the public on Monday.

"As sustained trading at the fair brings significant demand for cross-language communication, we are bringing smart tools to break the language barrier, helping to improve trade efficiency between Chinese exporters and overseas buyers," said Zhang Jing, a senior manager at the AI marketing business department of the company.

As of Wednesday, more than 107,700 overseas buyers from 212 countries and regions have attended this year's event, also known internationally as the Canton Fair. The number represents a 23 percent increase compared with the last session in October, the organizers said.

Supporting 85 languages spoken in over 200 countries and regions, iFlytek's translation device, which comes equipped with a large voice model, can serve customers who speak their own languages, according to the company.

For instance, while encountering a foreigner whose language cannot be clearly distinguished, the translation device will automatically identify the language — for example, Japanese, Thai or French — from the conversation and utilize multiple language engines to aid in communication, the company said.

"Specialized foreign trade terms pose no difficulty — exhibitors can express themselves more smoothly, while buyers can gain clearer explanations for products, significantly increasing the chances of closing deals," she said.

iFlytek can help Chinese export-oriented enterprises expand their businesses globally, primarily through technological and marketing empowerment, according to Zhang.

"As an AI and voice technology company, iFlytek possesses powerful

multilingual speech recognition and synthesis technologies, which can assist international enterprises in addressing the language challenges in diverse global markets," she said.

Through its translation services and devices, the company helps international enterprises enhance cross-language communication efficiency and provides more localized and personalized services for users in different countries and regions, according to Zhang.

Additionally, iFlytek has developed a global programmatic advertising marketing platform, utilizing AI technology and algorithm capabilities to help businesses reach more target users and achieve more effective user growth.

During the Canton Fair, the company also unveiled its latest open large model, iFlytek Spark V3.5, which is based on the first nationwide computing power platform and delivers rapid and precise responses.

"The large model can efficiently assist enterprises in generating localized content during overseas marketing and promotion," she said.

Currently, the marketing platform's coverage areas mainly include the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, Latin America, the United States and Europe, accumulating rich service experience in the e-commerce, internet services and online travel industries.

In addition to technological advancements, iFlytek Spark V3.5 is rapidly accelerating its practical applications. Currently, iFlytek's AI programmers are not only using it internally within the company but have also deployed it in over 100 firms.

The model not only comprehends complex programming logic but also automatically generates high-quality code, assisting developers in improving their coding efficiency and expediting the construction of the digital world, according to the company.

During the Canton Fair, iFlytek also showcased its deep applications and solutions in the fields of education, automotive, urban development and other areas, presenting its intelligent software and hardware devices.

"In the current climate of accelerated globalization facing Chinese enterprises, iFlytek is providing comprehensive support to businesses expanding into international markets, facilitating the rapid expansion of their global market presence," said Zhang.



Employees of China Railway No 4 Engineering Group Co Ltd lay tracks on the Wuhan-Yichang section of the Shanghai-Chongqing-Chengdu High-speed Railway in Jingmen, Hubei province. WU HUIQIU / FOR CHINA DAILY

SOE achieves milestone in key HSR construction

By ZHUANG QIANGGE and PANG BO

The Shanghai-Chongqing-Chengdu High-speed Railway, which will link a number of urban clusters along China's longest river — the Yangtze — and benefit some 600 million people, got a boost on Tuesday as the railway's builder began laying tracks along a key section.

Builders from State-owned China Railway No 4 Engineering Group Co Ltd (CREC4) began laying 500-meter-long ballast-free tracks on the Wuhan-Yichang section, which is part of the 2,100-kilometer HSR costing some 600 billion yuan (\$84.2 billion).

They laid the tracks at the construction site of Jingmen West Railway Station, along the 315.5-km Wuhan-Yichang section, in the prefecture-level city of Jingmen, Hubei province.

Li Yi, work safety supervisor for the CREC4 management department of the project, said the entire line — which runs parallel with the Yangtze and links six provincial-level regions of Shanghai, Jiangsu, Anhui, Hubei, Chongqing and Sichuan — is being built and put into operation section by section, and is expected to be fully operational by 2030.

Li said the Wuhan-Yichang sec-

2,100 kilometers

total length of the Shanghai-Chongqing-Chengdu High-speed Railway, which will link a number of urban clusters along the Yangtze River

tion — which launched construction in September 2021 with a total investment of some 52.27 billion yuan — will be open to traffic by June next year.

Upon its opening, it can allow travelers from Wuhan, capital of Central China's Hubei, to reach Shanghai in the east or Chongqing in the southwest within three hours, thus fully boosting the transport of passengers and cargo along the line, he said.

Li added that the Shanghai-Chongqing-Chengdu HSR will include such sections as Shanghai-Nanjing-Hefei, Hefei-Wuhan, Wuhan-Yichang, Yichang-Fuling, Fuling-Chongqing and Chongqing-Chengdu.

Speaking at a track-laying launch ceremony on Tuesday, Liu Bo, Party secretary and chairman of CREC4, called on the company's builders to make the Wuhan-Yichang section into a showcase project for the entire HSR.

The section starts at Hankou

Station in Wuhan and runs westward through Hanchuan, Tianmen and Zhongxiang before ending in Yichang — another prefecture-level city in Hubei, said Wen Liangcheng, a staff member from CREC4's publicity department.

Allowing trains to run at 350 kilometers per hour, it will have eight stations — Hankou, Hanchuan East, Tianmen North, Jingshan South, Zhongxiang South, Jingmen West, Dangyang West and Yichang North, Wen said.

Li said CREC4 will be in charge of laying tracks for the entire Wuhan-Yichang section, which is being invested and managed by Wuhan-based Yangtze River Coastal Railway Group Co Ltd.

Ma Chunshan, Party secretary and chairman of Yangtze River Coastal Railway Group, said at the ceremony that the Shanghai-Chongqing-Chengdu HSR "will be of vital importance in supporting the high-quality development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt and building Hubei into a strategic fulcrum for the rise of Central China".

In Hubei alone, about 26 million people along the Wuhan-Yichang section will have access to faster and more convenient transportation, Ma said.

Wen said on the eastern end, the Wuhan-Yichang section can

link with the Hefei-Wuhan section of the Shanghai-Chongqing-Chengdu HSR, Beijing-Guangzhou HSR, Wuhan-Jiujiang HSR and Wuhan-Huanggang-Huangmei intercity railway.

He added that on the western end, the Wuhan-Yichang section can join the Yichang connecting line with Zhengzhou-Chongqing HSR, and the Chongqing-Yichang HSR.

Jingmen West Railway Station, located in Zhanghe new area of Jingmen, is an intermediate station to be jointly used by the Shanghai-Chongqing-Chengdu HSR and the Jingmen-Jingzhou HSR, running between the two prefecture-level cities in Hubei, Wen said.

The station will have five platforms with 13 railway lines, he said.

To ensure smooth track-laying work, CREC4 builders are using intelligent track-laying technology, Wen said.

Chen Kexiong, 72, a villager living near Jingmen West Railway Station, said he will be happy to see people in Jingmen greeting the HSR next year.

For years, rapid transport for them has always been a challenge, he said.

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BUSINESSFOCUS

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Gifting one's way to business potential

Market for presents, comprising promotional items, giveaways and welfare products, thrives as it enhances consumer relations, boosts purchases and fosters employee-employer ties

By WANG ZHUOQIONG

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Yanzhifang Food Co Ltd, a nutritious grains producer based in Anhui province, is growing at a rate of 50 percent annually from a new business category — gifts.

The company, which has been relying on retail and e-commerce to reach more health-conscious consumers, expects its gift products business to reach one quarter of total revenue, or 500 million yuan (\$69.1 million), by the end of this year.

"Branded health grain products for families, friends, or as welfare for employees, have been in great demand since 2020," said Kong Qingfang, director of corporate affairs at Yanzhifang. "We've developed gift products customized for every client's budget and request."



Helen Shen

A rising number of domestic companies that target individual consumers at the retail level are banking on the surging growth potential of China's gifts industry.

The Chinese gifts market, which primarily comprises marketing or promotional items, giveaways and employee welfare products, is thriving as such products help enhance consumer relations, boost purchases, and foster employee-employer ties.

China is the world's largest producer and exporter of promotional giveaways. The market size of China's gifts industry is forecast to reach 1.38 trillion yuan in 2024, according to the "2024 China Gift Industry White Paper" by RX Huabo and Kantar.

In 2022, the overall scale of China's gifts industry reached 1.23 trillion yuan, with the annual growth rate exceeding 9 percent from 2018 to 2022. Projections anticipate an average growth rate of 4 percent between 2023 and 2027, according to the report.

The gifts sector in China harbors significant growth potential. By comparison, the mature gifts industry market in the United States, particularly gift cards, reached \$275 billion in 2022.

Emotional appeal

The giftware industry in China encompasses a wide array of consumer products, spanning everyday items like home decor, drink-ware, and stationery to more luxurious offerings such as timepieces, jewelry, silverware and artworks.

"Everything can be a gift, as long as it is imbued with emotional significance," said Helen Shen, vice-president of RX Huabo. The Shenzhen, Guangdong province-based company holds 13 gift exhibitions in China annually, covering more than 3 million buyers and 10,000 suppliers.

"With the continual improvement of living standards in China,



Visitors check out products during the China (Shenzhen) International Gifts and Home Products Fair in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, in April. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Colorful dragon-shaped fridge magnets are displayed during the China Beijing International Gifts, Premium & Houseware Exhibition in Beijing in March. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A visitor looks at thermal mugs at the Shenzhen gifts fair in April. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

there's seemingly no shortage of options. However, selecting the right gift requires insight and a deep understanding of people's lives," Shen said.

During the three major traditional Chinese festivals — the Spring Festival, the Mid-Autumn Festival and the Dragon Boat Festival — large enterprises or organizations also provide food, groceries or home appliances to strengthen their relationships with employees, Shen said.

Compared to conventional retail channels, the gifts sector, with its emphasis on added value and personalized services, often yields higher profits for producers, she said.

For instance, leading food and snack companies have identified

new growth opportunities within the gifts sector.

The white paper by RX Huabo and Kantar indicates thriving new categories, including pet-related products and innovations inspired by traditional Chinese culture, small home appliances and digital electronic devices.

During the China (Shenzhen) International Gifts and Home Products Fair in April, a dedicated hall showcases "Created in China" gift products, highlighting innovations from Chinese designers.

Among the exhibitors at the China Beijing International Gifts, Premium & Houseware Exhibition in March, a set of eye-catching colorful dragon-shaped fridge magnets designed by a Beijing-based industrial design studio became a hit.

These magnets, featuring trans-

parent materials and components that could be reversed and twisted to look like a dragon floating on the surface, captured the attention of many buyers.

"We used to design and create customized toy products for the capital's iconic tourist sites. We were bestsellers but in small quantities. Now, the gifts sector presents a larger and newer market," said Liu Yang, a professor of industrial design at Beijing University of Technology and founder of Beijing Huaxin Yichuang Industrial Design Co Ltd.

"Chinese consumers have always had a fondness for traditional Chinese culture. It's the modern design, craftsmanship, and new material that make traditional Chinese intellectual property and cultural products more appealing to today's youth," said Liu.

Shen of RX Huabo said that gifts are no longer about just adding a company logo or commemorating traditional festivals.

The innovation and added-value infused into the gift receive the most recognition, she said.

An increasing number of giftware companies have expanded their business by incorporating more design elements and offering customized designs for customers.

"When it comes to gifts, it's about delving into the corporate core values and cultural systems and fusing them with designs and productions," said Liu, who has called for setting up a platform during gift industry exhibitions for designers to gather and exchange innovations and stimulate the applications of these IPs.

Another new trend this year is more visibility among companies

promoting pet-related products.

Shen said that, due to the increasing trend of viewing pets as life companions, potential customers are often pleasantly surprised when they receive pet accessories as gifts rather than gifts for themselves.

Additionally, a surge in the population of singles has resulted in less procurement of food ingredients such as oil, rice, or flour, and an increase in purchases of dairy and ready-to-cook products, she said.

The gifts industry in China is mainly operated by small and medium sized companies, with relatively small-sized orders in both value and quantity.

According to the white paper jointly released by RX Huabo and Kantar, there were only 50,407 registered and existing companies in the gifts industry as of 2022.

Statistics from the white paper showed that there are currently over 100,000 small and medium-sized gift companies, along with over 4,000 large gift companies.

According to the report, more than half of the total orders for a single supplier consisted of less than 10,000 pieces. Over 60 percent of orders were valued at less than 3 million yuan each in 2023. In terms of volume, about 75 percent of single orders comprised fewer than 300 pieces.

However, the industry is growing, and powered by emerging retail enterprises and those venturing overseas.

"This year, all of our fairs are likely to experience growth, with a projected 7 percent increase in average exhibition coverage and revenue," said Shen.

RX Huabo's gift exhibitions have grown from having just over 100 exhibitors initially to nearly 10,000 exhibitors presently.

She said that promotional and marketing products are expected to maintain robust momentum, driven by rising consumption among product companies such as liquor producers and electric vehicle manufacturers.

In the past, growth engines stemmed from formula milk producers who acquired more promotional presents, or insurance companies in the finance industry.

The gifts sector in China is extending its reach overseas, with RX Huabo set to launch its inaugural overseas exhibition this September in Indonesia.

The show is set to feature around 500 suppliers from China, with preparatory workshops in advance to facilitate overseas market expansion, Shen said.

"A growing number of Chinese companies, including electric vehicle and mobile phone producers, are venturing abroad to explore market opportunities," she said. "As they eye more overseas consumers, we're going along with them."

Plans for gift exhibitions in the Middle East and Vietnam are also afoot. "In these markets, middle-income families are rapidly expanding, with a demand for higher-quality gifts," she added.

Maker of collectible toys goes full steam ahead to meet growing global demand

By WANG ZHUOQIONG

Pop Mart, a leading Chinese maker of collectible toys, recently opened new stores in France and Australia, as part of efforts to expand its global presence and fuel revenue growth.

On April 5, Pop Mart opened its first pop-up store at France's largest department store group, Galeries Lafayette. The pop-up store held the global first release event of "Skullpanda", its top intellectual property offering, attracting a large number of French consumers with a variety of interactive activities, the company said.

The pop-up store is aiming to bank on tourists visiting Paris for the 2024 Olympic Games in July, said the company.

With the official opening of the Galeries Lafayette pop-up store, Pop Mart has opened three offline stores in Paris.

On Feb 26, 2023, Pop Mart's first

store in France officially opened in Place de la Sorbonne in Paris, with the store design integrating several local cultural elements.

The company offers a variety of limited-edition trendy toys and on-site creative interactive activities for European fans, such as Zimomo, and painting creation experiences.

"This year, it is important for us to develop the French market, thanks to the world-class sports event and because it is a mature toy market. In the future, we plan to open more stores in landmark areas to continuously attract young consumer groups in Europe," said Alan Mai, director for Australian and European markets at Pop Mart.

A tailor-made and localized strategy for the European market will help Pop Mart win more consumers on the continent, which is home to diverse cultures, said Mai.

As the center of regional cultures, Paris will amplify the influence of

the Pop Mart brand worldwide, Mai added.

Meanwhile, on April 5, it opened its ninth store in Australia at the Macquarie Centre in Sydney. The company, which entered the Australian market in 2021, now operates 16 roboshops and one digital commerce channel.

Founded in 2010, the Beijing-based toy producer aims to become a leading global cultural and entertainment company. It has built an operating platform covering the industry chain of trendy toy IP incubation and operation, product development and retail, theme parks and experiences, and entertainment.

In 2018, Pop Mart began to develop its overseas businesses and shifted its focus to direct-to-consumer in 2022, opening directly operated offline stores in several cities across the world.

With the continuous expansion of

online and offline channels, its brand and products have gained global influence.

As of end-2023, the company had opened 80 stores (including joint ventures) overseas, and the number of roboshops had reached 159.

According to its latest financial report, annual revenue from overseas businesses in 2023 increased 134.9 percent year-on-year to 1.07 billion yuan (\$147.8 million), accounting for 16.9 percent of the total revenue.

In 2023, Pop Mart entered France, Malaysia, Thailand and the Netherlands for the first time.

The company's domestic business is also growing.

Pop Mart posted a 36.5 percent year-on-year rise in revenue to 6.3 billion yuan for fiscal year 2023, with net profit up 107.6 percent year-on-year to 1.19 billion yuan, according to the company.

In 2023, the company opened 55



Consumers shop at Pop Mart's first Paris store. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

new physical stores on the Chinese mainland. It closed 21 stores due to lease expiry and other commercial reasons. In effect, the number of physical stores increased from

329 to 363 in a year.

Pop Mart opened 123 roboshops last year. The total number of robot stores increased from 2,067 to 2,190 in the period.

COMMENT

Editorials

Those sowing seeds of discord are not like-minded with regional countries

Those trying to drive a wedge between China and its Asia-Pacific neighbors feel no qualms about smearing the Belt and Road Initiative and other cooperation mechanisms between China and regional countries as Beijing's geopolitical tools. They intentionally turn a blind eye to the fruits that have been harvested in the form of infrastructure facilities, jobs, environmental protection and green development, and the development achievements that have been made through the joint efforts of the participating countries.

None of the cooperation mechanisms between China and its neighbors excludes any third party. Beijing always welcomes capable countries working together with China to promote common development.

That is in stark contrast to the exclusive small circles some countries from outside the region are trying to form with countries in the region with the aim of isolating China from its neighbors. A practice that has proved to be a fool's errand as it has found little favor in a region that understands the importance of peace and stability for development.

Those countries trying to create frictions seem to forget that regional countries have the wisdom of experience, having been burned by such practices in the past.

The more these trouble-intentioned countries try to steer the region in that direction, the more the regional countries will pull together to resist their designs and reinforce their solidarity and cooperation.

During his nearly week-long trip that starts on Thursday, Foreign Minister Wang Yi will chair the Fourth Meeting of the China-Indonesia High-Level Dialogue Cooperation Mechanism and the Seventh Meeting of the China-Cambodia Intergovernmental Coordination Committee. He will finish the tour in Papua New Guinea. Such bilateral cooperation mechanisms, particularly those under the China-ASEAN collaboration framework, are conducive to promoting substantive cooperation.

Last year, China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations were each other's largest trading partners for the fourth consecutive year. In January and February, trade between China and ASEAN totaled 993.2 billion yuan (\$137.19 billion), up 8.1 percent year-on-year. The economic progress of the region is not a gift received from the hegemon for doing its bidding, but a hard-won result of regional countries' own efforts.

A host of guests from Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and Singapore, have visited or are due to visit China this month. The close exchanges between China and its neighbors demonstrate the great importance they attach to their relations and to maintaining unanimity.

Those countries that cover their divisive geopolitical schemes under the guise of "shared values" are at odds with the amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness that are the values most cherished by countries in the region. Regional countries know that these are the crucial building blocks for peace, stability and development, which are essential to build a better future for the region.

The refusal of those calling for "like-minded" countries to open their own markets — while demanding regional countries open theirs — and to lower tariffs for imports, promote technology cooperation and invest in livelihood projects in the developing countries speaks volumes of their hypocrisy. Fundamentally, their unwillingness to provide public goods to bridge the development gap, and refusal to address the trust deficit originate from their zero-sum game mentality and "democracy versus autocracy" false binary mindset. China, in contrast, will continue to prioritize its neighborhood diplomacy by strengthening cooperation, mutual understanding and trust.

Rather than trying to subordinate regional countries to their will, those trying to use the region as a geopolitical crucible in which to temper their privileges would do better to conform to the regional norms so they too are welcomed to sit at a table where all enjoy friendly meals. It is they that need to show they are like-minded to regional values.

Japan boldly doing US' bidding

For the first time in five years, Japan's annual diplomatic report calls for the promotion of strategic and mutually beneficial ties with China.

Yet the same document identifies China as an unprecedented strategic challenge for Japan, which suggests its approach to bilateral relations will be less than conducive to realizing such ties.

The top leaders of the two countries reached a consensus on the need for such a relationship at their meeting in San Francisco in November last year.

Yet Japan has done little since then to match its words with deeds. In fact, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's recent busy diplomatic schedule would suggest it has instead been intent on reinforcing the false notion that its neighbor presents a challenge to Japan rather than an opportunity.

Kishida's visit to Washington last week, for example, not only helped strengthen Japan's strategic alliance with the United States but also helped usher in a new small clique, grouping the country with the US and the Philippines, with the aim of impressing trilateral security cooperation on the East and South China seas. To Kishida and like-minded Japanese, these diplomatic overtures are no doubt satisfying as they further consolidate Japan's image as being the US' most important regional ally, which in their eyes raises the country's status on the world stage.

To those with a more objective perspective, it simply makes the country a stooge of Washington. By echoing Washington's scaremongering of a "China threat" and advocating for a tough stance against China, Tokyo has revealed it lacks the confidence to follow its own path. Hence, if any neutral or positive words about China have been included in Japan's 2024 diplomatic declaration this week, it only exposes Japan's opportunist and double-dealing intentions.

True, differences do exist between Beijing and Tokyo, notably over the Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea, Japan's attempts to whitewash its imperialist past, and, the latest addition to the list, its reckless move to discharge the nuclear-contaminated waste water accumulated at the tsunami-struck Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the sea.

But none of these justifies Japan linking arms with the US against China. Apart from making waves over the East China Sea disputes, Japan has also repeatedly interfered in the Taiwan question and actively meddled in the South China Sea disputes, stoking confrontation in a region in which, by and large, countries have made concerted efforts to maintain the peace and stability that has enabled them to prosper in recent decades.

In his speech at a state dinner in the White House, Kishida quoted the famous line from the TV show *Star Trek* about "boldly going where no one has gone before." Yet Tokyo and Washington are following around in a circle following a familiar path. If Tokyo really wants to boldly go where it hasn't gone before, it should stop following Washington's lead.

Japan under Kishida has transformed its national security strategy, discarding its pacifist Constitution and expanding its outlook "beyond that of being America's closest ally." Yet it still seems it is unwilling to boldly go where it hasn't gone before by turning its back on Washington's schemes and making peace with its past and its neighbors.

By continuing to be content with its allotted role as a tolerated guest in the Anglo-Saxon club, Japan under Kishida may be boldly pursuing a militarist path, but in doing so it is only demonstrating that it is fearful of standing on its own two feet. As long as that is the case, countries in the region must remain vigilant against Japan's ambition to develop into a military power with the assistance of the US.

Cao Yi



Opinion Line

Inflation rebound in US deepens monetary policy divide with Europe

Recent US Department of Labor data show that the consumer price index in the United States rose 3.5 percent year-on-year in March, up 0.3 percentage points from the growth in February, and the core CPI rose 3.8 percent year-on-year and 0.4 percent month-on-month, both exceeding expectations for three consecutive months.

The higher-than-expected CPI indicates that the rebound in the US inflation since the beginning of the year is not temporary. The minutes of the US Federal Reserve's monetary policy meeting in March also show that the Fed will not cut interest rates until it is confident inflation is steadily returning to the target level.

Analysts point out that the continued rebound in US inflation has had many impacts on the US and global markets. With inflation data rebounding, market institutions have to reassess the Fed's

policy path, with Wall Street traders expecting the Fed to keep rates higher for longer. There is speculation that the Fed may raise rates again.

Jamie Dimon, chairman and CEO of J.P. Morgan Chase, even said "we are ready for the Fed to raise interest rates to as high as 8 percent".

After the March inflation data were released, US President Joe Biden broke the practice of not commenting on the Fed's decision, saying he believed the Fed will cut rates by the end of the year. Analysts believe that Biden's remarks reflect that the US economy is unable to withstand continued high interest rates, and the "resilience" of the US economy may not be as strong as claimed by the Fed.

As expectations of US interest rate cuts subside, the divergence between European and US monetary policy will widen. If the European Central Bank

cuts interest rates before the Fed does, it could cause the euro to fall sharply and European enterprises to pay more for dollar-denominated imports, which would fuel inflation again.

The ECB has intensified efforts to shed the impression that it follows the US in terms of monetary policy. Therefore, it is believed the ECB, fearing that the economy could lose steam, may cut interest rates before the Fed does in June.

The US inflation data are an important indicator of the country's and even global economic trends. However, there have been more signs that inflation data have gradually been used by the US government and the Fed to influence market expectations. The question is, as US federal government debt approaches \$35 trillion, how long can this tool be wielded?

— ECONOMIC DAILY

Mathematics can help more talents to stand out

The emphasis on mathematics in the enrollment policies of some universities in China has got some people worried.

Special enrollment brochures released by the universities echo a national plan to strengthen fundamental sciences. The enrollment policies of Northwestern Polytechnical University and National University of Defense Technology mention that outstanding performance in mathematics alone is sufficient for special consideration.

A careful reading of the brochures, however, makes it clear that having a high score in mathematics does not necessarily mean direct admission. In addition to a high score in mathematics in the National College Entrance Examination, or *gaokao*, candidates' total scores must also fall within a certain range, and they must also pass subsequent written tests, interviews, physical tests, and other stages.

Although having a good score in mathematics is only a necessary condition and does not guarantee admission, it signals that top universities are looking for talents with a sound background in mathematics for the long-term development of society.

Most universities still go by the total *gaokao* scores for admitting students. However, in high school some talents have outstanding scores in individual subjects but put up an average performance in other subjects. If their total scores do not match the admission criteria of top universities, it could mean a missed opportunity for some talents.

That's why the Ministry of Education released a guiding document in 2020 on strengthening fundamental sciences, which promotes multi-dimensional evaluation of the candidates' performance while ensuring fairness and justice.

The core competition among coun-

tries lies in technological innovation capabilities. Whether it's the internet, consumer electronics, or the semiconductor industry, they all rely on basic disciplines such as mathematics and physics. To some extent, the quantity of talent in basic disciplines that a country reserves determines how far its path of technological innovation can go.

It is for this reason that in recent years, countries have continuously increased their investment and efforts in the cultivation of talents in fundamental sciences and related fields. Of course, admitting such candidates is only the first step. Universities must also develop scientific training plans tailored for these candidates, fully empower them with the space for independent exploration, so that their genius can flourish and live up to expectations of society.

— BEIJING NEWS

What They Say

Strong foundation laid for achieving growth target

At constant prices, China's gross domestic product in the first quarter increased by 5.3 percent year-on-year. It can be said that China's economy has continued its upward trend since last year.

Judging from the main indicators, production and supply are stable and rising, domestic demand continues to recover, employment and prices are generally stable, the cultivation of new drivers and new advantages has accelerated, market vitality has been improved, and the stability and coordination of economic operations have been enhanced.

The role of consumption as the main engine of economic growth has been further consolidated, as fixed asset investment has increased steadily, and the scale of imports and exports has reached a new level.

Combined with indicators

reflecting economic vitality such as the flow of people, logistics, electricity consumption and freight volume, as well as indicators reflecting market expectations such as the manufacturing purchasing managers' index that has returned to the expansion range, it can be said that China's economy has maintained good recovery momentum.

The economic growth of 5.3 percent in the first quarter was due to the continued effects of pro-growth and pro-business policies. From a quarter-on-quarter perspective, after adjusting for seasonal factors, the country's GDP increased by 1.6 percent in the first three months of the year, and the quarter-on-quarter growth rate has kept increasing for 7 consecutive quarters.

In the first quarter, China's economy continued to promote structural optimization, achieved new results in innovative, coordinated, green, open, and

shared development, and made solid progress in high-quality development. From January to March, investment in high-tech manufacturing and high-tech services increased by 10.8 percent and 12.7 percent respectively year-on-year, 6.3 and 8.2 percentage points higher than the growth rate of all fixed asset investment.

Although the external environment is still increasing in complexity, severity and uncertainty, the domestic economic recovery is still uneven, and some industries and enterprises are still facing difficulties in production and operation, the first quarter performance lays a good foundation for achieving the goals and tasks for the whole year.

The market should have confidence that the Chinese economy has the ability to maintain sustained and healthy development in the long run.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Robert Lawrence Kuhn

Xi's message to US side is clear and positive

President Xi Jinping's recent meeting with US business leaders and academics rightly caught the attention of the international media. Among the factors on which the peace and prosperity of the world depends, two of the biggest are the state of US-China relations and the prospects for China's economic development — both of which were the primary themes of Xi's carefully planned message to the US side.

The setting counts. It was right after the annual China Development Forum, where the CEOs of foreign corporations come to engage with China's policymakers. China's top leader, who met with the CEOs, thereby elevated the meeting's importance with the highest authority. In the new era, with the Communist Party of China directly responsible for leading all sectors of the country, the fact that the general secretary of the CPC Central Committee himself held the meeting is itself the first important message to the US side.

The readout of the meeting, as reported in China's media, is a fascinating probe of the current way of thinking of China's leaders. Although the top leader is always well prepared for his meetings and speeches, he seemed extraordinarily well prepared for this timely meeting. The structure and specificity of his remarks combined to form the clearest, most incisive, most direct and in-depth expression of his views on China-US relations, and on China's economy.

One can infer two big themes from the meeting: China is committed to seeking improved relations with the US, and China is determined to more comprehensively reform and open up its economy. Although the two themes are hardly new, there was something about the top leader's remarks this time that seemed different, something that signaled intensified commitment.

On US-China relations, his message was unambiguous. The fact that he chose to meet with the China experts and CEOs from the US is a neon-flashing sign that China seeks to stop the cascading slide in relations, stabilize relations, and carefully build relations back up. The top leader placed his trust in the people in general and in people-to-people exchanges in particular, which is a long-standing foundation of his approach to foreign policy, broadly speaking.

Referring to China-US relations, he said: "The future will of course be created by the people." And he expressed the hope that "people from all sectors of Chinese and American societies will have more mutual visits and exchanges".



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

What I found striking was that while calling for cooperation, not confrontation, and mutual respect and win-win results, he acknowledged that "the relationship cannot go back to the old days", a powerful and realistic recognition, which counter-intuitively gives credence to his follow-on exhortation, "but it (China-US relations) can embrace a brighter future". Only an honest assessment of the present can enable a hopeful vision of the future.

What was no surprise was that Xi was optimistic about China's economy — which is the No 1 topic on everyone's mind — by

reminding his listeners that China's growth rate in 2023 was among the highest of the major economies and accounted for more than 30 percent of global growth, much as in previous years. What was somewhat of a surprise was that he told the story of China's economy in the context of two negative "theories": the "China collapse theory" of the past, which of course did not happen, and the "peak China theory" of the present, which he said will not happen.

China, he said, "will continue to advance high-quality development and Chinese modernization, enable the Chinese people

to live a better life, and contribute more to sustainable development in the world". These words were not crafted as smooth talk for the foreign visitors but are the overarching strategic policy of Chinese leaders and the day-to-day operational guidelines of Chinese officials. The new mantra for China's economic growth is "high-quality development", which is driven by "new quality productive forces". Everyone who counts in China gets the message.

On reform and opening-up, his words were weighed judiciously, as they always are. There has been concern among foreign

businesses, and even among some domestic entrepreneurs, that reform and opening-up have stalled. In response, the top leader said "reform and opening-up hold the key to contemporary China's catching up with the times in great strides", and "China's reform will not pause, and its opening-up will not stop", but he has made similar remarks in the past.

That's why I focused on what he said next: "China is planning and implementing a series of major steps for comprehensively deepening reform, and steadily fostering a market-oriented, law-based and world-class business environment." The operative word here is "planning", which means there are new structures, new regulations and/or new measures on the horizon that will be sufficiently different from the present ones, to justify the phrase "major steps for comprehensively deepening reform".

Had he stated only the general principles, his words might not have instilled high confidence. But by putting the world on notice and creating widespread expectations, he has given credence from the top that China is serious about a new round of economic reforms. This is why I expect, and most foreign analysts do not, significant economic reforms, the most in a decade or so.

The proof, of course, will be in the specifics of the plan, and then its real-world implementation. For example, in recent days, the government has been shortening the negative list for foreign investment, and lifting restrictions on market access for foreign investment in manufacturing, while opening up the medical and telecommunications sectors.

Moreover, China's cybersecurity regulator has relaxed restrictions on outbound data flow so foreign businesses operating in China can feel more secure in conducting their normal business.

To me, a major motivating factor for President Xi is that to truly achieve his grand vision for China — "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" — the country must become a world-class business center, and to become that, the country must develop a "market-oriented, law-based and world-class business environment".

Who can deny the world would benefit from stable US-China relations? Who can deny the world would benefit from China's economic growth and development? Both sit on the global center stage in these tense mid-years of the third decade of the 21st century.

The author is chairman of The Kuhn Foundation, and is a winner of the China Reform Friendship Medal. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Ma Yingying

US-EU suppressions of China's EVs defy free-market rules

China's auto industry has developed by leaps and bounds in recent years — in particular, the export of new energy vehicles has shown rapid growth. China exported more than 2 million and 3 million vehicles in 2021 and 2022, up 95.4 percent and 56.7 percent respectively.

In 2023, China even surpassed Japan to become the world's largest automobile exporter, with exports reaching 5.22 million vehicles, a 57.2 percent increase, and the export revenue reaching \$101.61 billion, a 68.9 percent increase. And in the first two months of this year, China's auto exports reached 831,000 vehicles, up 21.8 percent year-on-year.

However, to prevent China from dominating Western markets, the United States and the European Union are trying to restrict China's auto exports by imposing trade protectionist measures. After launching a trade war against China in 2018, the US has imposed high tariffs on Chinese automobiles, restricted government procurements, and introduced discriminatory subsidy policies to suppress and/or weaken China's auto industry.

Now, using national security as a pretext, the US seems intent on building non-tariff barriers to restrict the import of "smart vehicles" and related components from China, and expand the scope to include all third-party Chinese electric vehicles (EVs) and parts.

Moreover, the European Commission, to protect the European Union's EV industry, launched an anti-subsidy investigation into pure EVs imported from China in October 2023 and is considering raising import tariffs.

Behind the continued growth of China's auto exports are multiple factors including advanced technologies, costs, markets and government support. First, China's auto industry continues to improve in technology and production efficiency, with advancements in electrification and intelligence

which will transform into unique advantages. The technological advancements in new energy vehicles, the advantages of industry and supply chains, and innovations and applications in intelligence have strengthened the position of China's auto industry in the global market.

Second, China's auto-manufacturing industry enjoys significant cost advantages. Compared with developed countries, China has relatively low labor and production costs, which allows Chinese auto-makers to sell their products at much lower prices than their Western competitors. The Glory edition of BYD Seagull, for instance, was officially launched with a price of about \$9,700, which is \$5,000 less than the average price of a US-made EV.

Given the increasing frequency of climate change-related disasters such as extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and biodiversity loss, countries across the world have reached a broad consensus of pursuing green and low-carbon development, which has led to an explosive growth in the new energy vehicle market. China's affordable new energy vehicles are selling well not only in the domestic market but also have been welcomed in overseas markets.

Additionally, the Chinese government has been promoting the development of the auto industry,

issuing favorable policies, and supporting automakers, thereby promoting the auto exports.

The efforts of the US and the EU to check the growth of China's auto-manufacturing industry are both unreasonable and counterproductive for their own industrial development. Such US efforts will harm the welfare of their consumers. Chinese-made EVs have become popular in global markets due to their cost-effectiveness. Imposing tariffs on and building non-tariff barriers

against Chinese-made vehicles will limit consumer choice and increase prices, without addressing the major challenges facing their auto industries.

The US and EU efforts will also disrupt and distort the global auto industry supply chains, damaging the economic interests of various countries. The auto industry is highly globalized, with a long supply chain covering multiple countries and regions. So by resorting to protectionist measures, the US and the EU will disrupt the efficient supply chains, which will raise production costs for domestic automakers and lower the demand for products from China and its upstream countries.

Furthermore, market segmentation caused by trade protectionism will undermine the promotion of innovation, harming both domestic and global auto industry development. Competition is a key factor that drives innovation, and by excluding Chinese automobiles from the domestic market, the US and the EU will eliminate competition from the market and weaken the innovation drive. Not to mention that

exclusive and closed markets hinder technology exchange, cross-border cooperation and lower the efficiency levels.

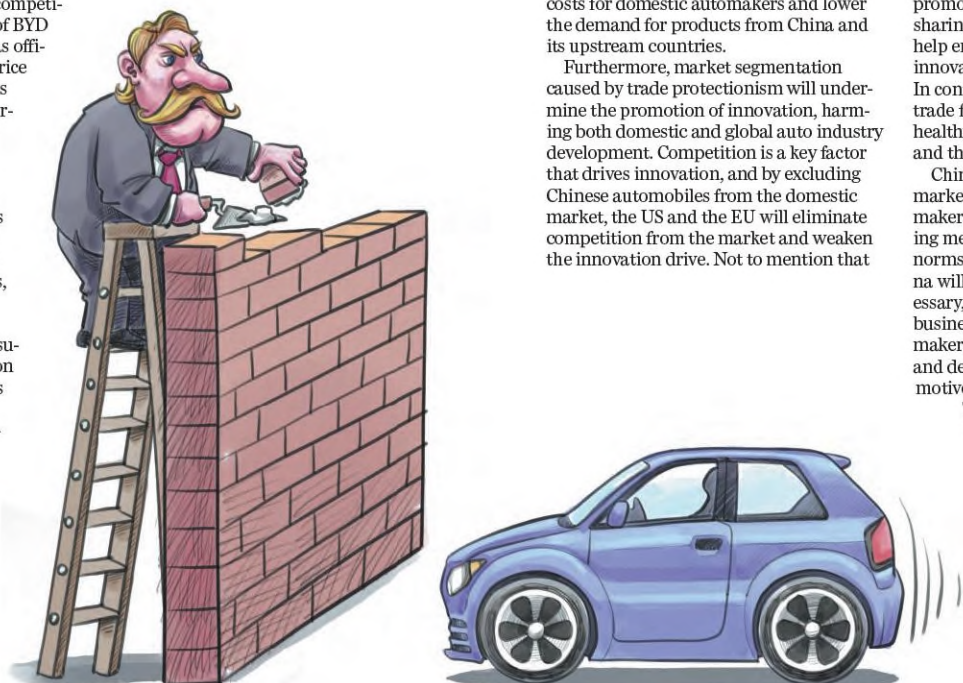
In addition, protectionism goes against the principles of free trade and market economy. In short, it is detrimental to the stability and development of the international trade system.

Faced with the rapid development of China's automotive industry, the US and the EU should adopt an open and cooperative attitude and address the challenges using mutually beneficial means. Cooperation promotes technology exchanges, market sharing and resource integration, and can help enhance the competitiveness and innovation capability of the auto industry. In contrast, protectionism exacerbates trade frictions and is detrimental to the healthy development of the auto industry and the stability of the global economy.

China is one of the world's largest auto markets, and crucial for US and EU automakers. If the US and Europe persist in taking measures that violate market economy norms and fair competition principles, China will take strong countermeasures, if necessary, which will negatively impact the business and profits of US and EU automakers, as well as the research, innovation and development of the US and EU automotive industries.

Through open cooperation, the auto industries of the US, the EU and China can jointly explore new technologies, develop markets, achieve mutual benefit, and propel the global automotive industry toward a more sustainable and innovation-driven direction.

The author is an assistant research fellow at the Institute of World Economics and Politics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL VIEWS

BERNARD DEWIT

Prominent supporter

As the current president of the Council of the European Union, Belgium can play an active role in the development of EU-China relations

It is no secret that the relationship between the European Union and China remains complex and multifaceted. As well as viewing it as a competitor and systemic rival, the EU continues to see China as a partner, and focuses on a de-risking strategy rather than seeking decoupling. It aims to attain strategic independence and greater reciprocity in international relations, holding the belief that trade and investment relations with China are significantly asymmetric. On the other hand, China is seeking to transition away from its traditional economic and social model, and striving for a more balanced path of development. It appears to align with principles of sovereign internationalism and doesn't want to play a zero-sum game, which is a positive sign for a potential rebalancing of EU-China relations.



As one of the world's largest economies and a leading global power, China is a significant economic partner for the EU. With bilateral trade growing rapidly in recent years, it is clear that the EU and China are remaining and will continue to remain important trading partners. They both need each other for different reasons. China needs cooperation with the EU in order to overcome its current economic slowdown, and the EU has a surplus in trade in services and significant foreign direct investment in China, with China also accounting for around 15 percent of the EU's total trade.

The major changes in the world today are accompanied by strong competition in new strategic sectors such as renewable energy and semiconductors. In such a complex, multipolar world, the two major economies should take up a greater role in multilateral coordination.

I believe that promoting greater cooperation would be beneficial for both economies. Both share a common interest in safeguarding free trade and forward-look-

As for the future of Belgium-China relations, I hope that the recent visit of De Croo and Lahbib to China and China's visa exemption for Belgium signify a broader trend of enhanced cooperation and mutual trust in the future. In times of increasing international uncertainties, punitive measures from one or the other side could result in tit-for-tat measures and further calls for decoupling. Let us not focus on economic confrontation, but rather on areas of cooperation and common dialogue.

ing investments in research into future technologies. For instance, there are plenty of possibilities to cooperate in areas such as logistics and biopharma, two strong points of the Belgian economy, as well as to explore new areas for growth in sectors such as renewable energy and the digital economy.

People-to-people contacts are also indispensable in this regard. Belgian universities should be willing to strengthen student exchanges with China, as the young generation can play a crucial role in the future of bilateral relations. With the re-opening of China's borders after the COVID-19 pandemic, travel between the two sides has received a much-needed boost and will enable people to experience each other's culture again.

In this context, the official high-level visit of Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De

Croo and Minister of Foreign Affairs Hadja Lahbib in January 2024 was a positive sign.

Prime Minister De Croo noted that Belgium will continue its candid dialogue with China to deepen common understanding and will push for continuous development of bilateral relations in political, economic and other fields. Belgium will also oppose decoupling of the industry and supply chains and hopes to strengthen personnel and cultural exchanges with China. In this regard, Belgium is willing to play an active role in the development of EU-China relations as the current president of the EU.

As Chairman of the Belgian-Chinese Chamber of Commerce, I welcome China's recent decision to expand its visa-free policy to include Belgium as well. This is one of the positive concrete results that have emerged out of the two top Belgian officials' visit to China.

The visa exemption policy is a great sign for the future positive development of Belgian-Chinese bilateral relations, and could help to foster closer cooperation. It highlights China's confidence and readiness to further open its borders, and will hopefully result in an influx of EU tourists into China and more people-to-people exchanges. These are very important in today's complex geopolitical climate. For the businesspeople here, eliminating visa applications will also simplify undertaking short business trips to China.

On Dec 7, 2023, the 24th EU-China Summit took place in Beijing, where President of the European Council Charles Michel



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and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen met with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang. Some new working groups on common issues of interest such as financial regulation have been created as well.

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ures from one or the other side could result in tit-for-tat measures and further calls for decoupling. Let us not focus on economic confrontation, but rather on areas of cooperation and common dialogue.

The author is chairman of the Belgian-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and senior partner of Dewit Law Office. 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.

YU HONGYUAN AND CHEN HONGYANG

Sino-German green economic cooperation

The two countries should leverage their partnership in global governance to foster multilateral climate financing and expand cooperation in the green industry chain

Upon his arrival in Chongqing on April 14, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz initiated his journey of visiting China, with a particular focus on cooperation in new energy and green supply chain. Scholz highlighted the city's significance as an industrial hub, particularly for automotive industry, fostering crucial economic ties with Germany. As a pioneer of the green economy, Germany



Yu Hongyuan



Chen Hongyang

has dedicated itself to establishing institutional leadership in this domain. It indirectly guides other countries by shaping international systems, rules, norms and standards related to the green economy. Germany spearheaded the creation of the 21st Century Renewable Energy Policy Network to foster a multi-stakeholder participatory model, aiming for innovation thought leadership. It also established the International Renewable Energy Agency, the first international body explicitly committed to promoting renewable energy, and formed the Renewable Energy Club to encourage a green recovery and achieve directional leadership.

Furthermore, Germany has solidified its central leadership position in global renewable energy governance through the founding of the International Clean Energy Conference and the Global Energy Transition Conference, continuously enhancing its institutional leadership.

Despite recent volatility in the international economy and financial markets, compounded by the impacts of the Russia-Ukraine crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, Germany has persistently promoted the development of clean energy, primarily through the European Emissions Trading System.

First, under the Scholz administration, Germany has introduced ambitious green

economy and energy transition policies, accelerating domestic renewable energy development and enhancing bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation on the global stage. This includes launching climate clubs and advancing the Just Energy Transition Partnership.

Second, green economy objectives are driven by the Renewable Energy Act and the Federal Climate Change Act, aiming to achieve an 80 percent renewable energy supply by 2030 and striving for 100 percent by 2035.

Last, Germany has hastened the innovation in green hydrogen technology and bolstered energy security through global hydrogen diplomacy, establishing agreements with Canada, Japan and other nations on hydrogen imports and the construction of stable supply chains. Germany also engages in strategic cooperation on hydrogen energy with Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan.

In the realm of renewable energy systems and equipment, Germany produces a range of products including photovoltaics, wind energy systems, batteries, network components, electrolyzers, large heat pumps and carbon capture utilization/storage facilities, aligning with the Net-Zero Industry Act proposed by the European Commission. In 2021, the German Federal Government advanced the circular economy strategy, differentiating it from other interpretations

These were achieved through the China-EU Leaders' Summit and similar mechanisms.

The German Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action introduced the Sino-German Dialogue and Cooperation Mechanism on Climate Change and Green Transition during the seventh round of Sino-German government consultations co-chaired by Premier Li Qiang and Chancellor Scholz. This mechanism highlights Germany's commitment to eight areas, including industrial decarbonization, energy transition, energy efficiency, circular economy, climate partnerships, greenhouse gas emissions trading, green transportation and sustainable finance.

In June 2023, both countries signed a memorandum of understanding to establish the Dialogue and Cooperation Mechanism on Climate Change and Green Transition as part of their ongoing government consultations on climate objectives. This memorandum underscores a five-year plan involving high-level dialogues, expert exchanges, business representative activities, and demonstration projects.

Investment-wise, German companies have increased their stakes in the Chinese market, particularly in green transportation, where Sino-German cooperation in the automotive industry serves as a model for bilateral relations. This is bolstered by China's burgeoning new energy vehicle market. In terms of resource efficiency, on

Feb 11, 2022, BASF and Heraeus jointly invested 66 million euros (\$70.32 million) in Pinghu city, Zhejiang province, to establish BASF Heraeus (China) Metal Resources Co Ltd, focusing on the recovery of precious metals from waste catalysts to improve resource utilization.

Germany's long-standing cooperation with other countries and international organizations in climate and energy continues, with a focus on advancing technical, financial and investment goals as set at COP28 through multilateral cooperation. Additionally, Germany emphasizes partnerships on climate transition, having implemented financial packages for individual countries with G7 donor support. Multilateral cooperation with financial institutions should be reinforced as needed.

The expansion of Sino-German cooperation could be based on Germany's mature climate club model, which is constructed on three pillars: promoting robust and transparent climate mitigation policies; jointly transforming industries to accelerate decarbonization; and fostering international ambition through partnerships, thus enhancing climate action and promoting justice in energy transition. China remains committed to advancing Sino-German cooperation, emphasizing its significance in areas such as decarbonization, green finance and sustainable financing.

Faced with a substantial global climate finance gap, China and Germany should leverage their partnership in global governance to foster multilateral climate financing and expand cooperation with various international actors in the green industry chain, aiming to enhance Sino-German green cooperation.

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CULTURAL HERITAGE



Editor's note: April 18 is the International Day for Monuments and Sites. To mark the occasion, China Daily's reporters have interviewed those involved with protecting the heritage of ancient civilizations to explore how the sites inspire us today.

Digging up the Buddhist past

Archaeologists unearth intriguing clues hinting at a legacy of architectural achievement, **Wang Ru** reports.

On the wind-swept desert outskirts of Kashgar in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, the remains of two towers have long stood in defiance of the elements. Local residents call them *mo'er*, which means "chimney" in the Uygur language, and regard them as ancient emplacements, but nobody knows for sure what exactly they were.

When Xiao Xiaoyong, an archaeology professor at the Minzu University of China in Beijing visited the site in 2019, he initially thought there might not be any key findings, as he only saw two pagodas and some low mounds with shapes he couldn't exactly describe. But his later work proved that he was wrong.

Several days after they started excavations in 2019, Xiao realized the importance of the site, as they discovered buried walls.

About two weeks later, they began unearthing exquisite Buddhist statues, which shocked not only them, but also the local authorities.

Since then, during the course of four excavations over the past five years, more than 10,000 precious artifacts have been unearthed, including ceramics, wooden pieces, stone, bronze and bone artifacts, the remains of fabric made from silk and hemp, and fragments of statues.

The finds have helped reveal the site's identity. Archaeologists now believe it was a Buddhist temple, first built in the 3rd century and falling into ruin around the 10th century, contemporaneous with the period of the Three Kingdoms (220-280) to the late Tang Dynasty (618-907). They have been able to determine its scope, layout, the types of its main buildings, the format of the site, and the evolution of the complex.

The site lies on an ancient platform of about eight meters in height, to the east of a steep precipice. To date, excavations cover 3,900 square meters.

The two existent structures are a stupa in the center of the site, and a pagoda with a square-shaped base in the northernmost section. Other buildings were once located around them, and were not built at the same time, but gradually formed a large site, Xiao says, adding that the stupa has a typical format that can be traced to Central Asia in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, and what remains of it stands about 12 meters in height.

As one of the site's earliest buildings, the stupa is inferred to be center of the temple, with many other buildings facing toward it.

The pagoda has suffered the ravages of time, making it difficult to judge its original function, but it must have been an important building among the others in the site, since it's larger than the central stupa and had at least five stories, Xiao says.

Between the two there were various structures inferred to have been used by monks. They include buildings featuring a layout of homocentric squares, which was common in



Above and right: A plaster Buddha head and a pottery bottle unearthed from Mo'er Temple Site.

Top: A bird's-eye view of the foundations of the Mo'er Temple Site in Kashgar, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

Above: Specialists work on the site in 2021.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

the Tarim Basin and Central Asia at the time, and others with a format unique to Kashgar. Altogether, more than 40 rooms have been found, Xiao says.

A highlight is a rectangular Tang Dynasty building believed to be a Buddhist temple. It has a central hall, side halls on two sides and a courtyard in front of the central hall.

Xiao says that this format was seldom seen in Central Asia then, but is similar to temples in the Central Plains of China. He believes that it shows the influence of the Buddhism school, which got localized in Central China, in Kashgar at the time.

Historical records show that Empress Wu Zetian, who reigned from 690 to 705, ordered the building of Dayun Buddhist temples across the country, including in Xiyu, or the western regions, a term used to describe today's Xinjiang and Central Asia in ancient times. One such temple was built in ancient Shule (today's Kashgar) and had a Chinese abbot. Archaeologists infer that the rectangular building was possibly a Dayun Temple.

Archaeologists believe the stupa was built first, and then different

kinds of buildings were gradually built to its south, east and north. Finally, the rectangular hall was built during the Tang Dynasty and became the new center of the complex, Xiao says.

"When I imagine the story of Mo'er Temple, I think it was a gradually developing process. Early buildings continued to be restored and used. As a result, it had a strong sense of history in its appearance. At its peak during the Tang Dynasty, the complex reached the scale we see today," he says.

Since most of the buildings were located on the edge of the steep cliff, they presented a spectacular sight. The buildings would have been painted with white lime and when people viewed them from afar, it would have been impressive, he adds.

The temple can be regarded as testimony to the important era when Buddhism spread to Xinjiang, which is often believed to have been during the 1st century BC.

Xiao says that Kashgar was the gateway from China to Central, South and West Asia and an important station on the ancient Silk Road.

"Combining historical records, scholars believe that when Buddhism spread to Xinjiang, the earliest stations were Khotan (today's Hotan) and Shule. ... No later than the early period of the 2nd century, Buddhism from the Gandhara area (in modern-day Pakistan) spread to Kashgar," Xiao says.

From Xinjiang, Buddhism continued to spread to China's central areas, and developed as it came into contact with local cultural traditions, gradually becoming Chinese Buddhism.

As a result, the Mo'er Temple, which was begun in the 3rd century, was one of the earliest Buddhist temples built in Shule.

In his famous book *Datang Xiyu Ji* (Great Tang Records on the Western Regions), Tang Buddhist monk Xuanzang records his journey to India on a mission to obtain Buddhist sutras, and mentions that when he returned, he passed by what is now Kashgar and saw "several hundred Buddhist temples and more than 10,000 monks".

"This means he possibly visited Mo'er Temple, and saw it at its most prosperous," Xiao says.

A lot of sheep, cow and horse

bones have been unearthed as have evidences of a large number of peaches, grapes and apricots, which proves that many people lived there, he adds.

However, the prosperity Xuanzang may have witnessed has eroded with time. During the long passage of time following the monk's visit, people left and buildings collapsed, leaving only the two towers that seemingly defy the wind, their ancient stories untold until recent archaeological efforts.

Studies show that the main buildings were finally destroyed in a fire. The archaeologists infer that they were abandoned in the 10th century, but no evidence of that has been found so far.

Among the large number of artifacts unearthed, there are many fragments of plaster Buddhist statues. The statues combine features of both Chinese and Gandharan Buddhism, Xiao says.

"They have curly hair, very similar to Gandhara Buddhist statues, but their facial expressions are not flinty, like Gandharan style, but are similar to Chinese Buddhist statues," he says.

Moreover, some of the coins found



at the site, like Wuzhu coins, a currency that dates back to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), and Kaiyuan Tongbao, a popular Tang Dynasty coin, come from the Central Plains of China.

"They reflect communication in ancient times and provide material for our studies on the spread of Buddhist art and the evolution of Buddhism," he adds.

Among earthen ruins, the site is relatively well-preserved, according to Zheng Jianzhong, an engineer at the Cultural Heritage Rehabilitation Institute of China Railway Academy in Chengdu, Sichuan province, who was also one of those responsible for restoration at the site between 2020 and 2021.

"Earthen ruins are especially difficult to preserve, but this site has existed for such a long time, and has remains. That's already good preservation," Zheng says.

But it is now threatened by more frequent rain and wind caused by climate change.

"Rainfall has become increasingly frequent in Kashgar in recent years. After a heavy downpour, parts of the remains get swept away, and then wind comes, causing further destruction. Therefore, the site needs urgent protection and restoration," Xiao says.

Zheng says that before restoration, the main problems were that the two towers were unstable and were at risk of collapse. Moreover, problems of drainage had led to erosion, further threatening the structures.

They worked to consolidate the remaining parts, and improved the drainage system. But Zheng points out that these efforts will only prolong their life, not save them, since they are in the open air and exposed to rain and wind.

According to Chen Xingcan, head of the Institute of Archaeology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, since the temple complex was built gradually over a long period, it improves understanding of how Buddhist temples developed in Kashgar, and of China's communication with Central Asia in the past.

"It reflects the pluralistic, integrated pattern and inclusiveness of Chinese civilization," Xiao says.

In recent years, Buddhist archaeology in Xinjiang has undergone remarkable progress, but this site is unique, according to Xiao.

"The site was established early and lasted for centuries before being finally abandoned. Systematically excavating such a temple complex is rare in our archaeological work in Xinjiang," he says.

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Secrets emerge in Northwest China from the mists of time

By WANG RU

A newly excavated site has revealed a graveyard containing the largest number of prehistoric tombs found in Northwest China, and a mysterious culture, experts say.

The Xia'eryamakebu Site in Dulan county, Haixi Mongolian and Tibetan autonomous prefecture, Qinghai province, about 100 kilometers from the well-known Tang Dynasty (618-907) Reshui Graveyard Site, one of China's top 10 archaeological discoveries of 2020, has been identified as the only large-scale Nuomuhong Culture site containing both residential and burial areas ever found, says Du Wei, a researcher with the Qinghai Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology.

Xia'eryamakebu means "the riverbank where gazelle appear" in Mongolian. The excavation was carried out by the institute and Northwest University in Xi'an, Shaanxi prov-

ince, between 2021 and 2023. Located in the Qaidam Basin on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, the site occupies an area of nearly 250,000 square meters and dates to around 3,500 to 3,000 years ago, contemporaneous with the middle and late periods of the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC). The Hatu River runs through the site and divides it into two halves, north and south of the river respectively.

The north part comprises a large cemetery, while its counterpart in the south is a residential area with two smaller cemeteries.

Altogether, 3,228 tombs have been discovered in the three cemeteries, making this the best-preserved and largest prehistoric graveyard found in Northwest China to date. The scale is also rare in contemporaneous sites in the Central Plains, says Du, who is also head of the archaeological project.

The tombs show evidence of a spe-

cial burial custom. They were reopened years later, the remains disturbed, and then reburied.

They show differences in level, since some are large and contain many funerary objects, while others are smaller and contain fewer objects. This is evidence of social differentiation in the Qaidam Basin, an indicator of civilization, Du says.

A great number of artifacts combining multiple cultural elements have been unearthed, including pottery, bronze, jade, stone, bark and wooden artifacts, animal and plant remains. For example, millet, painted pottery and lacquer ware, probably from the Central Plains and North China have been found, as well as bronze pole head decorations in the styles that were widely seen across the Eurasian grassland, and carnelian beads similar to those from South Asia.

"It shows how early people moved to the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and the



Pottery vessels unearthed from tombs at the Xia'eryamakebu Site in Dulan county, Qinghai province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

process of communication and integration among multiple ethnic groups," Du says.

Nuomuhong Culture was discovered when archaeologists excavated the Talitaliha Site in Dulan in 1959, and found evidence of a Bronze Age

culture in what is now central Qinghai. Further study of the cultural type almost ceased afterward due to the lack of new archaeological evidence.

The Xia'eryamakebu Site fills in this gap, and Du says the artifacts found so far are believed to enrich the

"panoramic understanding of the time, settlement features, economic forms, handicrafts and human structures of Nuomuhong Culture".

They have also made clear the evolution and layout of the settlement part of the site, and bear witness to an uninterrupted history spanning 500 years, Du says.

"It's rare to find such a large group of tombs on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau," says Huo Wei, an archaeology professor at Sichuan University. "It proves the long history of the Qaidam Basin and enriches our understanding of the civilizational history of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau."

Chen Xingcan, head of the Institute of Archaeology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, says with its large number of bronze artifacts, well-built and well-preserved tombs, the site changes archaeological ideas about the social development of the northern area of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

CULTURAL HERITAGE



Sculpting a civilization

Intricately crafted jadeware, dating back four millennia, helped carve out a blueprint for China's earliest societies, **Deng Zhangyu and Zhou Lihua** report in Wuhan.



From top left: A bird's-eye view of the Panlongcheng Site Museum at Wuhan, Hubei province. A jade phoenix is being fixed for show. **Middle:** Jade artifacts from Shijiahe culture on display at the museum represent the highest level of jade craftsmanship of its time, displaying exquisite skills, and imaginative designs. The prehistoric culture dates back to 5,900 to 3,800 years ago. **Right:** The exhibition displays 172 sets of jade pieces and related cultural relics loaned from 21 key museums and cultural institutions across China.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



of a higher level. They are divine and sacred, having the power to communicate with deities," says Cheng, the show's curator.

Deity portraits and figurines are also common subjects in Shijiahe jade culture. The jade figurines were regarded as images of the ancient people's ancestors. There were jade pieces featuring two deities' faces connecting with each other, a deity's face with the body of a snake, and a deity's face with two eagles standing on its head.

"Shijiahe people used their creativity and bold imagination to show their worship and respect for nature, their deities and their forefathers," says Cheng.

In addition to their creative designs, the craftsmen's skills were also highly sophisticated. All of these jade pieces are very small, just several centimeters in length, with some being similar in size to a fingernail.

According to the curator, the most challenging aspect of curating the show is figuring out how to ensure that audiences can clearly see these small artifacts within a large exhibition space. Magnifying glasses are placed near some exhibits, and some patterns have been pictured, enlarged and mounted on the walls.

To allow visitors to view the reverse side of certain jade objects, the exhibits are arranged at an angle. Upon closer inspection, visitors can discern that the intricate lines were not merely drawn, but meticulously sculpted and carved.

"We don't know how the Neolithic people made these exquisite jade items in such a small size. They're so marvelous," says Cheng. This exhibition is the first dedi-

cated showcase of jade artifacts from the Shijiahe culture, which boasts an enduring culture spanning around 2,000 years. The Shijiahe site in Tianmen is recognized as one of the largest cities of its time in the country, with the greatest number of surrounding settlement clusters in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River during the late Neolithic period.

To date, only several hundred jade objects of Shijiahe culture have been unearthed, and are scattered among the collections of various museums across the nation. Some cultural institutions possess only two or three pieces, and have loaned them out to support the exhibition.

"We are really thankful to those institutions for supporting us. We all know it's an important and challenging exhibition. Visitors will be able to understand the unity of Chinese civilization through the development of its jade culture during that prehistoric period," says Wan.

In recent years, the Panlongcheng Site Museum in Wuhan has been devoted to presenting high-quality exhibitions to the public. These carefully curated exhibitions are ticketed at 30 yuan (\$4), setting them apart from the permanent free displays available to the public. Most of China's museums charge no fee for entry. Since the museum opened to the public in 2019, it has held two such dedicated exhibitions every year.

"We are aiming to cultivate niche markets and audiences, particularly those who have a deep understanding of culture and archaeology. These discerning individuals are the targeted audience for these high-quality exhibitions, which focus on illustrating the stories behind these relics," explains Wan.

The museum is located at the Panlongcheng site, where excavation is still ongoing and many of its team members are young archaeologists who have great passion for their career.

"Our team will keep presenting shows focusing on the culture in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River," says Wan.

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About 4,000 years ago, during the late Neolithic period, a group of people sculpted vivid animals, sophisticated portraits of deities, figurines and divine birds — all from pieces of jade as tiny as a fingernail.

How these prehistoric people produced such intricate jadeware at a time when tools were mostly made from stone is not yet known, but the jade culture of the time reveals not only the highest levels of craftsmanship, but also the development of a glamorous civilization in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River.

The ongoing exhibition, *Mythological Jade of Shijiahe Culture*, at Panlongcheng Site Museum in Wuhan, central China's Hubei province, offers visitors a rare chance to get a close and full view of jade pieces from a prehistoric civilization that lived around from 5,900 to 3,800 years ago.

On display are 172 sets of jade artifacts and related cultural relics loaned from 21 key museums and cultural institutions across the nation. While the jade pieces are mainly those unearthed at the Shijiahe site in Tianmen, Hubei province, the exhibition also presents relics from southwest China's Sanxingdui culture, east China's Liangzhu culture and Longshan culture from the Yellow River.

"In China, jade pieces have been discovered among the remains of many Neolithic cultures, but only those found in Shijiahe culture had a far-reaching influence on the cultures that followed," says Cheng Mingqian, curator of the exhibition. "The patterns from Shijiahe culture have been found on artifacts made from stone, bronze and jade in other ancient cultures."

The exhibition consists of three parts: various types of jadeware from Shijiahe culture, the exquisite craftsmanship and advanced techniques of jade making, and the influence of Shijiahe jade culture on others.

In the third section, jade figurines and the faces of deities are juxtaposed with bronze figurines from Sanxingdui culture in Guanghan, Sichuan province, a civilization known for its enigmatic bronzes. Both the jade and bronze figurines share some similarities: they all

have bulging eyes and big ears, which means they could see and hear over a long distance, representing a kind of superpower, says Fang Qin, director of the Hubei Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology.

"The bulging eyes and big ears are how prehistoric people imagined their deities and ancestors. The artifacts are believed to have been used in ritual ceremonies to communicate with the gods," adds Fang, who has been conducting archaeological research on Shijiahe culture for decades.

As well as almost identical facial features, their hairstyles and crowns also bear a similarity to each other. The patterns from Shijiahe culture have also been widely found in other prehistoric cultures and subsequent dynasties, which illustrates the diversified unity of Chinese civilization, according to Wan Ling, director of Panlongcheng Site Museum.

Jade artifacts excavated at the Panlongcheng site, where an ancient city of the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC) existed, also exhibit similarities to those found at Shijiahe.

Wan says that it vividly narrates the cultural interaction and integration among the late Neolithic cultures in various parts of China through the medium of jade.

Many of the jade pieces on display were discovered in the tombs of high-ranking members of society at the time, such as tribal leaders, rulers and military officials, demonstrating the social status of the tombs' owners. Many of them were skillfully sculpted into shapes of animals, such as tigers, eagles, cicadas, phoenixes and dragons.

Jade cicadas were numerous, as they represented the afterlife, and were particularly prevalent at Shijiahe.

Images of the phoenix were also popular motifs on Shijiahe jade-ware.

One of the stars of the exhibition is a vivid "circular" jade phoenix loaned from the National Museum of China. With its highly stylized design, it is known as "China's first phoenix".

"For Shijiahe people, birds are of a higher rank than cicadas, a symbol

3D rendering brings lowly Qin-era legal worker to life

By DENG ZHANGYU

What did a grassroots official living more than 2,000 years ago look like?

A recent study unveiled by the Hubei Provincial Museum released the 3D reconstruction of the owner of a Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) tomb unearthed at Shuihudi village, Yumeng county in Central China's Hubei province. He is known as "Xi" according to the bamboo slips unearthed from the tomb. The reconstruction provides the vivid image of a diligent low-ranking official: handsome, well-proportioned, and showing signs of his "professionalism".

Since 2019, the Hubei Provincial Museum, together with the Hubei Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology and the School of Archaeology at Jilin University,

has conducted comprehensive studies on the bones of the official, whose skeletal remains are well-preserved.

Wang Xianfu, deputy director of the Hubei Provincial Museum, says that the official's height is estimated to have been 161.5 centimeters and his body weight around 59.9 kilograms. He was 46 years old when he died.

"He had uneven shoulders, suffered from spondylosis, and the frequent kneeling and sitting caused damage to his lower limbs, all of which are related to his long-term engagement in historical and literary documentation and 'desk work'," said Wang at a news conference held at the end of March in Wuhan, Hubei province.

The low-ranking official is the owner of tomb No 11 at Shuihudi, Yumeng county, where dozens of

Qin era and Han (206 BC-AD 220) Dynasty tombs have been discovered over the past 50 years.

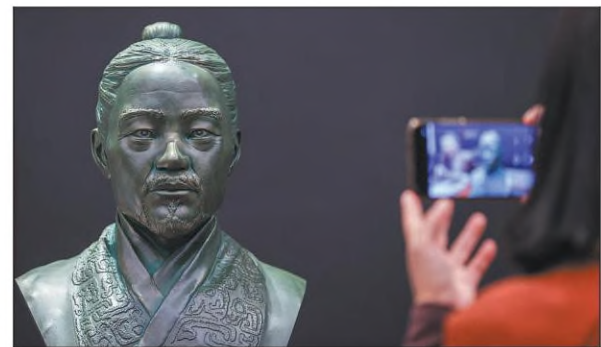
When the tomb was discovered in 1975, a total of 1,155 bamboo slips recording the legal system, grassroots governance and medical work of that time were unearthed. These bamboo slips contain about 40,000 characters and were transcribed by the ancient official during his lifetime. It marked the first discovery of the Qin Dynasty laws and systems, and was later selected as one of China's "Top 100 Archaeological Discoveries of the Century".

Through the bamboo slips, regulations protecting the environment and consumers' rights dating back 2,000 years were unveiled to the world, such as trees not allowed to be cut down in spring and a requirement that goods for sale should be clearly priced.

Apart from laws, the legal official had recorded his own daily life and major events from 306 BC to 217 BC, shortly after China's first emperor Qinshihuang unified the whole country.

From his own records, the official was born in 262 BC and began working for the government at the age of 19. When he was 28, he became a legal worker for a prison. He went to war three times and died at 46. The "occupational diseases" he developed, as the results of physical anthropology showed, are consistent, says Yang Lisheng, director of the academic and research center of the Hubei Provincial Museum.

"National and family affairs are meticulously recorded by the official in the form of chronicles. The stories of these 'ordinary people' are often absent from historical records, yet they can reveal the grand and



The 3D reconstruction of the owner of a Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) tomb unearthed at Shuihudi village, Hubei province, is displayed at a news conference in the province's capital Wuhan in late March. ZHANG CHANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

tumultuous history behind them," Yang adds.

He says that his team expects to present the living conditions of a grassroots figure from history through the 3D reconstruction to

outline a crucial aspect of the history of the Qin Dynasty.

Yang says that the 3D image of the legal worker will be shown to the public later this year at the Hubei Provincial Museum.

LIFE



Hong Kong singer-songwriter Ivana Wong raises the curtain of the 10th Beijing International Pop Music Festival with two solo concerts on April 11 and 12. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Pop goes the theater

Festival gives the mainstream music genre an unconventional home in venues in Beijing that typically host plays rather than concerts, **Xing Wen** reports.

It's universally agreed upon that performing in front of audiences and critics is the ultimate test of ability and courage for a stage actor. But for veteran music producer Jiang Tao, singing in a theater with a superior sound system and fostering closer interaction between audiences and performers also serves as a touchstone for a talented singer. That's why he has run the annual Beijing International Pop Music Festival, which offers pop musicians opportunities to perform in theaters, since 2015.

Singer-songwriters Jeremy Zhang, Zhang Qiang and Jin Wenqi, as well as the bands Wild Children, New Pants and Sir Deer, are among the artists who have been invited by the festival over the past 10 years.

Jiang is one of the festival's initiators and is now the secretary-general of its organizing committee.

"Compared to stadiums and arenas where concerts are frequently held, theaters enable the audience to perceive the performers' nuances more distinctly. And because they have superior sound systems, theaters also enable artists to better showcase their skills," he explains.

He says lively and bustling outdoor music festivals typically prioritize the interactions between performers and crowds. In contrast, within a theater setting, audiences tend to quietly appreciate performances with less interaction.

"This scenario presents artists with a greater challenge: how to properly handle the atmosphere in a theater filled with thousands of people."

Jiang recalls singer-songwriter Lao Lang's solo concert, which was held as part of the first Beijing International Pop Music Festival in December 2015 at the Beijing Poly Theatre.

"As the concert progressed into its final third, the audience began to stand up. However, their reaction wasn't the chaotic frenzy seen in rock concerts, where people jump onto chairs. This warm and orderly atmosphere made me feel particularly good. It fulfilled my ideal image of pop performances in theaters," Jiang recalls.

This year marks the festival's 10th anniversary. It has already transitioned from a weeklong event to a year-round affair, featuring a range of activities, including pop music shows in theaters and livehouses, pop industry



Clockwise from top left: Veteran artist Gong Linna performing at the annual Beijing International Pop Music Festival last year; Japanese musician Shinji Tanimura singing at the festival in 2018; Greek American musician Yanni plays keyboard at the festival in 2019; and Jiang Tao, a veteran music producer who is also secretary-general of the festival's organizing committee, poses with Wong at an event.

forums, exhibitions and salons.

The opening performance of this year's festival took place on April 11 and 12 at Beijing's MAO Livehouse, and featured Hong Kong singer-songwriter Ivana Wong.

It was Wong's first time to perform at the festival.

Wong said before the concerts that during the event, she would perform work from different periods of her career, sharing with everyone the changes she has undergone as a music maker from the beginning until now.

She also expressed her delight at the opportunity to perform in Beijing.

"I feel that Beijing is a city rich in traditional culture and modern vigor. Such a contrast is very interesting. Similarly, making music requires innovation while preserving some traditions," she said.

Jiang, who has been involved in the pop industry for nearly three decades, emphasizes that

as a national cultural center, Beijing has always played a significant role in the growth of pop music culture in China.

"Due to the cultural atmosphere of this city, lyrics by pop musicians who live in Beijing have tended to explore themes beyond just love. They often delve into contemplations on life from a humanistic perspective, and exhibit depth and literary qualities," he says.

Jiang also hopes that the Beijing International Pop Music Festival can help promote the capital's musical exchanges with foreign countries.

The festival has previously invited foreign artists such as Japanese director Shunji Iwai and his group Hec&Pascal, Greek American musician Yanni, Swedish guitarist Yngwie Malmsteen, Singaporean singer-songwriter Yida Huang and Croatian pianist Maksim Mrvica to perform in Beijing.

Jiang shares his observations of the past decade of live pop music

performances in China.

He says there is a growing enthusiasm for live shows but expresses concern over the homogeneity and lack of innovation in music festivals.

"Many new bands and singers who are entering the market through short-video platforms, online talent shows and gigs at livehouses have not yet reached the required level of professionalism," he says.

Despite this, Jiang, who has been involved in pop music production and music event planning for a long time, remains optimistic about the future of China's pop music.

"I've noticed that many teenagers are excellent at playing musical instruments," he says. "The future looks promising, given the continued involvement of a new generation of young pop musicians."

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Left: Taiwan singer-actor Nicky Wu joins the outdoor reality show, *This Is My Island*. Right: Pop idol Liu Yaowen, 18, looks for food during the show on a deserted island in Hainan province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A cast of castaways' celeb island intrigue

By XING WEN

The Chinese term *chuang hai*, which directly translates as "venturing across the sea", evokes a grand narrative of daring migration, particularly in the late 1980s in China.

When Hainan Island in South China formally became a province, around 100,000 people from all corners of the country, driven by aspirations for a better life, crossed the Qiongzhou Strait and flowed onto this island teeming with promise and opportunity.

These pioneering venturers paved the way for Hainan's transformation from a remote island to an international tourist destination over the past three and a half decades.

Their audacious spirit of exploration and resilience laid the foundation for the island's development trajectory.

A new reality show set in Hainan channels the indomitable spirit of *chuang hai*, highlighting its enduring relevance and resonance in today's context.

This Is My Island aims to reignite this spirit of daring exploration and resilience by tasking a group of celebrities with building an experimental home from scratch on a secluded island in Hainan province.

The program has invited participants from different age groups, including 56-year-old singer Cai Guoqing, 37-year-old anchorman Yang Di, 33-year-old actor Hou Wenyuan and the seven members of the boy group, Teens in Times. Tasked with the challenge of self-sufficiency, despite scarce resources, they are required to embark on a journey of exploration, and coexist with one another in the wilderness.

The show's chief producer, Gu Chaofeng, emphasizes that regardless of age, individuals should not fear challenges and should dare to step out of their comfort zones to challenge themselves. In this program, every participant bravely does exactly that.

"We want to convey the spirit of *chuang hai* and allow more young people to understand that period of history and practice this pioneering spirit in their lives," he adds.

He stresses it's not solely a hardcore wilderness-survival reality show but rather an enriching island exploration program.

Apart from constructing shelters and searching for food on a deserted island, participants engage in boatbuilding competitions using materials found on the island. They also undergo military training, underscoring the importance of the navy, and even organize a sunset concert on the island.

The show is filmed on Shenzhou Peninsula in the southeastern part of Hainan province.

"I find Shenzhou Peninsula to be a particularly fascinating place," Gu says. "It's half developed and half undeveloped. It transitions from bustling tourism resorts to desolate islands and unexplored sea areas by just climbing over a mountain. It's a perfect place to film this show."

The production team has also partnered with Chinese National Geography magazine, which brings in experts to provide useful knowledge on wilderness survival, geography and botany during the program. The experts include Zhou Weiqiang, a wilderness adventurer who is often hailed as China's Bear Grylls, and nature photographer and plant enthusiast Zhong Xin.

In the first episode, which premiered on Friday on the video-streaming platform Youku, the participants divided into groups and built shelters on the island using materials such as wood and palm leaves.

The aforementioned experts then provided constructive advice for improving the shelters, enhancing their ability to withstand rain, retain heat and repel insects.

In addition, the participants made water-filtration devices using sand, charcoal and pebbles.

They also demonstrated ingenuity by using foil from chewing gum wrappers to connect the terminals of batteries, creating a short circuit to generate enough heat to ignite the foil and successfully start a fire.

"The most enjoyable aspect of participating in outdoor programs is that each experience is unique, and you must face many uncertainties," says 53-year-old Taiwan singer-actor Nicky Wu, who is one of the show's participants.

"When there is sunshine, perhaps we can use a mirror to start a fire, but on rainy days, all the wood might be damp, and just starting a fire can drive us crazy. However, these are all precious life experiences."

Yang adds that the experiences are teaching him to not take everything he normally has in daily life for granted.

As the eldest participant, Cai says the show has given him a newfound respect for young people.

"The seven members from Teens in Times, all of whom were born after 2000, grew up in the country's most affluent era. I thought they might be accustomed to comfort and averse to hardship, but they handled dirty and tiring work without complaint," he says.

"I believe that seeing us start from scratch in such an environment will provide inspiration to more young people."

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Left: Actor Hou Wenyuan, 33, tries to set up a shelter on the beach during the reality show. Right: Pop idol Ma Jiaqi, 21, scours for materials that might be useful.