

WORLD USA

Reaction to US' \$95 billion more in foreign military aid

PAGE 5



PBOC likely to increase trading of gov't bonds

BUSINESS, PAGE 14



History back in homes

Restoration combines traditions, modernity for Fujian neighborhood

CITY TALES, PAGES 8-9

# CHINA DAILY

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Crew members of the Shenzhou XVIII mission — Ye Guangfu (center), Li Cong (right) and Li Guangsu — meet the media on Wednesday at a news conference at the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center. WANG JIANGBO / FOR CHINA DAILY See more, page 3

## Shenzhou XVIII's astronauts set for launch

By CUI JIA at Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center cuijia@chinadaily.com.cn

The three post-1980 generation crew members of the Shenzhou XVIII mission said on Wednesday that their similar professional backgrounds and mutual trust will help them complete all the objectives set for the mission.

The Long March 2F rocket carrying the astronauts aboard the Shenzhou XVIII spacecraft is set to be launched at the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in Northwest China at 8:59 pm on Thursday, Lin Xiqiang, deputy director of the China Manned Space Agency and spokesman for the mission, said during a news conference on Wednesday at the launch center.

The crew members are Senior Colonel Ye Guangfu, who is the mission commander, Colonel Li Cong and Colonel Li Guangsu. Ye was also a crew member of the Shenzhou XIII mission that returned in April 2022, while Li Cong and Li Guangsu will be making their first space flight.

Ye, 43, said that unlike his first

To ensure the smooth running of the space station with complicated operation systems, all the operations must be precise, and the mutual trust of the crew members is required."

Li Cong, a crew member of the Shenzhou XVIII mission

mission, which was full of excitement because it fulfilled his dream of becoming an astronaut, this trip will require him to bear greater responsibility as mission commander.

Nonetheless, Ye said while meeting the media at the launch center on Wednesday, "Every mission to space is a new start."

He added that "besides recovering, I also had to return to training in the past two years. And the structure of the space station is new to me and more complicated to operate. Also, leading a team is another new challenge".

All of the crew members were trained as pilots in the People's Liberation Army and share other similarities in age and experience, said Li Cong, who is 34.

"To ensure the smooth running of the space station with complicated operation systems, all the operations must be precise, and the mutual trust of the crew members is required," he said.

Li Guangsu, who is 36, will be responsible for conducting experiments in space. He said he is looking forward to experiencing life in weightless conditions.

"Besides work, I also want to take a good look at the beautiful blue planet and our country. Furthermore, I want to see if the stars do twinkle, for my child," he added.

Lin, the China Manned Space Agency deputy director, said the main objectives set for the mission

include the handover of the space station from the Shenzhou XVII crew and carrying out a series of experiments and missions during the new crew's six-month stay.

According to the plan, the Shenzhou XVIII crew members will return to the Dongfeng landing site in late October.

During the mission, the country's first in-orbit aquatic ecological research project will be carried out. Using goldfish and zebrafish to establish a self-cycling aquatic ecosystem in orbit, the aim of the project is to make a breakthrough in the cultivation of vertebrates in space, Lin said.

Cang Huaixing, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Technology and Engineering Center for Space Utilization, said the experiment could help people build aquatic ecosystems and food-producing systems in space in the future.

Besides continuing to recruit and train Chinese astronauts for upcoming space and lunar missions, China will also promote the participation of foreign astronauts

See Mission, page 3

## Chongqing urged to boost modernization

President says work of Party, government aimed to ensure people live a happier life

By MO JINGXI mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping has called on Chongqing, China's largest municipality in terms of both land area and population, to bear in mind the principle that cities should be built by the people and for the people, and to actively explore new ways for the modernization of governance in super-large cities.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks during a three-day inspection tour of the municipality that started on Monday.

The trip, his third to the city since the 18th National Congress of the CPC in 2012, took him to a logistics park, a renovated urban residential compound and a digital urban operation and governance center, among others.

While visiting a community in Jiulongpo district on Monday, Xi said that the renovation of old urban residential communities is among the priorities of the country's urban renewal efforts and also a livelihood project. The renovation must preserve historical memory and distinctive features while addressing the real concerns of residents, he said, urging efforts to summarize the good practices that can be applied.

The community was originally built between the 1950s and the 1990s and has 55 buildings. In early 2022, a project was launched to renovate houses covering 110,000 square meters and demolish over 40,000 sq m of dilapidated residences.

Before he left, Xi told the residents who gathered to bid fare-

well to him that the people's well-being is of the utmost importance in Chinese modernization, and all the work of the Party and the government is intended to ensure that the people live a happier life.

After hearing work reports on Wednesday from senior officials of the CPC Chongqing Municipal Committee and the municipal government, Xi urged Chongqing to accelerate its pace of building a smart city, build an intelligent center for urban operation and governance, and refine its mechanisms and systems to make urban governance more intelligent, efficient and precise.

He also stressed the need to vigorously promote integrated urban-rural development in Chongqing, where urban, rural, mountainous and reservoir areas coexist and there are gaps among them in terms of development.

As China is advancing high-quality development, Xi called on Chongqing to further deepen reform and opening-up across the board and make its own contribution to advancing Chinese modernization.

Noting Chongqing's role as a key strategic fulcrum for the development of China's western region in the new era, Xi said the municipality should play a bigger role in promoting the interconnected development of the Belt and Road Initiative, the Yangtze River Economic Belt and the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor in the western region.

He also urged the city to promote alignment with high-standard international economic and trade rules and foster a world-class business environment that is market-oriented, law-based and internationalized.

## CHINA'S INDUSTRIAL ROBOT MAKERS GEARING UP FOR GLOBAL EXPANSION

With major advances at home, manufacturers look to build on strengths, innovation

By WANG KEJU in Beijing and WU YONG in Shenyang



In the Singapore factory of electrical goods manufacturer Dyson, the air is devoid of human chatter, replaced instead by the rhythmic hum of cutting, conveyor belts, and the pulsating throb of machinery. Operators and engineers occasionally oversee the production process as more than 300 industrial robots transform raw materials into motors for Dyson vacuum cleaners.

In China, fostering new quality productive forces has become a key objective under the umbrella of the Industry 4.0 plan, and industrial robots that balance stability and flexibility are crucial to the strategy.

In 2022, China's industrial robot installations accounted for over 50

percent of the global total, with the nation emerging as a powerhouse in the realm of automation. China's manufacturing sector boasts a robot density of 392 units per 10,000 workers, the latest data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology showed.

In the past decade, domestically produced robots have found applications in nearly half of the country's key economic sectors. By 2025, China is aiming to double the 2020 density level of industrial robots in the manufacturing sector, the ministry said.

See Robots, page 2

## The century of humiliation won't be repeated over TikTok

On Tuesday, the US Senate passed a legislation that would ban popular short video app TikTok, the most downloaded social media platform on the planet, in the United States unless the app's Chinese owner ByteDance sells it within a year. The legislation was included as part of a larger \$95 billion package that provides foreign aid to Ukraine and Israel, among others, which was passed in the US House of Representatives over the weekend. The package will become law once US President Joe Biden signs it, which he said he would.

The bill originated from Representative Mike Gallagher, who along with many others, pushed the false assumption that the app is controlled by China's government and subsequently pushed a bill demanding it be sold at gunpoint in order to continue to operate in the US, where it has 170 million users. With a Senate vote likely to follow, Biden stated he would support the bill. However, legal experts earlier told the mainstream media they do not believe such a bill will survive a legal challenge because of

WORLD WATCH By Tom Fowdy

the implications it has for the First Amendment.

The idea that the US believes it has a right to extort a company into selling a hugely successful operation is an act of extreme arrogance, entitlement, and unbridled callousness. Not only does it illustrate the absurd levels of irrational paranoia and McCarthyism that have gripped Washington DC, but also the total lack of respect it has for China and its people. Using the auspices of the Communist Party of China as a justifying premise for anything in the country they do not like, these kinds of politicians believe they have a right to undermine, trample upon and diminish anything China has produced which is equal to or better than what is produced in the US, showing the country's hegemonic mindset.

See Coercion, page 3



A TikTok content creator sits outside the United States Capitol in Washington, DC, on Tuesday. US senators cleared a legislation that would force TikTok's China-based parent company to sell the social media platform within a year or face a ban in the US. MARIAM ZUHAIB / AP See story, page 5

INSIDE Progressive change Global Views, page 13

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## PAGE TWO

From page 1

The sector's robot density in 2020 was 246 units per 10,000 workers.

Industrial robots now play a crucial role on production lines in industries such as automotive, electronics, food, and pharmaceuticals. By improving production efficiency and precision, industrial robots help enterprises lower costs and elevate their competitiveness, said Song Xiaogang, executive director of the China Robot Industry Alliance.

China's manufacturing sector is characterized by its vast scale and wide variety of categories, yet its level of automation still has room for improvement. This presents significant potential for the expansion of applications for domestically produced industrial robots, which are technologically advanced and cost-effective, Song said.

The industrial robot market in China experienced steady growth in 2023, with sales reaching 316,000 units, representing a year-on-year increase of 4.29 percent, according to a report released by the Gaogong Industry Research Institute.

**Domestic strengths**

A notable shift in market share between domestic and foreign manufacturers was seen last year. For the first time, domestically produced industrial robots accounted for more than half of the market share at 52.45 percent, according to the report.

Though China has solidified its position as the world's largest industrial robotics market, the country started out by focusing on bridging the gap with established players such as Japan, Germany, and the United States.

Siasun Robot & Automation Co was one of the first domestic enterprises to delve into research and application of robotics, and broke the long-standing market and technological barriers imposed by foreign products. As early as 2000, their robots were being used in construction machinery and motorcycle manufacturing.

With breakthroughs in multiple core technologies such as force sensors and offline programming, the company's industrial robotics has been widely applied in industries such as electronics, aerospace and engineering machinery. Siasun has also been involved in major national projects like the cross-sea highway project between Shenzhen and Zhongshan in Guangdong province, and the Gezhouba Dam hydropower project on the Yangtze River.

"The advancements have transformed China's industrial robotics landscape, reducing its reliance on imported technologies," said Zhang Jin, president of Siasun, which is located in Shenyang, Liaoning province.

However, despite these advances, international robotics giants such as Fanuc, ABB, Kuka, and Yaskawa, still have a large slice of the domestic market. This is particularly evident in the high-end segment of the market, where domestic industrial robots face strong competition.

The global automotive industry, for instance, which accounts for nearly half of the demand for industrial robots, poses significant challenges for Chinese companies seeking to gain a foothold. Established foreign manufacturers cur-



“The advancements have transformed China's industrial robotics landscape, reducing its reliance on imported technologies.”

Zhang Jin, president of Siasun Robot & Automation Co in Shenyang, Liaoning province

An industrial robot made by Siasun Robot & Automation Co in Shenyang, Liaoning province. REN PENGFEI / XINHUA

## One small step for humanoids, a giant step for industry

By WANG KEJU

A recent video showcasing a humanoid robot working in a factory has set the internet abuzz with excitement. The robot effortlessly inspected car door locks, tested seat belts, examined headlamp covers, and even affixed car emblems, blurring the boundaries of what humans and machines can do.

The robot, Walker S produced by Chinese AI and humanoid robotics company UBTECH Robotics, offers a glimpse into a future where humanoid robots could be seamlessly integrated into various industries.

The Chinese humanoid robot market is expected to reach 27.6 billion yuan (\$3.81 billion) in 2024, and by 2029, it is projected to surge to 75 billion yuan, capturing an impressive 32.7 percent share of the global market, according to a report jointly released by leaderobot.com and UBTECH Robotics in April.

Chinese-made humanoid robots have progressed from early exploratory stages, where they had simple locomotion in legs and arms, to advanced phases where they incorporate artificial intelligence, machine learning, and computer vision systems to develop rudimentary perception abilities, the report added.

A separate report by the Research Institute of the People's Daily Online showed that as of May last year, China had emerged as the global leader in both patent filings and valid patents for humanoid robot technology standing at 6,618 and 3,110, respectively, while global patent applications surpassed 15,000.

The development of AI, coupled with the power of large-scale models, has propelled humanoid robots toward greater intelligence, enabling them to tackle a wider range of real-world problems, said Xiong Youjun, chief technical officer of UBTECH.

These advances have paved the way for more natural human-robot interactions, streamlined motion planning, and increased research and development efficiency in the field of humanoid robotics, Xiong said.

In the years ahead, humanoid robots will find major applications in industrial manufacturing, commercial services, and household companionship, Xiong said.

While China has made notable

strides in the field of humanoid robotics, there are certain areas that need improvement.

Disparities still exist in critical components, operating systems, complete robot products, and the overall industry ecosystem. The need to catch up in software development has also been recognized, said Liu Yu, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Automation.

Developing humanoid robots that can adapt to human living environments poses significant challenges, with high demands for motion capability, environmental perception, decision-making, and more. These requirements contribute to increased hardware costs, said Zhang Jin, president of Siasun Robot & Automation Co.

The complexity of humanoid robot technology, coupled with the need to cater to multiple human needs, also further drives up development costs and extends the research and development cycle, Zhang said.

Unlike industrial robots that typically have six or seven joints, humanoid robots often require more than 40 joints to replicate human-like movements. This large number of joints adds to the mechanical complexity and hardware costs, Zhang said, calling for greater government support to enable the long-term growth of the industry.

After guidelines on innovative development of humanoid robotics were issued by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology in October last year, several major cities in China, including Beijing and Shanghai, have rolled out supportive policies to foster the growth of the sector.

Beijing, as a front-runner in technological innovation, has established a 10 billion yuan fund dedicated to the development of the humanoid robotics industry. Meanwhile, Shanghai intends to construct a synergistic innovation platform that combines large-scale models with humanoid robots.

By 2025, China envisions the preliminary establishment of an innovative humanoid robotics system to facilitate mass production. China has set its sights on achieving comprehensive capabilities in humanoid robotics by 2027 that are on par with the world's most advanced nations, according to the guideline.

# Robots: Production efficiency, precision being improved

rently dominate the industry, making it a daunting task for Chinese companies to carve out a space for themselves, said Yi Mingze, northern regional manager of Zhejiang Qianjiang Robot Co.

Domestic enterprises must prioritize investment in research and development to expand the scope of their core technologies. This approach is essential for reducing reliance on imports, particularly in areas where critical technologies are concerned, said Wang Yaonan, an academician with the Chinese Academy of Engineering.

**Wider ambition**

As latecomers to the sector, Chinese industrial robot makers have advantages and can accelerate their exploration of emerging industries and niche sectors, Wang said.

By strategically developing specialized applications, these companies can enhance their market share and brand competitiveness, he added.

Yantai Aitron Robot Technology Co in Shandong province is reaping the rewards of rapid development in the new energy vehicle sector. Its load-carrying robots have achieved international performance standards at lower costs while providing quality interactive coordination services.

"As a result, many domestic NEV manufacturers have started procuring Aitron's products. The 360-kilogram load-carrying robot, in particular, has seen a constant supply shortage due to high demand," said Liu Jie, the compa-

ny's deputy general manager.

Chinese industrial robot manufacturers are increasingly looking beyond the domestic market. With immense global potential, these companies are capitalizing on export opportunities to increase sales.

According to a report released by the International Federation of Robotics, industrial robot installations in Europe are on the rise. The 27 member states of the European Union installed nearly 72,000 industrial robots in 2022, a 6 percent year-on-year increase, the report said.

For European countries outside the EU, the total number of robot installations reached 84,000, a 3 percent increase on the previous year.

As early as 2007, Siasun began exporting its robot products. Today, the company's products are exported to over 40 countries and regions worldwide and are used by more than 4,000 companies, said Siasun's president, Zhang Jin.

Siasun is accelerating its international expansion. The company has established overseas subsidiaries and regional centers in Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Germany, and other locations, Zhang said.

This year, the company plans to further expand its global footprint by establishing a new overseas service center in Stuttgart, Germany, along with an overseas engineering service team, to enhance the performance of its local operations and better comprehend the needs of local consumers, Zhang said.

**Challenges ahead**

Despite these efforts by Chinese

industrial robot companies, there are still several factors constraining their expansion into overseas markets.

Chinese industrial robots still lack sophistication in the high-end segment of the market, according to some experts.

International robotic giants integrate their products with the industrial internet, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and the internet of things, to enhance the intelligence and capabilities of their products, said Huang Tian, a robotics expert at Tianjin University.

Establishing strong global sales and distribution networks is also crucial to improving brand recognition and expanding market reach. Learning from successful international brands, Chinese companies should invest in building a robust and efficient sales system that can penetrate and serve different overseas markets, Huang said.

This includes setting up partnerships with local companies that have established integration and distribution links, as well as providing comprehensive training and support to ensure customer satisfaction, he added.

By combining cost-effective products and customized solutions, domestic companies can provide good value that competes with international brands. This strategy not only aids market penetration but also fosters long-term customer relationships and loyalty, Huang said.

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Industrial robots assemble and paint trucks at a factory of China FAW Group in Changchun, Jilin province. XU CHANG / XINHUA



Humanoid robots are on display at the World Robot Conference held in Beijing in August last year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## TOP NEWS

## Xi hails shared future on space cooperation

China willing to boost partnership with Latin America and Caribbean, he says

By ZHAO LEI in Wuhan  
zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn

China is willing to work with Latin American and Caribbean countries to strengthen cooperation in space programs for the interests of their peoples, President Xi Jinping said.

He made the remark in a congratulatory letter sent on Wednesday to the first China-Latin American and Caribbean States Space Cooperation Forum.

Xi wrote that the event could provide a starting point for China to join hands with nations in Latin America and the Caribbean to form a high-level space cooperation partnership, promote the use of space technology to bring more benefits to the peoples, and continue to advance the building of a shared future.

Noting that this year marks the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the China-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) Forum jointly initiated by leaders of both sides, Xi said that China and Latin American and Caribbean countries have seen prosperous development over the past decade in their cooperation in various fields.

Their relations have entered a new era that features equality, mutual benefit, innovation, openness and prosperity for the people, the president added.

"I am happy to see that China and the Latin American and Caribbean countries have yielded fruitful results in space cooperation in recent years. New progress continues to be made in the fields of remote-sensing satellites, communication satellites and control station networks for deep-space programs.

"Such advancements have played an important role in promoting scientific and technological research, strengthening regional connectivity and improving peoples' livelihood," Xi wrote.

Vice-Premier Zhang Guoqing read out the president's letter on Wednesday at the opening ceremony of the two-day forum, which is being held in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, and is co-hosted by the China National

Space Administration and the Hubei provincial government.

Letters from Honduran President Iris Xiomara Castro Sarmiento and Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro were also read out by their respective ambassadors to China.

The two presidents congratulated the forum's opening and expressed their hope that it could help to enhance the comprehensive collaboration in the space field between China and their nations.

Government officials, diplomats and scientists from 27 Latin American and Caribbean countries, as well as representatives from the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs and other international organizations took part in the forum, which had a main symposium on Wednesday and four workshops set for Thursday.

Chinese and foreign participants were scheduled to discuss a wide range of topics including space science and technology, training for professionals, lunar and deep-space exploration, and space governance.

The event was intended to implement President Xi's instructions on the China-CELAC Forum, foster space cooperation among involved parties, facilitate the growth of the space industry in Latin American and Caribbean countries, and strengthen the friendship and partnership between China and related nations, the China National Space Administration said.

China has been cooperating on space exploration with some countries in Latin America and the Caribbean for many years. It helped Venezuela build and launch all of the South American country's three satellites; worked with Bolivia on the construction and deployment of its only satellite; and placed several satellites jointly built by Chinese and Brazilian researchers into orbit.

The latest development took place on Wednesday in Wuhan, with the space administration announcing that Nicaragua has signed up with the International Lunar Research Station project initiated by China.



The Shenzhou-XVIII team, led by Shenzhou-XIII veteran Ye Guangfu (left) and joined by Li Cong (right) and Li Guangsu, undergo intensive training in a capsule simulator on Jan 29, 2024. XU BU / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Know the astronauts on Shenzhou XVIII mission

## Ye Guangfu

Senior Colonel Ye Guangfu, 43, a first-grade astronaut, is the mission commander of the Shenzhou XVIII spacecraft, which is scheduled for launch on Thursday.

Ye, who is from Chengdu, Sichuan province, joined the People's Liberation Army in August 1998 and was assigned to a fighter jet regiment after graduation. He became a first-grade pilot at the combat unit.

In May 2010, Ye was selected as a member of the second group of astronauts for the PLA Astronaut

Division. He took part in a survival training session in Italy in July 2016 that was organized by the European Space Agency, and was a member of the reserve crew for the Shenzhou XII mission.

Ye made his first journey into space in October 2021, on the six-month Shenzhou XIII mission, becoming a member of the second group of inhabitants of China's Tiangong space station.

In June 2022, Ye was given the honorary title "Heroic Astronaut" and awarded the Third-grade Space Service Medal.

## Li Cong

Lieutenant Colonel Li Cong, 34, a fourth-grade astronaut, will be making his first spaceflight on Thursday.

Li, who is from Handan, Hebei province, joined the PLA in September 2009.

He was a second-grade pilot and deputy group commander of a PLA Air Force fighter jet brigade before being selected as a member of the third group of astronauts for the PLA Astronaut Division in September 2020.

## Li Guangsu

Lieutenant Colonel Li Guangsu, 36, a fourth-grade astronaut, will be making his first spaceflight on Thursday.

Li, who is from Peixian county, Jiangsu province, joined the PLA in September 2006. He graduated from the Aviation University of Air Force.

Before he joined the PLA Astronaut Division's third group in September 2020, Li was a first-grade pilot and deputy group commander of a PLA Air Force fighter jet brigade.

LI MENGHAN

## Mission: Progress of crewed lunar exploration program revealed

From page 1

and space tourists in flights to the space station, Lin said, adding that China is confident that its space station will welcome more new members from different backgrounds in the near future.

Lin also said that China's crewed lunar exploration program is progressing smoothly, with the development of major component systems, such as the Long March 10 carrier rocket, the crewed spacecraft Mengzhou, the lunar lander Lanyue and the

lunar landing suit, having been completed, with prototype production and tests being carried out.

In 2023, crewed lunar exploration was approved by the central government for launch and implementation, with the aim of landing

Chinese on the moon by 2030. The plan is to launch two carrier rockets to send a crewed spacecraft and a lunar lander into lunar orbit. The spacecraft and lunar lander will dock with each other, after which the astronauts will enter the lander, Lin said.

## Coercion: App ban will affect 170 million users

From page 1

This kind of attitude, the belief that China must be "coerced" into handing over its economic assets and resources to the West, has been inflicted on the country over the centuries and was most blatant in what China describes as "the century of humiliation" when Western powers brutally subjugated the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) into accepting their will and exploited according to their interests. This is most famously depicted through the Opium Wars, whereby the British Empire waged war on China for its refusal to open its markets up to opium and forced the Chinese into the first "Unequal Treaty" which not only imposed the export on them by force, but also ceded Hong Kong as a port for doing so.

Other such "unequal treaties" over the years created other foreign concessions in China, allowed

Westerners in China to be exempt from local laws and treat Chinese people as inferior, second-class citizens. Although this system is long gone, the fundamental mindset in the West's relationship toward China that assumes the country to be inferior and advocates a sense of entitlement to its markets and resources, remains, and is manifest in the belief of American politicians that the country has a right to effectively "steal" TikTok from Chinese ownership by attempting to leverage its operation on the threat of a ban. There is a line of thought present that only the US has the right to create globally successful media apps, and that China has no entitlement to do so based on a highly dubious political excuse.

However, the century of humiliation is over, and likewise any attempts to impose that kind of coercion and subordination on China will almost certainly fail. When

former US president Donald Trump's administration in 2020 attempted to ban TikTok under the threat of a sale, an effort which also failed, China's government responded by simply making it illegal for ByteDance to engage in such a transaction. There is no reason to assume that has changed, the same rule applies today. Under no circumstances will the company be allowed to sell such a wildly successful product under the threat of force to an American company. It is nothing less than effective robbery and contravenes every way and principle a free market is expected to operate.

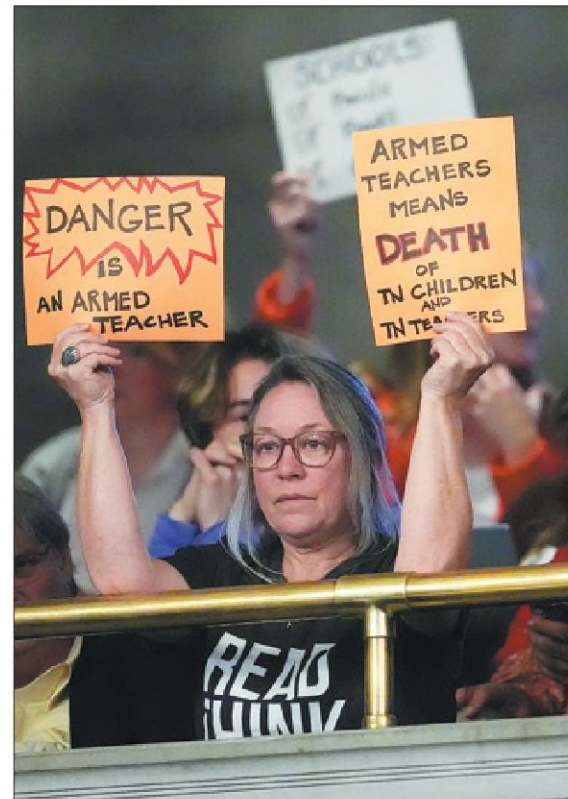
If the US, therefore, goes ahead with a ban given there is no sale to be had, it will invoke the anger of over 170 million Americans who use the app and will be a politically self-defeating move for any figure who endorses it. This in any case will demonstrate the paranoid, unrea-

sonable and unhinged culture which overhangs Capitol Hill on matters pertaining to China. This is of course, assuming such a ban will survive the inevitable legal challenge against it, which is also doubtful.

However, the message must be made clear: The US has no right to steal, undermine or impede China's success. The hysteria over TikTok is regurgitated paranoia based on a toxic mix of self-entitlement, McCarthyism and reactionary jealousy, all of which are rooted in the inherent denial of China's own development and success, the idea that all countries big or small must be inferior to America. Competition of course is fine, but this isn't competition, it's extortion.

The author is a British political and international relations analyst. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## No to guns



Protesters hold signs on Tuesday against a bill that would allow some teachers to be armed in schools during a legislative session in the House Chamber, in Nashville, Tennessee, the United States.

GEORGE WALKER IV / AP

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# WORLD

## Israel's Rafah attack plan sparks fears

### UN calls for probe into mass grave reports amid obstacles to delivery of aid in Gaza

GAZA STRIP — The new round of Israel-Palestine conflict raged on its 201st day on Wednesday as aid groups warned that Israeli plans to invade the southern city of Rafah, where most Gazans have taken refuge, would create an "apocalyptic situation".

Fears have been rising that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will soon follow through on repeated threats to send troops into Rafah, where 1.4 million people have sought shelter, many in makeshift encampments.

More than a million Gazan residents have lost their homes and 75 percent of the population in the Palestinian coastal enclave have been displaced since the conflict broke out in October, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, or UNRWA, said on Tuesday.

"Destruction is everywhere in Gaza. Damage to critical infrastructure is immense," UNRWA wrote in a post on social media platform X.

In Gaza, the UN said "multiple obstacles" continue to impede deliveries of urgently needed aid for Gazans desperate for food, water, shelter and medicine.

Israel launched a large-scale offensive against Hamas in the Gaza Strip to retaliate against a Hamas

rampage through the southern Israeli border on Oct 7, during which about 1,200 people were killed and more than 200 were taken hostage.

As of Tuesday, a total of 34,183 Palestinians have been killed and 77,143 others injured due to Israeli attacks, according to the Hamas-run health ministry.

"Everybody seems to be on a countdown to war across the largest displacement camp on Earth, which is Rafah," Norwegian Refugee Council chief Jan Egeland said.

Also on Tuesday, the UN rights office said it was "horrified" at reports of mass graves found at Gaza's two biggest hospitals after Israeli sieges and raids.

Israel has repeatedly targeted Gazan medical facilities during the conflict, accusing Hamas of using them as command centers. Hamas denies the accusation.

Over the past three days, Gaza's Civil Defense agency said nearly 340 bodies were uncovered of people killed and buried by Israeli forces at the Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis.

Israel's army responded by saying that claims it had buried Palestinian bodies were "baseless and unfounded", without directly addressing allegations that Israeli troops were behind the killings.



Palestinians gather in front of a banner with the names of deceased children displayed during a memorial ceremony in Rafah on Tuesday. DOAA ALBAZ / GETTY IMAGES

UN rights chief Volker Turk called for an "independent" probe into the deaths at Nasser and Gaza City's Al-Shifa hospitals, noting the "special protection" awarded to medical facilities under international law.

"Hospitals are entitled to very special protection under international humanitarian law," Turk said. "And the intentional killing of civilians, detainees and others who are hors de combat is a war crime."

The UN rights office said it did not have access to independent information as to what happened at the two hospitals.

But spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani said efforts were underway to corroborate reports and details given by Gaza authorities.

The White House said it would

discuss the subject with Israel.

"Obviously, scenes of mass graves in general are deeply concerning but I don't have anything that can confirm the veracity of those," US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters.

### US campus protests

Outcry has been growing around the world against Israel's offensive, which has turned vast areas of Gaza to rubble and sparked fears of famine.

Hundreds of students have been arrested in recent days at pro-Palestinian demonstrations on the campuses of prominent universities in the United States, Israel's top ally and military supplier. The US Senate just

approved fresh military aid to Israel.

The student protests have created a new and unpredictable challenge for President Joe Biden as he resists calls to cut off US support for Israel while trying to hold together the coalition of voters he'll need for reelection, The Associated Press commented.

The protests at Columbia University in New York and other campuses have captured global media attention and questions have resurfaced about Biden's lagging support from young voters. His handling of the Middle East conflict is also being closely watched by both Jewish and Arab American voters in key swing states.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Unjustifiable raids by EU condemned

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels  
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The China Chamber of Commerce to the European Union, or CCCEU, condemned the European Commission's surprise raids on the offices of a Chinese company in Poland and the Netherlands on Tuesday in the name of investigating foreign subsidies.

The Chinese business group said it was informed that the enforcement agencies authorized by the European Commission conducted the raids in the morning without prior notice. They seized the company's IT equipment and employees' mobile phones, scrutinized office documents, and demanded access to pertinent data.

"The CCCEU expresses serious concern over the EU conducting unjustifiable, unannounced raids on the Chinese company's subsidiaries in the EU," it said in a statement.

"The European side manifested its intention to weaponize the Foreign Subsidies Regulation as a tool to suppress lawfully operating Chinese companies in Europe."

The raids on Tuesday were the first since the FSR was officially implemented in July. The FSR allows the commission to investigate and remedy subsidies received from non-EU countries that distort the EU internal market.

The Brussels-based group voiced "strong dissatisfaction" over the raids "without prior notice and without solid evidence".

The chamber said the EU's actions "send a detrimental message not only to Chinese enterprises, but to all non-EU companies operating in the bloc".

The EU has initiated four investigations under the FSR in the last two months, all targeting Chinese companies, including solar panel, wind turbine and locomotive manufacturers.

### 'Extremely shocked'

The statement said the CCCEU and its members are "extremely shocked at and dissatisfied with the unannounced inspection".

"We urge the European side to stop the abuse of FSR tools and to effectively safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of foreign enterprises in the EU," it said.

The European Commission said in a statement on Tuesday that it carried out unannounced foreign subsidies inspections at the premises of a company active in the production and sale of security equipment in the EU. It, however, did not name the company and its country of origin.

The commission said it has indications that the company "may have received foreign subsidies that could distort the internal market" under the FSR.

The raids were carried out "accompanied by the counterparts from the national competition authorities of the member states where the inspections were carried out", said the commission, adding that unannounced inspections are a preliminary investigative step into suspected distortive foreign subsidies.

## Plastic reminder



A sculpture titled *Giant Plastic Tap* by Canadian artist Benjamin Von Wong is displayed outside the venue of the fourth session of the United Nations' Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution in Ottawa, Canada, on Tuesday. DAVE CHAN / AFP

## China's performance strong in EV industry, report finds

By JULIAN SHEA in London and AI HEPIING in New York

Newly published figures in the International Energy Agency's annual Global Electric Vehicle Outlook show that in the first quarter of 2024, sales grew by about 25 percent compared with the same period last year.

The number of EVs sold globally in Q1 2024 is equivalent to that in all of 2020.

This came after a record-breaking 2023, with EV sales totaling about 14 million worldwide. While traditionally strong markets such as China and the United States have continued to perform well, emerging markets such as Thailand and Vietnam are also recording growth.

Based on current trends, it is estimated that by 2030, almost 1 in 3 cars in China will be electric, and 1 in 5 in both the US and the European Union, causing a significant fall in demand for petrol and a major reinvention of the automobile production industry.

Furthermore, if countries abide by their climate pledges and meet them on time, by 2035, two out of every three new cars sold would be electric.

The reduced need for petrol across all forms of road transport would see daily demand for oil reduced by about 12 million barrels per day, which is close to the current daily combined demand from road users in China and Europe.

"The continued momentum

behind electric cars is clear in our data, although it is stronger in some markets than others," said IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol.

The increasing growth of Chinese EV exports, which accounted for more than half of all electric sales in 2023, combined with market competition and technical advances could help drive prices down.

Meanwhile, Tesla reported its lowest first-quarter profit since 2021, as it faces stiffer competition, especially from Chinese makers and slower worldwide sales. The company's net income of \$1.1 billion for the January-to-March period was 55 percent lower than the previous year.

The company's earnings call was CEO Elon Musk's first formal audience with investors since initiating a restructuring that is expected to reduce the company's global workforce by more than 10 percent.

Tesla has confronted competition by cutting prices again in recent days. The move came after Tesla reported this month that its global vehicle deliveries in the first quarter fell for the first time in nearly four years.

The Wall Street Journal reported on Monday that Tesla is engaged in a "price war" in China with hybrid specialist Li Auto, undercutting each other as sales of electric and hybrid vehicles surpassed those of traditional cars for the first time.

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## China's UN envoy opposes weaponization of space

By MINLU ZHANG at the United Nations  
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China's UN ambassador on Wednesday urged ongoing efforts to prevent outer space weaponization, to start prompt negotiations for a binding arms control treaty, and to ensure space remains peaceful for all member states and humanity.

"Outer space is not the private property of a few countries, but the common asset of all humankind. It is not an arena for countries to fight each other, but a new frontier for mutually beneficial cooperation," said Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the United Nations.

The UN Security Council on Wednesday rejected a draft resolution introduced by the US and Japan that calls for active contributions to the "objective of the peaceful use of outer space and of the prevention of an arms race in outer space".

The resolution gained 13 votes in favor, with Russia opposing and China abstaining. Russia's UN Ambassador Vasily Nebenzia said the resolution didn't go far enough in banning all types of weapons in space.

"The draft resolution that was just voted on is incomplete and

unbalanced and does not reflect to the fullest extent the common interests and the shared call of the 193 member states on the issue of outer space security. Therefore, China had to abstain from the vote on the draft resolution," said Fu.

"China agrees with the content of the current council draft relating to the 1967 Outer Space Treaty. However, these elements represent only one aspect of the governance of outer space security, and the draft should be supplemented with other substantive elements," he said.

The council also rejected an amendment put forward by China and Russia that suggested an additional paragraph, which would have had the council call on all countries, especially those with major space capabilities, "to take urgent measures to prevent for all time the placement of weapons in outer space and the threat or use of force in outer space", and "to seek through negotiations the early elaboration of appropriate reliably verifiable legally binding multilateral agreements".

The 1967 Outer Space Treaty, passed in the UN General Assembly that year, bans the placement of nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction in outer

space; prohibits military activities on celestial bodies; and details legally binding rules governing the peaceful exploration and use of space.

"I would like to point out that the amendment is not a new text, but elements from a General Assembly resolution supported by over two-thirds of member states," said Fu.

China also "firmly opposed a groundless accusation against China" over the meeting, Fu said.

"I would like to emphasize that if the US and Japan were truly committed to advancing the council's constructive deliberations on outer space security, then they should focus squarely on the risks of outer space being weaponized and the potential arms race in outer space, and they should unequivocally stand for the prohibition of the placement of all types of weapons, including nuclear weapons, in outer space," he said.

"The US should stop its development and deployment of offensive weapons in outer space, change its negative attitude towards the negotiation of a legally binding instrument on arms control in outer space and get engaged actively in the discussions at the Conference on Disarmament and First Committee of the UN General Assembly," Fu added.

## Filipino movement opposes US meddling

By PRIME SARMIENTO in Hong Kong  
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A citizens' movement was launched on Wednesday in the Philippines against what organizers called an "insidious attempt" by the United States and the administration of Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr "to impose upon us and the rest of the region and the world, a proxy war against China" potentially.

The Koalisyon ng Mamamayan Kontra Giyera, or the Citizens' Coalition Against War, was launched in the capital Manila during a hybrid forum organized by the think tank Asian Century Philippines Strategic Studies, or ACPH.

The ACPH has presented a manifesto and spearheaded a signature campaign that denounces the proxy war and the expansion of US military access in the Philippines, as mandated by bilateral agreements such as the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, the Mutual Defense Treaty and the Visiting Forces Agreement.

The citizens' coalition was launched amid an ongoing US-Philippines military exercise. The Balikatan, or shoulder-to-shoulder, bilateral exercise is an annual event, but this year was the first time the US deployed a long-range weapon system to the Philippines.

Herman Tiu Laurel, president of the ACPH, said signing the manifesto is just the start of a national

campaign to demand the Philippine government to focus more on immediate concerns of Filipinos like food security, public health and more efficient public transport.

Anna Malindog-Uy, ACPH's vice-president for external affairs, said the Philippines' strategic location makes it a "pivotal player" in any potential conflict in the Asia-Pacific region.

She said agreements like the VFA and MDT have established the Philippines as a "forward staging ground" for the US to enhance its ability to project power in the region.

The Balikatan is being conducted in the northern Philippine island of Luzon, which faces Taiwan — another flashpoint of

China-US relations.

Sass Rogando Sasot, a popular political blogger and scholar of international relations, said the US has a history of staging proxy wars against its rivals, and a US-led proxy war is not aligned with the Philippines' national interests.

Sasot said promoting economic development and preserving sovereignty are aligned with national interests. "Let's bring back sanity to Philippine foreign policy," said Sasot, noting that the South China Sea issue is best resolved through peaceful discussions.

Malindog-Uy said the "intricacies of geopolitics exact a considerable toll" that the Philippines can barely afford.

## WORLDUS

# Stabilizing relations aim of Blinken visit

By YANG RAN in Beijing and YIFAN XU in Washington

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to China is not anticipated to yield breakthroughs in bilateral relations, given Washington's unchanged strategy toward Beijing. However, experts note that such visits will play a role in maintaining stability between China and the United States.

"The visit to China can be seen as a follow-up on the consensus reached during the November summit in San Francisco, signaling the US' desire for regular high-level visits to maintain the stability of bilateral ties," said Yang Nan, associate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of American Studies.

"While these visits may not lead to substantial outcomes, establishing mutual understanding through such interactions can help prevent future misjudgments, which is a key objective."

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin announced on Monday that Blinken will visit China from Wednesday to Friday at the invitation of Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who is also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee.

Blinken was expected to meet with senior Chinese officials in Shanghai and Beijing to discuss a range of bilateral, regional and global issues, including the crisis in the Middle East, the Ukraine crisis, cross-strait issues, and the South China Sea, according to the US State Department website.

Blinken's last visit to China was in June, a time marked by strained relations.

"In contrast to his previous visit, Blinken's current trip to China comes at a time of less strained ties. Since February, there has been a notable increase in high-level official interactions," said Sun Xihui, an associate research fellow with the National Institute of International Strategy at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

"So Blinken's goal right now, I think, is to continue to move that relationship on the track with the momentum, not to do great new things, but try to maintain that momentum and try to maintain those lines and channels of communication and possibly deepen it," said Sourabh Gupta, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Institute for China-American Studies.

"I think they will touch upon things broadly, take the relationship forward and maintain lines of communication, try to set up a meeting, and then deal with all irritants, both in the bilateral relationship," he said.

## Positive trend

Following the San Francisco summit, there has been a positive trend of stabilization in the bilateral relationship. However, while the US has expressed a desire to improve communication and ties with China, it has also continued to suppress and smear China on many issues, displaying a clear duplicity, Yang said.

Sun pointed out that the US, despite maintaining frequent high-level interactions with China, has not undergone any substantive changes in its strategic positioning and policy toward China.

"Therefore, the main aim of the US engaging with China is to apply pressure on China, with the hope that China will align its cooperation with the US based on the US' stance and values in both bilateral and regional hot spot issues. The Joe Biden administration's goal behind these moves is to score points in diplomacy, to garner greater support in the upcoming election," said Sun.

"The US has recently been approaching its cooperation with China as if it were ordering from a menu. It focuses solely on its own demands without considering the concerns of the other party. This kind of cooperation is unsustainable. Many global issues, including the Russia-Ukraine conflict and climate change, require sustained, deep, and long-term systematic cooperation," said Yang.

"China has always hoped for stability in Sino-US relations, maintaining a positive momentum, which benefits not only the two nations but also the whole world. However, this momentum can't be maintained on China's efforts alone. The US needs to avoid the duplicity of saying one thing and doing another," he said.

"During the San Francisco summit, the two leaders outlined a series of collaboration directions, which now need to be implemented at the working group level. The US should essentially fulfill previous commitments, to rebuild mutual strategic trust between the two nations," Yang added.

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## Standoff in Texas



Pro-Palestinian protesters face off with mounted state troopers at the University of Texas in Austin on Wednesday. Student protests over the Israel-Hamas war have popped up on an increasing number of US college campuses following last week's arrest of more than 100 demonstrators at Columbia University in New York. JAY JANNER / AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN VIA AP

## TikTok users troubled by potential ban

By MINGMEILI in New York mingmeili@chinadailyusa.com

Americans expressed disappointment and concern regarding a bill signed into law by US President Joe Biden on Wednesday that could lead to either the sale or ban of the popular social media app TikTok in the country.

Biden signed the legislation passed by the House of Representatives in March and the Senate on Tuesday that requires either the sale of TikTok by its parent company in China or it would face a ban within nine months to a year.

Congress cited data-security concerns because parent company ByteDance is based in Beijing. Several members of Congress have questioned TikTok's Singaporean CEO, Show Chew, in the past year regarding the platform's operations.

Chew has said that TikTok keeps American's user data on US-based servers, and that the Chinese government has never asked it for any data, nor would TikTok release it if it were asked.

Under the law, TikTok could continue its operations in the United States if ByteDance sells it within 270 days, which would be by Jan 19, 2025. If a plan for divestment or a sale is in the works, 90 days could be added to the timetable.

"Rest assured — we aren't going anywhere," Chew said in a video posted moments after Biden signed the bill. "The facts and the Constitution are on our side, and we expect to prevail again."

TikTok is set to challenge the bill on First Amendment grounds, and TikTok users are expected to again take legal action.

China Daily interviewed people in Times Square in New York about the TikTok news.

"We have to embrace TikTok because it allows people with different viewpoints to discuss things and to disseminate their views on the world," said Wyatt Head, 29. "When I talk on TikTok, [people] can see me anywhere in this world. That's incredible."

"There was a lot of racial tension," he said of the prior questioning of Chew, and banning the app may generate hatred toward Chinese people. "The CEO was questioned in Congress; they were like, 'Is he Chinese?'"

"It's unconstitutional," Rami Hosni, 31, told China Daily. "It's the same content everywhere, and if you banned TikTok, you got to ban Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, all of them."

"I feel weird and bad about any decisions that Biden makes, and there was interrogating of the CEO of TikTok," Hosni said. He mentioned that some members of Congress said some content on the short-video platform is "inappropriate," but TikTok shouldn't be treated differently. "You can hide some content, but you can't ban the whole app," he said. "People are enjoying it, and you can watch people dancing every day. There is nothing dangerous."

Hosni said that banning or forcing the sale of TikTok will result in a loss of revenue for content creators.

"Many people are losing jobs, and I know there are so many people earning their livelihoods from TikTok," he said.

"It's a great app, and there's no reason it should be banned," Lucia Perez, 20, told China Daily. "It would be really sad if the US takes power over

it because they try to own everything.

"TikTok is like a very useful platform because it's fast — if you want to find something out, it's like fast, short videos," she said, adding that she usually spends three to four hours on TikTok a day when not busy.

"They would be losing jobs; that would be terrible, because a lot of people live off of it. I mean hopefully [the ban] doesn't happen," she said.

"I like [TikTok], because it's something to do to pass the time when I'm bored," Taran Murphy, 19, told China Daily. "I like funny dog videos."

"A lot of people would be angry because, like most people don't really care about the whole legal side of it. We just want to watch funny videos," she said. "There's definitely a lot of other streaming platforms, but it would be sad if TikTok was no longer there."

"I like TikTok a lot because I always make TikTok videos and stuff. I get a lot of likes," said Fatima Habibu, 13.

Habibu said she usually spends two to three hours a day on the app. "Like every teenager likes TikTok also. Everybody's on TikTok," she said. "I don't like them banning the app."

In November, a US judge in Montana blocked a state ban on TikTok.

In 2020, then-President Donald Trump was blocked by federal courts in his bid to ban or require a sale of TikTok and WeChat, a unit of China's Tencent.

Trump, the 2024 Republican presidential candidate, has reversed course and said this week that Biden was in favor of a ban on TikTok and wanted to help Facebook by doing so.

Agencies contributed to this story.

## Tennessee bill allows teachers to carry guns in schools

By MAYZHOU in Houston mayzhou@chinadailyusa.com

Tennessee's Republican-controlled House passed a bill Tuesday to allow trained teachers and school personnel to carry concealed handguns on school campuses despite strong opposition from Democratic lawmakers, students, parents and other anti-gun activists.

Scores of protesters gathered inside the state Capitol chanting, "Blood on your hands," as soon as the bill was passed. House Speaker Cameron Sexton called in state troopers to clear out the protesters.

Four Republican lawmakers voted against the bill along with all Democrats, and three abstained, as the bill passed, 68-28. It passed the state Senate earlier this month.

The bill is likely to become law because Tennessee Governor Bill Lee is not expected to veto it. Lee can either sign the bill or let it become law without doing anything.

Under the bill, teachers and school staff members who already have a gun permit are allowed to carry concealed handguns in classrooms and on campus after they complete 40 hours of school policing training, pass a background check, submit fingerprints, obtain a psychological certification from a licensed health provider, and gain the approval of their principal, district director and leaders of relevant local law enforcement agencies.

The parents and most of their colleagues will not be notified of the fact that they're armed under confidentiality rules.

Tennessee Republicans in favor of the bill said that trained staff can increase school security, particularly in rural areas where law enforcement may be more sparsely staffed with longer response times.

The bill's sponsor Republican Ryan Williams said his bill was aimed at protecting students and acting as a deterrent for potential school security threats. He said that the bill is "permissive," meaning no school would be required to allow guns on campus.

However, the bill appears to require administrators to consider every individual who wants to carry.

Democratic lawmakers were skeptical that it could effectively stop a school shooter and concerned about unintended consequences such as a teacher leaving a gun unattended or the use of increased force during in-school discipline.

"This is nothing but a bad disaster and tragedy waiting to happen if we do not ensure personal responsibility," House Democratic Caucus Chair John Ray Clemmons said. "Our children's lives are at stake."

The passage of the bill came about a year after a shooting at the Covenant School in Nashville in which a 28-year-old former student killed six people, including three children.

Sarah Neumann, a Covenant School mom, delivered a letter to the House on Monday with more than 5,300 signatures against the bill, reported The Tennessean.

The letter said there are gaps in training, and burdening teachers with the responsibilities of confronting an assailant with a gun while keeping an entire classroom safe. The parents were also concerned about the secrecy clause in the bill which bars school administrators from revealing who carry guns in the school.

The "Women for Gun Rights" account on X posted in favor of the legislation: "Gun Free Zones" like schools undermine the safety and well-being of our children. By signing SB1325 into law, Gov Bill Lee can empower teachers to become first responders. This legislation will help save lives and prevent senseless tragedies."

A vast majority of readers' comments on The New York Times called the bill a bad idea. A reader by the name Angie, who lives in the Memphis metro area with two school children in school, said she was "furious" over the passage of the bill.

"They really think that a teacher, regardless of how much training they have, would be able to switch from 'teacher-mode' to Terminator if something happens?" she asked. "No, what is more likely is that there would be more instances of teacher/student confrontations or gun accidents."

Agencies contributed to this story.

## Biden signs \$95b foreign military aid package, TikTok bill

By HENG WEILI in New York hengweili@chinadailyusa.com

The United States' latest foreign military aid package has sailed through Congress despite some vociferous opposition inside and outside Washington DC.

US President Joe Biden on Wednesday signed into law the \$95 billion legislation that includes \$61 billion in aid to Ukraine, \$26 billion for Israel, as well as \$1 billion in humanitarian assistance to Gaza, and \$8 billion for Taiwan to counter China in the Pacific.

The impact of the legislation was immediate. Biden said he had approved an initial \$1 billion in weapons supplies for Ukraine, and that the flow of the arms would start within hours.

The aid package includes Stinger air defense munitions, additional ammunition for high-mobility artillery rocket systems, 155mm artillery ammunition, TOW and Javelin anti-tank munitions and other weapons that can immediately be sent to the battlefield.

Meanwhile, Ukraine for the first time has begun using long-range ballistic missiles provided secretly by the United States, bombing a Russian military airfield in Crimea last week and Russian forces in another

occupied area overnight, American officials confirmed Wednesday.

Biden thanked House of Representatives Speaker Mike Johnson, the top Republican in Washington, for breaking the deadlock on the legislation.

Johnson's support for the bill, however, put him on shaky standing with the right wing of the GOP, with some members backing a motion to vacate his speakership.

Biden also blamed "MAGA Republicans" loyal to former president Donald Trump for blocking the aid for months, referring to Trump's Make America Great Again slogan.

The president also signed a separate bill tied to the aid legislation that bans TikTok in the United States if its owner, Beijing-based ByteDance, fails to divest the popular short-video app over the next nine months to a year.

The social media platform is particularly popular with young Americans, and TikTok says it has 170 million users in the US.

Trump, Biden's presumptive election opponent in November, supported a sale or ban of TikTok in 2020 but was blocked by the courts. Trump has opposed the recent move to ban the app, saying Biden supported the ban "to help his friends over at Facebook become richer and more dominant". "Frankly, there are a lot of people

on TikTok that love it," Trump said on his Truth Social. "There are a lot of young kids on TikTok who will go crazy without it."

The additional aid for Israel also comes as American college campuses are seeing increasing pro-Palestinian protests.

House Speaker Johnson went to the Columbia University campus in New York on Wednesday to support Jewish students after calling for university President Minouche Shafik to resign. He said he met briefly with Shafik and asked her to take more action against the protesters. Johnson's remarks outdoors were met with persistent boos and chants.

Congress' stalemate on the Ukraine aid bill ended when the Republican-controlled House abruptly changed course and approved four bills on Saturday by a vote of 316-94, with 21 House members not voting.

Many members of the House waved small Ukrainian flags when the Ukraine aid passed, a video on X showed.

"Ukrainian flags fly in the chamber of the UNITED STATES House of Representatives as they vote to send more of your hard-earned money to a corrupt foreign regime," Senator Rand Paul, a Kentucky Republican, posted on X on April 20.

The US Senate followed the House

on Tuesday evening, approving the package by a vote of 79-18. Three Republican senators — Rand Paul, Tim Scott of South Carolina and Tommy Tuberville of Alabama — didn't vote.

David Stockman, a former US congressman who was the director of the Office of Management and Budget in the Reagan administration, called the aid package the "final straw".

"The dreadful grip of the UniParty (Democrats and Republicans) on national security policy has finally produced sheer madness in a single package," Stockman wrote on anti-war.com.

"It is bad enough that there is not an iota of informed consideration behind any of this. But what is really alarming is that every single House Democrat (210) voted in favor of \$61 billion for the Ukrainian Demolition Derby."

"This included a 97-0 vote among so-called Dem 'progressives,' who also voted 96-0 in favor of aid to Taiwan — the purpose of which is surely not a more pacific neighborhood on the Pacific Rim," he wrote. "Once upon a time, the Democrats were the party of the peace candidates."

"At the same time, only 14 Republicans voted against all four components of this wholesale assault on constitutional liberty and fiscal

rectitude. As we have previously documented, America is now careening on fiscal automatic pilot toward a \$140 trillion public debt by mid-century."

Professor Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University, said of the Ukraine aid in a recent interview: "The US debt goes up by another \$61 billion, which is a lot of money for Americans that need the money. And nothing helps Ukraine right now. All it does is prolong the dying. It prolongs the destruction."

US Representative Byron Donalds, a Florida Republican, posted on X: "Government has sent billions to Ukraine while completely neglecting the historic nat-sec crisis at OUR border."

A recent Monmouth University poll found that only 4 in 10 Americans are in favor of the recently passed bills to provide aid for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, with 35 percent opposed. The nationwide poll was conducted April 18-22.

"The foreign aid package may be a big policy win, but politically it's a wash for Speaker Johnson," said Patrick Murray, director of the independent Monmouth University Polling Institute.

Agencies contributed to this story.

## CHINA

## Solid growth projected for tourism this year

By CHENG SI  
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The tourism sector will continue to grow in the first half of this year, after a prosperous first three months, experts said.

A report released recently by the China Tourism Academy said that in the first quarter of the year the tourism economy had recovered to roughly the level seen at the start of 2019 — before COVID-19 hit — following three quarters of growth. Tourism industry operators expressed growing confidence and people felt a stronger desire for travel in the first quarter.

The report said domestic tourism and related consumption rose 20 percent in the first quarter, with inbound and outbound visits averaging around 20 million a month.

"The tourism economy saw a good opening and stable operation in the first quarter, and the market has stepped into a period of new development," Ma Yiliang, the academy's chief statistician, said at a recent meeting in Beijing.

He said the tourism market has benefited from preferential policies on visas and payments as well as an increase in international flights.

"We've noticed that the increasing travel has brought increasing consumption," he said. "Also, some

small cities or less-known destinations such as Harbin, in the north-eastern province of Heilongjiang, and Tianshui, in northwest China's Gansu province, have gained popularity among young people because of their lower travel costs and good services. With more cities growing as trending destinations, they will invigorate the tourism industry."

Nanjing, capital of the eastern province of Jiangsu, received 65 million visits during the quarter, and the number of travelers on holidays such as Spring Festival was 3.5 times higher than usual, according to the city's culture and tourism bureau. More than 200 million people visited Nanjing last year.

"We estimate that the tourism economy will see a continuous and steady recovery in the first half of the year," Ma said. "Domestic tourist travel and tourism-related revenue will be roughly close to that of the same period of 2019, and inbound and outbound tourism will continuously increase."

In February, the academy estimated that domestic tourism visits will exceed 6 billion this year, with tourism-related revenue of over 6 trillion yuan (\$830 billion). It said it expected inbound and outbound visits would surpass 260 million, bringing in international tourism revenue of \$100 billion.

## More Chinese tourists tipped to visit Kazakhstan

By CHENG SI

Tourism industry insiders and experts are bullish on tourism cooperation between China and Kazakhstan this year — after the two nations stepped up efforts to optimize visa policies to facilitate cross-border travel.

Kazakhstan's tourism year in China opened in Beijing late last month. Thirty-five tourism and cultural events will be organized in different provinces and cities such as Beijing and Shanghai during the year, with the aim of enhancing Chinese people's understanding of Kazakhstan and attracting more tourists to the country.

Domestic travel agencies said trips to Kazakhstan are expected to grow in popularity in the coming months as Kazakhstan enters spring, its best season for tourism.

Figures from travel portal LY.com show that from March 1 to March 27, flight bookings from the Chinese mainland to Kazakhstan were up 36 percent from the previous month, and up 366 percent year-on-year. Hotel bookings for the period on the platform jumped by 694 percent year-on-year.

"Kazakhstan is a niche destination to Chinese travelers, but it has seen increasing popularity in China thanks to its visa-free policy and the good resumption of international flights," said Qi Chunguang, vice-president of travel portal Tuniu.

He said that travel to Kazakhstan usually peaks from April to October and his platform has received some bookings for group tours to the country for late this month as well

as for the May Day holiday and the Dragon Boat Festival holiday in June.

"Most of our customers going to Kazakhstan and countries and regions in Central Asia are from Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou in the southern province of Guangdong, and Urumqi in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, and are middle-aged or retired," he said.

He said he is confident about tourism development between China and Kazakhstan as Kazakhstan's vast territory holds rich tourism resources like stunning natural landscapes and scenic historical spots.

Shakhrat Nuryshev, Kazakhstan's ambassador to China, told a recent news conference in Beijing that he hopes Kazakhstan grows to be a popular overseas destination for Chinese travelers. ThePaper, a news outlet headquartered in Shanghai, reported.

He said Kazakhstan received about 217,000 Chinese travelers last year, 12 times more than in 2022, but even more were needed.

Nuryshev said he hopes that Kazakhstan's tourism year activities and visa-free policy for Chinese travelers can help deepen mutual understanding and friendship and advance tourism cooperation between the two countries.

China and Kazakhstan signed an agreement in May last year to allow people holding regular Kazakh or Chinese passports to stay in the other country without a visa for up to 30 days for the purposes of business, tourism, medical treatment or transit. The agreement took effect from Nov 10.

## Spring snow



Snow dusts a mountainside village in Yushu Tibetan autonomous prefecture, Qinghai province, on Wednesday. Spring snow in many parts of the province since last week has had an impact on agricultural activities. FANG DONGXU / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Tujia celebration



Members of the Tujia ethnic group perform at the opening ceremony of the ninth Longshan Sheba Day at a sports center in Longshan county, Hunan province, on Tuesday. Residents in festive attire were joined by tourists as they danced around a bonfire in celebration of the festival, which pays respects to ancestors and prays for a bountiful harvest. YANG HUAFENG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## China leads world in top sci-tech clusters

Nation steps up efforts to protect IP rights for enterprises overseas

By CAO YIN  
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As China takes a leading role in technological innovation around the world, its efforts to help Chinese enterprises protect their intellectual property rights overseas have increased, an official from the country's top IP regulator said.

Shen Changyu, head of the China National Intellectual Property Administration, told a news conference on Wednesday that China had 24 "top 100 science and technology clusters" by the end of last year, ranking first in the world for the first time.

The ranking was issued by the World Intellectual Property Organization in its Global Innovation Index 2023.

According to the index, the top 100 science and technology clusters were concentrated in three regions last year — North America, Europe and Asia — and more specifically in two countries: China and the United States.

For the first time last year, China was the economy with the most clusters ranked among the top 100, overtaking the US' 21 clusters, the same as in 2022, the index showed.

Shen said the achievement was

## 24 clusters

for science and technology in China were among the global top 100 by the end of last year, ranking first in the world for the first time.

due to the improvement in the quality and quantity of domestic innovation.

He said China authorized 921,000 invention patents last year, up 15.3 percent year-on-year.

Shen emphasized that IP rights are crucial for an enterprise's international competitiveness, adding that the administration has taken effective measures to help domestic companies strengthen IP protection when going global.

For instance, the administration has set up a national response and guidance center for overseas IP disputes with the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, and has also established stations in countries and regions with intensive trade exchanges to provide professional and efficient IP services for domestic enterprises, he said.

The center and stations served 1,706 companies last year, helping

them recover economic losses of 6.89 billion yuan (\$950 million), he said.

"We've also continued boosting the collection and supply of overseas IP information, and used online platforms to regularly release IP legal rules and risk warning messages of major nations and regions to help our companies learn about the IP situation in a timely manner," Shen added.

He said the training of lawyers who can tackle foreign-related IP cases will be increased, and more centers and stations will be built.

China also intensified a crackdown on counterfeits and endeavored to protect copyrights last year.

Kuang Xu, an official from the State Administration for Market Regulation, said on Wednesday that 44,100 administrative cases related to violations of trademarks and patents were resolved last year, involving products valued at 839 million yuan.

Among those cases, 1,376 suspected of IP crimes were handed over to judicial authorities, he added.

More than 6.4 million copyrighted works were registered last year, up 42.3 percent year-on-year, and 4,745 cases of piracy or copyright infringement were resolved, said Tang Zhaozhi, from the copyright management bureau at the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee.

## Briefly

## Former Shanghai lawmaker indicted

Dong Yunhu, a former senior legislator in Shanghai, has been indicted on bribery charges, the Supreme People's Procuratorate said on Wednesday. Following the completion of investigations by the National Commission of Supervision, the people's procuratorate in Hefei, Anhui province, filed Dong's case to the city's intermediate people's court, the top procuratorate said. Dong was a former secretary of the leading Party members' group of the Standing Committee of the Shanghai Municipal People's Congress and former chairman of the committee. Prosecutors accused Dong of taking advantage of his various posts and abusing his power to seek illicit gains for others, while illegally accepting a huge amount of money and valuables in return.

## Relief for Jiangxi, Guangdong, Guangxi

China has earmarked 110 million yuan (\$15.5 million) from the central natural-disaster relief fund to support flood control and disaster relief efforts in the provinces of Jiangxi and Guangdong and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. The emergency funds were jointly allocated by the ministries of finance and emergency management, the Ministry of Finance said on its website on Wednesday. Forty million yuan will be allocated to Jiangxi, 50 million yuan to Guangdong, and 20 million yuan to Guangxi. The funds will mainly be used for searches, rescues and relocations of people affected by disasters, secondary disaster detection, and the repair of damaged houses, the ministry said. Four people were killed after continuous heavy rainfall hit many parts of Guangdong recently, local authorities have said.

## 42 officials punished for deadly Shanxi fire

Forty-two public servants have been punished for a fire that killed 26 people and injured 38 others at a coal mine company building in North China's Shanxi province last year. In response to the negligence and dereliction of duty in the accident, the provincial discipline inspection and supervision organs took stern measures against 42 public servants from departments and governments at various levels, according to an investigation report released on Tuesday. Additionally, Shanxi police took coercive measures against 18 individuals from the company. The fire broke out in a bathroom on the second floor of a building occupied by the private Yongju coal mine company in Lyuliang's Lishi district on Nov 16. An investigation found the fire was caused by a short circuit in the main power supply line of a motor above a laundry basket in the dressing area of the bathroom. The short circuit ignited combustibles in the basket and led to the fire.

XINHUA

## Rescue group founder welcomes guideline

By LI LEI  
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The founder of a civil rescue group that has taken part in rescue operations at home and abroad has welcomed a pledge by central authorities to foster more voluntary groups specializing in disaster relief and help with their capacity building.

The pledge was included in a guideline on promoting voluntarism that was released on Monday with the aim of legalizing voluntary groups' involvement in missions ranging from responding to disasters to caring for vulnerable communities.

Zhang Yong, who founded Blue Sky Rescue in Beijing in 2008, highlighted the importance of capacity building for organizations like his, especially smaller ones that tend to lack professional skills and equipment.

"Some groups have enthusiasm but run short of capacity," he said, adding there had been multiple instances in the past where less-qualified volunteer rescuers were

trapped during their operations, further complicating relief efforts.

The guideline also seeks to expand Chinese volunteers' presence overseas.

In recent years, some voluntary workers have reported being declined entry to disaster-hit regions due to safety concerns. Others have risked the displeasure of their employers to engage in such efforts, for which paid leave is often required.

To bolster the legal standing of such undertakings, the guideline issued by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, China's Cabinet, urged the incorporation of nonofficial rescuers in the nation's emergency response system, with a view to deploying them alongside other forces, most government-led, such as fire departments and the military.

It called for a sound system to effectively organize voluntary workers to rescue victims and ship crucial supplies, and ensure such involvement is "law-abiding, scientific and efficient".

Zhang hailed the guideline as a

boon to nonofficial rescue forces and said it would enable them to better assist State-led relief task forces in emergencies. But he also said that smaller rescue teams might need to shift their focus from the front lines of major disasters to communities, where emergency responses tend to be less demanding.

The guideline also encouraged Chinese volunteers to venture abroad and step up their presence in countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, and form partnerships with their foreign counterparts and international agencies to make themselves more influential.

Rules will be improved to govern cross-border operations, it added.

Blue Sky Rescue has operated in countries including the Philippines, Myanmar and Sri Lanka in recent years.

Zhang said it had carried out 15 operations overseas so far, many of which were well-received by local governments and people, and had strengthened mutual bonds.

"I believe that it is an overall trend for Chinese social organizations and humanitarian rescue organizations

to go abroad," he said. "As long as you sincerely and solidly help the local people, it will definitely promote the unity and mutual recognition between the two peoples. This is the role that nongovernmental organizations play, which official organizations cannot replace."

A blue book on China's charity sector published by Social Sciences Academic Press said 279 million Chinese people offered voluntary services in 2022. Their service time added up to more than 4 billion hours that year and was worth 191 billion yuan (\$26.4 billion).

The nine-part guideline said China aims to form a "complete, scientific and efficient" voluntary service management system by 2035, and a strong voluntary sector will be a signifier of the socialist cultural power that China is seeking to become.

It said that employers — public and private alike — will be encouraged to support voluntary undertakings by their workers as part of corporate social responsibility, and that voluntary experience will serve as a crucial reference in recruitment and commendation.

## CHINA

## Canine assistance



People ride a bus with their guide dogs during an activity organized by the Guangzhou Guide Dog School in collaboration with Guangzhou Yiqi Public Bus Co on International Guide Dog Day in Guangzhou, Guangdong, on Wednesday. The bus company said that all of its routes would be fully open for the training of dogs from the school to support the development of such services. CHEN CHUHONG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## Draft to tighten anti-money laundering supervision

Foreign financial institutions may be asked to cooperate during investigation

By YANG ZEKUN  
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A draft amendment to the Anti-Money Laundering Law proposes establishing a monitoring body and improving the financial regulatory system.

The draft was submitted for initial review to the Standing Committee of the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature, on Tuesday.

Pan Gongsheng, governor of the People's Bank of China, said that several issues have emerged in anti-money laundering efforts in recent years, with institutions showing insufficient capacity to fulfill anti-money laundering obligations, a lack of smooth coordination mechanisms for supervision, and a low degree of information sharing.

There is also a need to strengthen monitoring and control of emerging money laundering risks and combat corruption, cross-border gambling, "underground banking" and other illegal activities, the central bank chief told the Standing Committee.

The draft clarifies that anti-money laundering refers to actions taken to prevent and curb activities that disguise or conceal the origins and nature of criminal proceeds and their benefits, as well as related criminal activities, including measures against terrorism financing.

It assigns the central bank the responsibility for national anti-money laundering supervision and management, in coordination with State Council departments, national supervisory authorities and judicial bodies.

Additionally, the draft calls for enhanced risk control and supervisory management, specifying anti-money laundering fund monitoring, and risk assessment systems for national and industry-specific money laundering.

It also improves provisions for legal liability, increases penalties for violations and specifies the extraterritorial applicability of the law. During legal investigations of money laundering and terrorism financing, foreign financial institutions may be asked to cooperate, it said.

Those who refuse to cooperate with investigations may be issued warnings, fined or prohibited from conducting related business activities. Directors, supervisors or senior management of financial institutions, or others directly responsible, may also be fined or banned from working in the industry. Such institutions may also be included on a list of organizations and individuals identified by the authorities as having significant money laundering risks, where failure to take measures could lead to severe consequences.

## Former BOC chairman pleads guilty to graft

By YANG ZEKUN  
yangzekun@chinadaily.com.cn

Liu Liange, former Party chief and chairman of Bank of China, pleaded guilty to accepting bribes totaling 121 million yuan (\$16.7 million) and illegally issuing loans amounting to 3.32 billion yuan at a trial at Jinan Intermediate People's Court, in Shandong province, on Wednesday.

Liu confessed to his crimes and delivered a final statement in court. He will be sentenced later.

He served at Export-Import Bank of China from March 2007 until June 2018 and then began working at Bank of China. He became chairman of Bank of China in June 2019 and continued in that role until March 2023, when he was placed under investigation.

Prosecutors from the Jinan procuratorate said that from 2010 to 2023, Liu used his positions including vice-president and president of Export-Import Bank of China, as well as president, Party chief and chairman of Bank of China, to assist related units and individuals in matters of loan financing, project cooperation and personnel arrangements. In return, he demanded and accepted money and properties totaling more than 121 million yuan.

From the end of 2017 to the beginning of 2020, while working at Export-Import Bank of China and later Bank of China, Liu, knowing that related enterprises did not meet loan issuance conditions, violated the Law on Com-

mercial Banks and the Banking Supervision Law among other legal stipulations by promoting the issuance of loans totaling more than 3.32 billion yuan, resulting in a principal loss of more than 190 million yuan.

Prosecutors asked that Liu be held criminally responsible for the crimes of accepting bribes and illegally issuing loans.

Liu, 62, a native of Jilin province, was expelled from the Party and arrested in October last year. He was indicted in February.

The finance sector has been a significant focus of China's anti-corruption efforts in recent years. Since last year, dozens of officials at various levels from the banking, securities and fund sectors have been investigated. Several senior banking officials have been tried or sentenced recently.

On April 18, Fan Yifei, former vice-president of Bank of China, was charged with accepting bribes of 386 million yuan for using his positions to help others seek benefits.

In February, Tian Huiyu, former president of China Merchants Bank, was given the death penalty, suspended for two years, with deprivation of political rights for life and confiscation of all personal assets, for crimes including abuse of power by State-owned company personnel, accepting bribes of over 210 million yuan, and making nearly 300 million yuan through trading with undisclosed information, insider trading and disclosure of insider information.

## Breakthrough points to wearable batteries

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai  
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Scientists at Fudan University in Shanghai have achieved a breakthrough in research on high-performance fiber batteries that could see people using their clothes and backpacks to charge mobile phones and watches.

They have designed samples of leather and canvas bags that look no different from ordinary ones but are embedded with the flexible fiber batteries. Jiang Haibo, a researcher on the team, said such a bag can wirelessly top up a mobile phone battery's charge by 20 to 30 percent in half an hour.

Such technology may also provide effective power for heated suits that could be used in winter, the researchers said.

They said bags and clothes with the fiber batteries can now be charged via wires or wirelessly and could possibly be integrated with solar energy in the near future, realizing the combination of energy storage and harvesting.

Peng Huisheng, a leading researcher in the study and an academician with the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said the team began working with flexible fiber lithium-ion batteries in 2008 and had solved a major problem in the latest study: how to use safe polymer gel electrolytes instead of the organic electrolytes commonly used in earlier fiber batteries.

Organic liquid electrolytes are flammable, leak easily and fail to meet the safety requirements for fiber batteries woven into textiles that have direct contact with people's skin.

It was considered difficult to replace the organic liquid electrolytes with polymer gel electrolytes, because polymer gel electrolytes are like jelly and easily slip off fiber electrodes. That meant they struggled to form a tight and stable contact interface with the fiber electrodes, resulting in low energy storage performance.

Peng got the inspiration for the breakthrough from creepers, which can be tightly and steadily wound around another plant. He studied why the two plants can be intertwined in such a perfect way.

The principle is that creepers secrete a liquid with good wettability, which penetrates into the pore structure of the contact surface between the two plants. The monomer in the liquid then polymerizes to glue the creeper to the other plant, entangling

“

In our study, we designed fiber electrodes with multi-level pore structures, and devised a solution to infiltrate into the pore structure.”

Peng Huisheng, professor at Fudan University

them tightly together.

“In our study, we designed fiber electrodes with multi-level pore structures, and devised a solution to infiltrate into the pore structure,” said Peng, who is a professor in Fudan's macromolecular science department and the corresponding author of a paper about the research that was published in the journal Nature on Wednesday.

He said the solution they used undergoes a chemical reaction and forms polymer gel electrolytes that form a tight and stable interface with the fiber electrodes, thereby achieving both high safety and high energy storage performance.

“All such difficulties conquered mean that we have pushed the boundaries in the research and development of flexible fiber batteries, paving the way to provide effective energy solutions in the fields of human-computer interaction, health detection and intelligent sensing,” Peng said.

Tests showed that the fiber batteries' performance remains stable after 100 washing cycles and 10,000 abrasion cycles, as required by industry standards. Even after being bent 100,000 times, it can still maintain a stable power output.

A pilot production line has been built to make fiber batteries on a large scale. It can produce fiber batteries with an energy density of 128 watt-hours per kilogram that are capable of supplying energy for high-powered appliances such as drones.

“The textiles have been shown in tests to supply power in a safe and stable manner to electrical appliances under high and low temperatures, vacuum environments and with external damage, giving them the potential to be used in important fields, such as fire and disaster relief, polar scientific research and aerospace,” Peng said.

## Chengdu ready to lift curtain on horticultural expo

By HUANG ZHILING  
and PENG CHAO in Chengdu

All preparations for the opening of the International Horticultural Exhibition 2024 Chengdu on Friday have been completed and it is ready to welcome visitors from around the world, a senior expo official said on Tuesday.

With the theme “Park City, Beautiful Habitat”, the expo in Chengdu, capital of Southwest China's Sichuan province, will run through Oct 28. It will showcase a diverse collection of flower and plant species, and gardening cultures from all over the world.

The installation of exhibitions at all 113 exhibition parks in the seven major exhibition areas of the main venue, as well as six core pavilions, has been completed, Zhang Yinchao, office director of the expo's organizing committee

and abroad, and will form a beautiful picture of harmonious coexistence between people and nature. “Apart from the exhibitions, more than 2,000 activities will be held during the 186-day event, including eight international professional competitions that will showcase the latest varieties, technologies and achievements in the field of horticulture,” he said, adding that the expo is expected to attract five million visitors.

Yang Min, deputy office director of the expo's executive committee and deputy director of the administrative committee of Chengdu East New Area, said the main venue, covering 242.2 hectares, will feature more exhibition parks and international exhibition parks than similar domestic events held previously.

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The Huaaju Pavilion, inspired by a hibiscus flower, in the Chengdu Garden at the International Horticultural Exhibition 2024 Chengdu in Sichuan's provincial capital on Monday. ZHANG LANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

The 39 international exhibition parks, established by countries from five continents, bring together world gardening styles including a Chinese landscape garden, Italian terrace garden, French palace-style garden, and a British natural landscape garden, he said.

Yang said Chinese and Western restaurants at the venue can provide 3,700 dining seats at the same time, while hotels around the main venue will offer more than 7,000 guest rooms. Mobile food trucks and drones will also be used for food delivery, he said.

The main venue will feature a variety of experiential activities, such as a music fountain show, lawn music fair and iron flower show, as

well as more than 100 cultural and creative products in 10 categories.

Zhou Jun, deputy director of the executive committee's publicity department and deputy director of Chengdu's park city construction administration bureau, said a series of “Chengdu theme week” activities will be held during the five-day May Day holiday, which starts on May 1.

They will feature unique Chengdu elements such as giant pandas and Sichuan Opera, allowing tourists to have a deeper understanding of the host city's rich culture and history, he said.

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一城 CITY TALES 一街

Editor's note: A number of Chinese cities have maintained their cultural memory in the form of historical neighborhoods that have only added to their multilayered charm and vigor with the passage of time. China Daily is taking readers on a journey to some of these timeless areas, where President Xi Jinping has left his footsteps and remarked on the preservation and vitalization of heritage. In this installment, we wander about the Sanfang Qixiang neighborhood in downtown Fuzhou, sheltered by luxuriant banyan trees and immersed in a cultural atmosphere that helped nurture the course of modern China.

# BRINGING THE HISTORY BACK TO THE HOMES

Restoration of historical Fujian neighborhood bolsters pride and preserves tradition, with a contemporary twist, Yang Feiyue and Hu Meidong report in Fuzhou.

The densely packed, historical buildings, with their mottled white walls and green moss on their black tiles, red lanterns hanging from their eaves and swaying in the wind, have a way of luring visitors into a sense of anachronism at Sanfang Qixiang.

The historical neighborhood's 200-odd ancient buildings, with their Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasty elements, fan out like a fishbone, creating maze-like lanes and alleys that constitute the fabric of the 40-hectare complex in downtown Fuzhou, capital of East China's Fujian province.

The area, the name of which translates as "Three Lanes and Seven Alleys", was initially built during the Jin Dynasty (265-420). During the Tang Dynasty (618-907), it became the center of a bustling development, as residents of high social status, ranging from government officials to scholars, settled there, before reaching its peak during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Before the 1990s, many of the mansions were subdivided into squatter homes. Some were on the verge of being demolished, as local authorities veered toward real estate development.

In 1991, when President Xi Jinping was secretary of the Fuzhou Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China — the city's top official — he led efforts to protect and renovate the ancient buildings and heritage sites at Sanfang Qixiang.

"This kicked off a shift in the development concept for the historical area from demolition to restoration. After about three decades of protection, the newly paved slate walkways lined with ancestral houses are studied with towering leafy banyan trees, each delicately pruned.

"There's not a hair out of place and everything is so clean and in order," says Chen Yongjian, who was born in the neighborhood and has lived here for more than seven decades.

About six years ago, he was relocated to a newly restored historical home tucked away in the alleys a few hundred meters from his former house.

It had once been one of the residences of Ming general Zhang Jing, and Chen used to share the home with 20 of his family members.

"It was so overcrowded that even the hallway was populated by two households," Chen says.

"Clutter filled up the public spaces, and the lack of underground sewage systems gave rise to a persistent stink," he adds.

As government preservation efforts kicked in, Chen says he noticed that his neighbors quickly stopped taking liberties and randomly decorating the property, and his home community has since undergone a face-lift.

His new home has a courtyard that separates his room from an anterior roofed space selling assorted trinkets, like necklaces and bracelets.

"I enjoy the serenity of the spacious room inside, while also being exposed to the vibes of the modern world across my threshold," Chen says.

Yan Longhua, a professor from the Fujian University of Technology, has been in charge of the historical area's protection and restoration since 2007.

"Our conservation efforts have been progressing. Throughout the process, we have been continuously examining the cultural and architectural landscape of Sanfang Qixiang and clarifying its characteristics and values," Yan says.

For example, one key element, the *ma'nanqiang*, the distinctive saddle-shaped wall typical of historical buildings found in Fujian, has been retained and is widely used in the design of Sanfang Qixiang's buildings.

Adorned with clay sculptures and paintings, the wall gently slopes up symmetrically on either side of a central "pommel", with its protruding upturned corners extending slightly outward, a bit like the eaves of a roof.

More details were added after Yan and his team studied the characteristics of Sanfang Qixiang in historical documents, and selected typical elements to integrate into the design of the *ma'nanqiang*.

For example, the rolling mountain landscape and marine elements of



GRAPHICS BY LIU CHEN, TEXT BY YANG FEIYUE / CHINA DAILY AND PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Top: Traditional houses in Fuzhou's Sanfang Qixiang neighborhood are usually decorated with colorful patterns on protruding eaves. Above: Towering banyan trees in Sanfang Qixiang silently witness the passage of time. LI WENSHU / CHINA DAILY

Online See more by scanning the code.

area of no more than 20 square meters in the 1980s, and people would only buy them for holidays and celebrations," Chen Junfan says.

Now his shop covers a much bigger area, and visitors can see their presence felt throughout the day.

The rising status of Sanfang Qixiang as a destination has injected a sense of pride in Chen Yongjian, leading him to volunteer as a tour guide for more than a decade.

"They have brought vitality to my home and I want to do my part to help it remain prosperous," Chen Yongjian says.

He has made a point of studying Sanfang Qixiang's history and keeps abreast of the exhibitions about historical figures that are held at their former residences.

Although he has had to reduce the number of tours he gives because of his dwindling physical strength, Chen Yongjian, in his 70s, says that he is not planning to give up the job, especially after President Xi visited the neighborhood during an inspection trip to Fujian in March 2021.

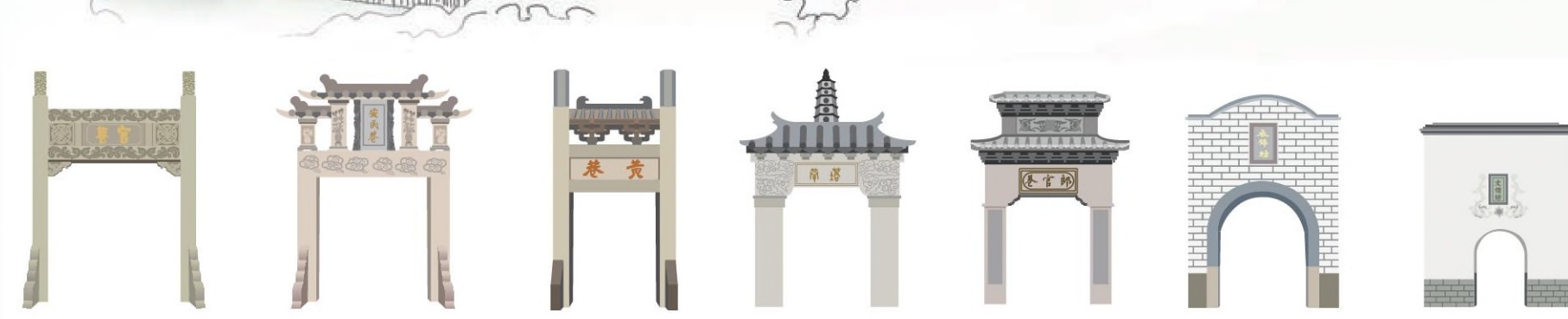
He says he has drawn strength from Xi's instructions about properly protecting ancient neighborhoods, buildings and cultural relics to preserve the history and cultural traditions of a city, and how important it is to "value and respect old buildings and neighborhoods."

"I feel fortunate to be part of the neighborhood, thanks to my ancestors who chose to settle here," Chen Yongjian says.

"I grew up listening to the stories of historical figures and I feel it a privilege to share my love for my hometown with people from far and wide."

Yang Feiyue contributed to this story.

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Some of the lanes and alleys in Fuzhou's Sanfang Qixiang have a unique gate: (from left) Gongxiang Alley; Anmin Alley; Huangxiang Alley; Taxiang Alley; Langguan Alley; Yijin Lane and Wenru Lane.

## Surprising encounters on streets where heritage lives on to this day

By ERIK NILSSON in Fuzhou erik\_nilsson@chinadaily.com.cn

We had to pilot our drone carefully to avoid a midair collision with a parrot.

Our film crew had already paid to fix the machine after thwacking it into the top of an archway the day before we encountered a man taking his parrot for a fly, much like others would take a dog for a walk.

As you do, I guess.

Our cameraman told him that he was worried about hitting the bird, pointing out our drone was "almost certainly more expensive" than the animal. "Impossible!" the guy replied. "The bird is definitely worth more!"

It was one of the last things I'd

Indeed, not only every dish, but every eatery in Sanfang Qixiang has a story, as one person I met during my visit told me.

More storied, however, are the neighborhood's 60-odd dwellings. Larger-than-life historical figures lived in these large historical mansions, endowing this tiny community with an outsized impact on this vast nation.

Perhaps most prominent among these is the rented residence where national hero Lin Zexu was born into poverty in 1785 and spent the first 20 years of his life.

Lin served as an official in 14 provinces and is still a household name for publicly burning 1.18 million kilograms of opium that British traders had smuggled into China in the early 1800s.

As rain tip-tapped on the courtyard's black ceramic shingles, I sipped Fujian's well-known rock tea during the Jin Dynasty (265-420) and continuously added to and renovated since.

It's hailed as a "living museum of

That is, dollops of minced pork sheathed in hunks of pork pounded into strips.

This local delicacy, which translates as "meat swallow" — a reference to the bird — dates back 140 years to Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) Emperor Guangxu, my host explained.

He recounted its history as we thwacked pork atop a polished tree stump with mallets for 20 minutes until the meat was just a few millimeters thick, causing my palms to tingle and eventually go numb.

He later invited me to serve the ones I'd made to customers, whose raised eyebrows revealed they hadn't expected a blonde-haired, blue-eyed waiter to be carrying steaming bowls of their order to their table.

Ming (1368-1644) and Qing architecture".

But, it was slated for demolition in the 1990s, after the land was sold to real estate developers, until President Xi Jinping, then secretary of the Fuzhou Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China, intervened to save the neighborhood from the wrecking ball. Fuzhou's old buildings have been given a new lease on life, thanks to this and subsequent preservation efforts.

The historical figures who once occupied these dwellings no longer live here — but their stories do.

Their homes now literally house the past. And they remind us how it shapes the cultural future of not just Fuzhou, but all of China — and, ultimately, the heritage that inhabits not only this community but also the world we all share.

Visitors to this ancient network of streets will discover that they are home to both local and universal legacies, and are an excellent place to get lost in time.

visitors pose with various goldfish lanterns in a small alley at Fuzhou's Sanfang Qixiang on Feb. 10. WEI PEIQIAN / XINHUA

Above: Scholars visit modern translator and thinker Yan Fu's residence in the neighborhood on Jan. 6. LYU MING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



Top: Visitors pose with various goldfish lanterns in a small alley at Fuzhou's Sanfang Qixiang on Feb. 10. WEI PEIQIAN / XINHUA Above: Scholars visit modern translator and thinker Yan Fu's residence in the neighborhood on Jan. 6. LYU MING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## LIFE

On the orange cover of the book *Yisheng Yishi* (roughly, a lifelong pursuit), a memoir by editor and publisher Li Xin about his four-decade career starting in 1982, is a black-and-white photo of him as a middle-aged man sitting at a desk under a lamp concentrating on a stack of papers — a draft of the Chinese version of *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* by US sociologist Ezra Feivel Vogel.

The book's publication in January 2013 marked the peak of his four-decade career, Li says. It has sold over 1.5 million copies.

On Douban, a major review aggregator in China, nearly 70,000 readers gave the book 9.3 points out of 10, ranking it in 18th place among the site's 250 top-rated books.

"It is absolutely the most important, difficult but successful book in my editing career," he says.

In *Yisheng Yishi*, Li outlines his career through important books that he worked on at what he identifies as four stages over the past 40 years.

He tells stories about producing books and his interactions with writers such as Vogel, Nobel laureate C.N. Yang, Louis Cha Leung-yung and writer and translator Yang Jiang.

As he has worked at top Chinese publishers since 1982 as one of the first university graduates after the country resumed college entrance examinations in 1977 — namely, People's Literature Publishing House, Joint Publishing HK, SDX Joint Publishing Company and the Commercial Press — Li's experience involving more than 3,000 titles showcases the developmental arc of China's publishing industry throughout this period.

"This book is a record of my experience in publishing over the last 40 years, through which I try to present my perceptions of the industry," he says.

He doesn't only chronicle his successes.

"I hope all the regrets I record in the book will help my peers," he writes in an essay about the book.

Zheng Yong, deputy editor-in-chief of Commercial Press, says, "The book is not only Li Xin's personal memoir but a historical account of the contemporary publishing industry to pass down from generation to generation."

Li was born in Beijing in 1952. His love of books blossomed during childhood. His father, a professor of foreign literature at Tsinghua University, subscribed to *Yiwen*, a magazine devoted to the translation and introduction of foreign literature, and bought many novels from China and abroad. After his father finished a book, his two elder sisters would read it before passing it along to him.

From the beginning of 1968 until April 1969, Li worked at the library of the Affiliated High School of Peking University, where he read *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes and sci-fi books like *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* by Jules Verne.

When Li worked in the countryside in Northeast China's Jilin province from 1969 to 1974, he took about 30 good books from the library with him, including ones by French writers Victor Hugo and Honore de Balzac.

Four years later, he passed the college entrance examination and



## A man of words

Memoir of a book editor and publisher reflects industry's vicissitudes over the past four decades, **Yang Yang** reports.

enrolled at Wuhan University to study Chinese language and literature. Upon graduation, he chose to work at the People's Literature Publishing House, aspiring to become a book editor and a literary critic.

"Compared with my university classmates, I lacked sufficient academic experience to do scholarly research," he says. "And I'm not talented enough to be a writer or journalist."

At university, Li found that his remarks at literary symposiums often stood out because his experiences in the countryside endowed him with a realistic perspective from which to understand literature.

"My experiences in rural areas allow me to better understand life and people, which is useful in literary criticism since novels usually reflect reality," he says.

He was also coaxed toward his occupation because of his belief that books could advance social progress.

Li quotes the founder of the Zhonghua Book Company (established in 1912), Lu Feikui, who once said: "Publishing is a comparatively small industry. But it exerts the greatest influence on social advancement."

"This is an objective observa-



Publishing industry veteran Li Xin's (pictured top) recent memoir (above), *Yisheng Yishi*, recalls his four-decade career working on more than 3,000 titles. The book reflects the development of China's publishing industry.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

tion that I completely agree with," Li explains.

"Although media have developed rapidly, to my mind, books are still the most influential. Publishing is a very important industry that helps shape people's souls."

Even so, Li says a good editor must know how to sell a book nowadays, following the advent of social media, as livestreaming platforms have become the major channels to market books in China.

"That's why I've appeared in marketing activities on various channels. We need to adapt to the new requirements of the times," he says.

Li believes editors should have cultural ideals to publish books that advance social development. Even if they're mostly entertaining, they should convey enlightening ideas.

He did not hesitate to seize the opportunity to work at the People's Literature Publishing House, which is one of the country's leading publishers.

As one of the few university graduates at that time, Li joined the editing team, working on books about literary theory, as reading grew in popularity and the public wanted more books about cultural and art theory.

One of them was *Zhongguo Xian-dai Xiaoshuoshi* (roughly, a history of modern Chinese fiction) by Yang Yi, a 30-something scholar who had just completed postgraduate school. Through Li's efforts, the three-volume book series brimming with over 1.5 million words became a textbook for liberal arts students at higher education institutions.

"We felt like we were fighting giant windmills like Don Quixote because many of the books on cultural and art theory we reviewed were undeveloped and definitely needed revision," he says.

"Generally speaking, my 14 years at the People's Literature Publishing House nurtured me as a talent, if I may be called one."

In *Yisheng Yishi*, Li records the process of working on key books at the publishing house to trace his trajectory. He especially recalls how he shifted his attention from books about literary and art theory to best-sellers by Hong Kong and Taiwan writers, such as Li Ao and Anita Leung Fung-ye, and books with more diverse genres and topics. The section about the first stage of his career also includes two lawsuits related to the copyright of Qian Zhongshu's *Weicheng* (Fortress Besieged) and Leung's work.

In 1996, Li got a chance to join Joint Publishing HK as its deputy editor-in-chief, in a market driven by profits and efficiency. He grew from an editor to a publisher in eight years.

"My experience in Hong Kong broadened my vision and helped formulate some of my publishing philosophy," he says.

One particularly important ability Li says he improved during this period was design aesthetics.

"At the People's Literature Publishing House, we published mostly black-and-white books with few illustrations. But in Hong Kong, I was involved in the publishing of all kinds of books, which gave me a better sense of design," he says.

"You get a good book, and you need to find a good form to present it. It's about how to design the look, what kind of paper to use, how large it should be and so on. It actually reflects readers' preferences. It is an ability to create a book that everyone loves."

In 2005, Li returned to Beijing and became deputy general manager and deputy editor-in-chief at SDX Joint Publishing Company. It was there, he says, that his career peaked with the publication of influential books over the nine years before he retired. These include *The Great Flowing River: A Memoir of China, From Manchuria to Taiwan* by Chi Pang-yuan, *Shangxue Ji* (roughly, memories of school) by He Zhaowu, *Chen Yinke De Zuihou Ershinian* (roughly, the last 20 years of Chen Yinke, an important historian and poet) by Lu Jiandong and *The Memoir Tetralogy* by Wang Dingjun, *Yixue De Wendu* (roughly, the temperature of medicine) by Han Qide, and *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*.

After retirement, Li became an adviser at the Commercial Press, where he continues to pursue social progress through book publishing.

"People ask me, how I could stick to one profession all my life," he says.

"It's because I feel fulfilled by my work"

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## The true story of a village's literary transformation

By XING WEN  
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In the 1950s, Zhou Libo (1908-79) wrote *Shanxiang Jubian* (Great Changes to Mountain Areas), a novel portraying the way the country's resolution on agricultural cooperatives boosted food production in a small village named Qingxi.

This book contains detailed, vivid rural-life scenes and vibrant character portraits. It uses dialect and colloquial language to evoke the colorful atmosphere of countryside culture. It draws upon Zhou's actual experiences doing farmwork during his stay in Qingxi village in Hunan province's Yiyang city, and has become one of his representative works.

While Zhou's writing captured the social landscape of Qingxi village in the 1950s, more than 60 years later, the power of literature has truly spread its wings as Qingxi has undergone a remarkable transformation as part of the country's

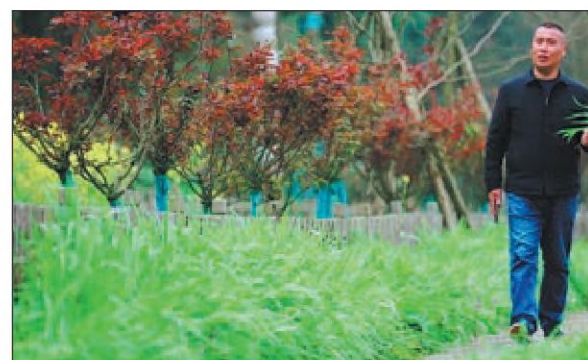
rural vitalization drive.

The village successfully redefined its development trajectory over the five years starting from 2018. It determined it would leverage its place as the novel's setting and use Zhou's former residence to turn itself into a "village of literature" with the support of the local government and the China Writers Association.

Scenes depicted in Zhou's writing, such as the lotus pond, camellia forests and pear orchards, were developed into tourist attractions. In early 2022, Qingxi obtained authorization from the association and associated publishing houses, and gradually built a series of bookstores and amassed a trove of editions signed by contemporary Chinese writers.

Bu Xuebin is the owner of Libo Bookstore. The 50-year-old villager previously worked as a farmer and then a miner when mineral extraction was a major industry in the area.

Around 2004, the mines were



Bu Xuebin, a villager and former miner, who has become a bookstore owner in Qingxi village, Yiyang, Hunan province, features in a documentary shown on Mango TV and Hunan Satellite TV.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

closed down. So, Bu and many other villagers had to seek livelihoods elsewhere. He traveled to different cities in search of mining jobs.

However, two years ago, when his hometown embarked on the

journey to become a village of literature, he made the decision to return home and start his own business in the culture and tourism sector.

With support from the local gov-

ernment, he turned his family's old residence into a bookstore named after Zhou.

"The initiative of empowering rural vitalization through culture has pulled me out from the 1,600-meter depths of a mine shaft and into the sunshine," Bu says.

Meanwhile, as the work of mine reclamation and environmental restoration unfolds, the scenery has become even more beautiful.

The average annual per capita income in Qingxi has reached 50,000 yuan (\$6,900). The area has seen a surge in vitality, accompanied by a growing number of young people returning home.

Recently, a six-episode documentary, *Qingxi Village — Great Changes to Mountain Areas in the New Era*, exploring how literature has transformed the village, was released on the video-sharing platform Mango TV and on Hunan Satellite TV. The episodes look at themes such as literary empowerment, environmental improvement, grassroots govern-

ance and industrial revitalization. Zhong Shan, its executive producer, recalls a visit to Qingxi village after a rainfall.

"That day, the rain caused the flower petals to scatter, and there weren't many people around the village. In the afternoon, I sat on the road outside Zhou Libo's former residence, sipping tea, lost in thought. Before I knew it, I had drunk three cups," says Zhong.

"For me, it was like rediscovering long-lost tranquility and a poetic atmosphere."

Liu Xinchao, deputy director of the School of Humanities at Central South University, says the documentary offers a glimpse into how the village has been practicing the development concepts of innovation, harmonization, greenness, openness and sharing.

"Rural areas are fertile ground nurturing the flourishing development of culture. By revitalizing culture in rural areas, we can tap into its advantages to chart a path for development," Liu says.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Talks can be fruitful if Washington bears in mind it takes two to tango

Both Beijing and Washington have said that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's ongoing visit to China is a follow-up to the earlier agreement between the leaders of the two countries on the need to sustain communication and manage the frayed bilateral ties.

There is little doubt about the importance of the two sides continuing to talk. But there is a huge question mark over what the discussions between the top US diplomat and his hosts can yield. It is generally assumed that given the current state of relations between the two sides, the chances are slim that the visit will culminate in any meaningful deliverables.

Beijing and Washington seem to have been largely talking past each other on very important issues of mutual concern in recent years, and the likelihood of that pattern changing during Blinken's visit appears remote. This is because, as distrust accumulates between the two governments, the gap between them keeps widening.

Secretary Blinken revealed prior to the trip a long list of subjects that he wanted to discuss with his Chinese hosts. It encompasses topics from China's alleged overcapacity to support for Russia's military industrial base to the East and South China seas to the Taiwan question to human rights to synthetic opioids to the Middle East.

At a news briefing by an official with the Foreign Ministry's Department of North American and Oceanian Affairs, Beijing categorically rejected Washington's narrative on every topic on Blinken's list.

On the conflict in Ukraine, the world can see it clearly that the Ukraine issue is not an issue between China and the US, and the US side should not turn it into one. On the Taiwan question, it's China's domestic affair that brooks no interference by outsiders. On the South China Sea issue, the US is not a party to the disputes there, and thus it should not intervene, not to mention mess things up. On human rights, matters involving Xinjiang, Xizang and Hong Kong are all China's internal affairs, which have nothing to do with human rights, and the US must not interfere with Chinese domestic affairs in the name of human rights. On the latest US accusation concerning "overcapacity", it is Washington that resorts to "naked economic coercion and bullying", targeting China's advantages in electric vehicles, power batteries and solar panels as results of the international division of labor and market demand.

Beijing also presented its own list of priorities for the discussions, which are establishing the right perception of ties, strengthening dialogue, effectively managing differences, promoting mutually beneficial cooperation, and jointly shouldering responsibilities as major countries.

But these fundamental building blocks for better relations have been laid on shaky ground as contrary to Beijing's expressed hope for a constructive atmosphere for the face-to-face communication, Blinken struck a harsh note before he departed for China.

He accused China of "supporting" Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, and attempted to enlist the European Union's support to mount pressure on Beijing. "If China purports on the one hand to want good relations with Europe and other countries, it can't on the other hand be fueling what is the biggest threat to European security since the end of the Cold War," he said last week.

Moreover, coinciding with Blinken's trip to China, media reports reveal that the US is planning to kick some Chinese banks out of the international financial system for allegedly financing Russia.

In a clear response to the US allegation of it assisting Russia's invasion, the Chinese government published a white paper titled "The Hypocrisy and Facts of the United States Foreign Aid" on Friday. The document turned out to be a fitting answer to the US Senate passing a high-profile package of foreign aid to Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan island on Tuesday night local time.

Indeed, on each and every subject Blinken is expected to raise during his talks with his hosts, he will present a diametrically opposite opinion to theirs, meaning there is little room for compromise unless there is some give and take.

While that has been found wanting up to now, the fact that Blinken is in Beijing for talks offers a glimmer of the hope that still lingers in Pandora's box, as it suggests that both sides still view the possibility of finding some firm common ground as a case of never say never.

## US people know well what's going on

Demonstrating students and faculty members on college campuses across the United States are calling for a permanent cease-fire in Gaza, an end to US military assistance for Israel, university divestment from arms suppliers and other companies profiting from the war, and an amnesty for students and faculty members who have been disciplined or fired for protesting.

These demands are fully justified given the US' backing of Israel's "self-defense campaign" in Gaza, which was triggered by the Hamas-led attack on Israel on Oct 7, has resulted in the loss of more than 34,000 Palestinian lives, including those of women and children.

Washington has seized on Israel's response to the attack as the opportunity to use Tel Aviv as its enforcer to advance its overall Middle East geopolitical agenda to reduce the influence of Iran and Russia in the region.

That being said, neither the Joe Biden administration nor the Benjamin Netanyahu government of Israel truly cares about the hostages it is believed that Hamas and other groups still hold, not to mention the plight of Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

Washington's veto of the State of Palestine's membership in the United Nations and the US lawmakers' approval of new military aid for Israel last week, which triggered the student protests in the US, have made it crystal clear that it is the real obstacle to peace in Gaza.

US President Joe Biden told reporters on Monday that he condemned both anti-Semitic protests and "those who don't understand what's going on with the Palestinians".

But who is it that doesn't understand that? The protesters have a very clear understanding of what is going on. They are calling for a cease-fire and for the colleges to divest from the US weapons manufacturers that are providing arms for Israel.

As with the Ukraine crisis, the upcoming US presidential election has become a complicating factor making the situation in the Middle East an extension of the US' domestic political games. The US' stance on the two regional crises reflects the latest movements and shakings of interest exchanges at home rather than the real interests of the nation.

The protests have also brought into the spotlight the influence of outside groups, influential alumni and big-money donors on colleges, who, having vested interests in the US' support of Israel, are pressuring the college administrators to silence the protesters.

The disconnect between the US elites and ordinary Americans, and the internal divisions within the two are reinforcing each other in a vicious cycle resulting in a series of contradictory foreign policies of the US. The US' airdrop of aid for Gaza, and the conflict between US law enforcers and the US students and teachers are both ugly shows of that. So are the US' schizoid three-in-one China policy of confrontation, competition and, supposedly, cooperation.

The backlash against the widespread protests against the country's one-sided pro-Israel policy and the Biden administration's nonchalant response to them and to the law enforcement departments' crackdown on the protesters speak volumes about the root cause of not only the Gaza crisis but also the problems in US society.

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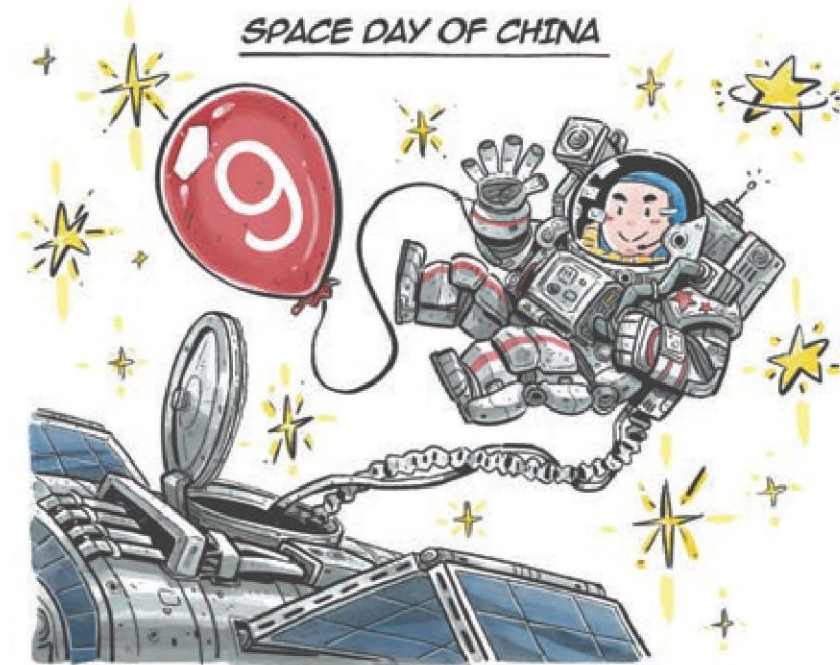
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Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## Development of western region faces new historic opportunities

China's vast western region, which covers 12 provincial-level regions and accounts for 21.5 percent of the country's GDP, is vital to the country's overall development.

At a symposium held in Chongqing on Tuesday for promoting the development of the western region, the top leader said that the region plays an important role in China's reform, development and stability, and should improve its overall strength and sustainable development capacity and contribute to the country's modernization drive.

The western region has so far built nine national strategic emerging industrial clusters on new materials and biomedics and five national advanced manufacturing clusters on electronic information and aviation, with its industrial added value increasing from 5.8 trillion yuan (\$800.5 billion) in 2019 to 8.1 trillion yuan in 2023.

The vast western region also boasts of

many unique resource advantages, based on which it has accelerated the cultivation and development of a series of characteristic industries. Because of continuous efforts to optimize the distribution of major productive forces, and give full play to its comparative advantages, the western region has made greater strides in promoting high-quality development in recent years, with regional GDP growing from 20.5 trillion yuan in 2019 to 26.9 trillion yuan in 2023, at an average annual growth rate of 4.9 percent, ranking top among China's four major regions.

The western region is also an important channel connecting China with the outside world, and a number of major international channels have been built across the region, opening China's road of opening-up and development. Since the beginning of this year, the container cargo transported by freight trains on the

new land-sea corridor via the western region has exceeded 200,000 twenty-foot equivalent units, a record high for the same period in earlier years.

The western region has actively integrated into the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative, and built a multi-level opening-up platform, breaking its past geographical disadvantage and forming a pattern of opening-up between land and sea and between the east and the west. In the past five years, a total of 35,000 China-Europe freight trains have been launched in the western region, accounting for 50.5 percent of the country's total, and the total import and export volume of the western region reached 3.7 trillion yuan in 2023, up 37 percent over 2019.

As more measures supporting the western region are to be rolled out, the region's development will take greater strides forward in the time ahead.

— GUANGMING DAILY

## 'Overcapacity' based on an illogical premise

Some media outlets in the West have been hyping up the issue of China's "overcapacity", claiming that China produces more than it consumes. An in-depth analysis will help set the record straight.

Overcapacity can manifest in various forms, such as absolute overcapacity, relative overcapacity and structural overcapacity. Capacity is a dynamic variable, with both demand and supply constantly changing, and achieving equilibrium is an ideal state that is not easily reached.

A look at statistical data finds more. The utilization rate of manufacturing capacity in the United States was 77.24 percent in the fourth quarter of 2023, while the utilization rate in China during the same period was 76 percent. Given

that there is little difference between the utilization rates of the two countries, how can the US justify its accusing China of "overcapacity"?

In international trade, each country produces products with its own comparative advantages and then exchanges them with others to maximize mutual benefits, which is a win-win situation. When designing production capacity, no country should only focus on itself and ignore others, particular China, the only country in the world that has a complete set of industrial categories as classified by the United Nations. With its huge market demand and long-term accumulation of technological innovation, China completed its industrialization process in

decades, while most developed countries took hundreds of years. With complete industrial supporting capabilities and abundant human resources, China can produce quality goods for its own needs as well as for the global market, and at reasonable prices, thus benefiting the whole world.

So it is not right to equate China's production capacity exceeding its domestic demand with overcapacity; it does not conform to economic principles. Just as the US sells various financial products to the world, China also sells mechanical and electrical products, textiles and clothing etc to the US. We exchange what we need with each other to achieve mutual benefits. There is no such thing as overcapacity.

— IFENG.COM

## What They Say

## Challenge of data privacy has to be faced to promote governance

Relevant departments in Shanghai have reportedly prohibited hotels' "face scanning" verification of customers who have presented their valid identity documents.

Facial recognition technology is commonly used in not only the hotel industry but also other fields such as transportation, with the intention of improving security.

However, some are questioning whether the compulsory "face scanning" constitutes violations of people's privacy, as it involves the collection of tremendous sensitive personal biometric information.

Not to mention that many violations of privacy have been reported, and some of them are related to such industries as banking, transportation, logistics and information. The protection

of personal data, including biometric data, is an issue that the government needs to address.

In the digital age, personal information seems to have public attributes. But fundamentally personal information belongs to the individual. How to determine the boundaries of personal information collection for public security purposes remains a question that needs to be answered.

The Personal Information Protection Law stipulates that "personal information processors may process sensitive personal information only when there is a specific purpose and sufficient necessity, and strict protective measures are taken".

It can be seen that the collection of personal information should also follow the principle of proportionality between means and purposes, and seek the greatest "common denominator" of governance between public security, commercial interests and individual rights and interests.

It should also be noted that there are no simple solution to such a complex problem, and a combination and balance must be found among the diverse interests and demands of all parties.

Shanghai's new rules for hotel check-in are not simply "one size fits all", but stipulate that if hotel guests do not bring their ID cards, they can still choose "face scanning" to verify their identity, or they can go to a police station for the issuance of relevant certificates.

That the previously compulsory "face scanning" was made optional in Shanghai for hotels in the city is a concession of the local government to people's right to privacy. That shows by innovating governance to make the public services more refined and precise the government can effectively improve the efficiency of social governance and ensure people's support for its policies.

— PEOPLE'S DAILY

## COMMENT

Zhao Huirong

## US, not China, adding fuel to Ukraine crisis

It has been widely reported that during his trip to China from Wednesday to Friday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will once again accuse China of "aiding Russia" in the Ukraine crisis. Absurdly, on Tuesday, the Senate passed a \$95 billion bill to provide military aid to Ukraine, Israel, and even China's Taiwan island, with the House having approved the package on Saturday.

If the State Department's statement is indeed true that Blinken will discuss how to fulfill the commitments made by the Chinese and US presidents in November last year, the US Congress should refrain from blatantly interfering in China's domestic affairs and cease exacerbating the crises in Ukraine and the Middle East.

As for the Ukraine crisis, China neither created the crisis nor is a party to it. In fact, China has been working to promote talks between Russia and Ukraine, and released a document, titled "China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis" to help end the conflict. And Chinese special envoy has traveled across the region to mediate among different parties, which shows China is playing a constructive role in helping resolve the Ukraine crisis.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict is a zero-sum game because it is not only the result of disputes between Russia and Ukraine but also a geopolitical showdown between Russia and the US-led West. So when the conflict will end depends on Russia, Ukraine, the US and NATO. Actually, the Russia-Ukraine conflict would have ended, if not prevented, had the US prioritized peace instead of being obsessed with maintaining its global hegemony.

On the other hand, despite building a comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era, China and Russia are not military allies, and China advocates for the two sides to adhere to the principle of non-alliance, non-confrontation and non-targeting of any third party.

The sustainable development of Sino-Russian cooperation not only stems from their historical ties, but also benefits from their geographical proximity and strong economic complementarity. China-Russia goods trade had been growing at a fast rate before the Ukraine crisis, with bilateral trade rising by 35.9 percent in 2021, according to Chinese official data.

Besides, Russia has been expanding trade with Asian countries since the Western countries imposed sanctions on it following the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis in 2022. Yet Sino-Russian trade grew by only 29.3 percent and 26.3 percent in 2022 and 2023 respectively after the Ukraine crisis broke out.

China has reiterated that it is not supplying weapons to either side in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and has nothing to do with the "Russian defense industrial



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

It is willing to hold candid and constructive discussions with the US to normalize bilateral relations. But the US needs to take true actions to improve bilateral ties, because that would benefit the people in not only the two countries but also the rest of the world.

cles, smartphones, toys and computers to Russia, with the export of buses and trucks soaring over the past years. This should make it more than clear that China has nothing to do with the "Russian defense industrial base".

In the San Francisco summit in November last year, the Chinese president told his US counterpart that for two large countries like China and the US, turning their backs on each other is not an option. It is unrealistic for one side to try and remodel the other, adding that confrontations and conflicts will have unbearable consequences for both sides.

It is necessary therefore for the two countries to develop mutual respect and engage in win-win cooperation. But some US politicians, fearing that other countries might replace the US as the global hegemonic power, are desperately trying to conceal the US' failure to address domestic problems by hyping up external threats. They have also been trying to divide countries into rival camps, which is not conducive to improving Sino-US relations or US development.

China attaches great importance to, and is committed to, developing friendly relations with the US. It is willing to hold candid and constructive discussions with the US to normalize bilateral relations. But the US needs to take true actions to improve bilateral ties, because that would benefit the people in not only the two countries but also the rest of the world.

The author is a research fellow at the Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

base". Its relationship with Russia is one of normal economic cooperation, which no country has the right to interfere in. Hence, China will not tolerate any snide remarks against its normal relations with Russia.

The US needs to look inward, at US companies' activities in many other countries. According to Federal Customs Service of the Russian Federation, trade between Russia and the US was \$5.5 bil-

lion in 2023, while the trade between Russia and Japan, and Russia and the Republic of Korea reached \$9.7 billion and \$15 billion respectively. And while Russia-India trade hit \$64.9 billion, Russia-Turkey trade was worth \$56.5 billion. It should also be noted that Russia is still supplying gas to Europe via pipes through Ukraine and Turkey.

Sino-Russian trade, meanwhile, is focused on traditional goods rather than

weapons or defense equipment. Coal, oil and natural gas accounted for the largest percentage of China's imports from Russia, with the import of Russian crude rising by 24 percent in 2023 to 107 million metric tons. The other products China imports in bulk from Russia include copper, copper ore, timber and seafood, with the import of Russian agricultural and food products rising significantly.

China, on its part, mainly exports vehi-

Amr El Henawy

## Palace Museum exhibitions show civilizations don't necessarily clash

One usually doesn't visit a museum to learn about new global realities. But exhibitions of historical relics at the Palace Museum (Forbidden City) in Beijing are teaching cogent lessons about contemporary, real-world developments. The exhibitions are being held only because of dramatically changing geopolitical and economic relationships.

One recent exhibition titled, "Historic Encounters: Interaction between China and West Asia", was one of the latest subjects of a report in Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post. In the exhibition are displayed hundreds of ancient Saudi Arabian and Iranian artifacts, some of which illustrate reciprocal cultural influence in early China-Middle East trade along the ancient Silk Road.

Another exhibition at the Palace Museum, called "The Glory of Ancient Persia", explores the rich cultural history of Iran. Yet another, titled "AlUla, Wonder of Arabia", displays artifacts from an ancient oasis city in the Medina province of Saudi Arabia.

These exhibitions, with artifacts loaned from Iran and Saudi Arabia, could be held only because of the recent triumph of Chinese diplomacy. In March 2023, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi eventually managed to broker a rapprochement between Riyadh and Teheran, leading to the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

## Diplomacy paves way for museum exchanges

But why would the Palace Museum — the repository of the greatest artistic achievements of Chinese civilization — showcase the products of ancient Islamic civilization? One immediate stimulus may have been

Beijing's official commitment to "enhanced exchanges and understanding" among different cultures, as proposed by the Global Civilization Initiative put forward by China's top leader in March 2023.

An event more than a decade earlier provides a deeper explanation. On Sept 7, 2013, at Nazarbayev University in Astana, Kazakhstan, President Xi Jinping, while delivering a speech on the "Silk Road Economic Belt", emphasized its lessons for peaceful trade and cultural exchanges in the contemporary world. The Palace Museum is proving the president's point with exhibitions of goods traded centuries ago and of artifacts illustrative of the cultural influences between peoples.

But the Palace Museum's exhibitions are also recognizing a new contemporary reality: China is opening its doors wider to other civilizations. That speech in Kazakhstan marked the launch of the most significant development initiative of the 21st century, the Belt and Road Initiative.

President Xi said the Belt and Road Initiative is to be "rooted in the ancient Silk Road", and to a remarkable extent, many of its first major projects were in the Muslim countries the ancient Silk Road passed through. Today, the initiative involves projects in more than 150 countries, including many that are home to some of the world's nearly 2 billion Muslims.

The Palace Museum's recent exhibitions on Persian, Saudi Arabian and other Middle East artifacts acknowledge China's deepening contemporary engagement with Muslim countries. In the third decade of the 21st Century, when two-fifths of the global population identify with either Chinese or Islamic civilizations, they need to recognize one another: the Palace Museum is doing exactly that.

## Today's Chinese and Arab business leaders need risk neither life nor limb to seize the burgeoning opportunities in each other's markets.

But it is in the Middle East and North Africa that Belt and Road projects are achieving their most dramatic real-world results. Although frequently accused by critics of being "debt traps", major Belt and Road infrastructure projects in the region have integrated seamlessly with Arab countries' national development plans (such as Morocco's Emergence Plan 2020, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, Oman's Vision 2040 and Egypt's Vision 2030).

## Chinese investments funding vital projects

The modernization of ports (including Saudi Arabia's Jeddah Islamic Port and the United Arab Emirates' Jebel Ali Port in Dubai) has boosted trade and improved logistics for supply chains. New economic zones (such as Oman's Duqm Special Economic Zone and Egypt's Suez Canal Economic Zone) are stirring economic activity. And Chinese investments have funded developments in energy, infrastructure, manufacturing and technology.

Moreover, China has repeatedly and clearly underscored its commitment to the Arab states. In December 2022, while attending the China-Arab States Summit during his state visit to Saudi Arabia, the top Chinese leader urged that "the spirit of China-Arab friendship" be developed into "a closer China-Arab community with a

shared future". He reiterated that the Belt and Road Initiative will be the guiding principle, "the lodestar", for such collaboration, and described the relationship between China and the Arab world as a "strategic partnership of comprehensive cooperation and common development".

In economic terms, the partnership promises to link China's market of 1.4 billion people, with the 475 million people of the Arab world. And in geopolitical terms, it suggests a fundamental, long-term re-shaping of relations of the Middle East and North Africa with the rest of the world.

The connectivity enabled by these developments is not only between the Chinese and Arab people. The Doraleh Multipurpose Port, a major Belt and Road development project in Djibouti, is serving as a new gateway from the Middle East to Africa. In recent years, the UAE's trade has surpassed the US' trade with sub-Saharan Africa and, as reported by The Economist (March 26, 2024), Dubai is now home to more than 26,000 African companies. African businesspeople seeking investment and support also congregate in Abu Dhabi, Riyadh or Qatar.

In fact, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's government has been quick to recognize the Middle East and North Africa as the 21st century's most rapidly developing commercial and financial powerhouse. It has done a good job of following up on Belt and Road projects with visits of official delegations to key cities and countries in the region while mobilizing the SAR's resources to develop a full agenda of cultural and financial mega events.

But official enthusiasm for exploiting the vast untapped potential in the Middle East

and North Africa has thus far failed to encourage businesses in Hong Kong and the rest of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area to make equal efforts. The same lack of private initiative is true of most Arab businesspeople: they know the vast potential of the Chinese market, but instead of committing resources to it, they hesitate and falter to do so.

Government-to-government contacts alone are never enough to promote commercial and financial development. The effective impetus always comes from people-to-people interactions: at first, in small business deals between individuals; later, after gradually building relations of trust, ever larger deals involving more people; and as mutual profit increases, developing genuine business friendships and partnerships. When people meet to trade, civilizations don't need to clash.

The impressive antiquities from sites in Iran and Saudi Arabia are drawing huge crowds in Beijing. But it is the much humbler, camel-borne objects in the recent exhibitions of Palace Museum that had the clearest lessons for us. They were traded centuries ago by individuals who trekked across deserts and mountains to faraway places. Today's Chinese and Arab business leaders need risk neither life nor limb to seize the burgeoning opportunities in each other's markets. The doors have been opened for them.

The author, a former Egyptian diplomat, is now a permanent resident with his family in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and heads the MENA Chamber of Commerce and promotes business ties between Chinese and Arab businesses. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

# GLOBAL VIEWS

ANTHONY MORETTI

## Wishful thinking

Another nebulous US-led BRI competitor with strings attached

There is an old saying in the West: "If you can't beat them, join them."

Perhaps the United States' politicians — most especially those in the Joe Biden administration — will accept that reality at some point. That would then allow the US to become a partner in China's successful Belt and Road Initiative.



But until that day arrives (and no realist expects it to), the US will continue to unveil watered-down and inadequate competitors to the BRI.

The most recent example: The proposed Luzon Economic Corridor, whose primary goal, according to the State Department, is to "support connectivity between Subic Bay, Clark, Manila and Batangas in the Philippines."

To this end, the US State Department said, "The United States, the Philippines and Japan will accelerate coordinated investments in high-impact infrastructure projects, including rail; ports modernization; clean energy and semiconductor supply chains and deployments; and agribusiness to further connect and drive economic growth in each hub."

That sounds great, but is it realistic?

Before we examine the LEC and address that question, let's look back at another highly touted connectivity plan the US had in mind. There are important lessons we can learn from it.

In 2023, the US announced the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, an effort that would speed up cargo shipments and improve communications across multiple continents. The White House stated that the "landmark" arrangement would unlock "sustainable and inclusive economic growth" throughout Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Short on promises but long on ambition, the IMEC would dent the BRI and affirm the US' place as a global economic dealmaker.



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

Late last year, I examined the IMEC and highlighted a few concerns. I questioned whether tangible and sustainable projects would ever be launched. I asked if China's positive engagement with the Middle East would lead countries in the region to question the US' commitment to peace and therefore make them reconsider the US' purpose for engaging in IMEC. (The recent US decision to shoot down a UN

resolution to grant Palestine full membership within the organization will exacerbate those concerns.) Finally, I argued that the US' message about democracy and human rights was falling on deaf ears; Washington can no longer dictate to other countries how those nations will conduct their internal affairs.

I concluded that "skepticism abounds (about the IMEC) with far fewer countries interested in partic-

ipating (compared to the BRI) and a paltry budget associated with it". And where does the IMEC stand roughly eight months after it was trumpeted on the global stage?

In January, Bloomberg reported that the IMEC had been shelved and "talk of the transcontinental trade lane has all but gone silent". One analyst noted that "Washington is seriously struggling to counter China's grand economic vision" connected to the BRI.

With that in mind, let's now turn our attention to the LEC again.

On the surface, the LEC looks to be rooted in geopolitics and linked to an effort by the three countries to antagonize China. The Philippines' recent rocky diplomatic relationship with China has led Manila to seek even deeper ties with the US. Meanwhile, Japan has more and more often aired its concerns about Chinese "aggression" in the region.

Let's not forget that the Philippines became part of the BRI in 2018 and then walked away from the initiative in late 2023, a move the government claimed was necessary because China was repeatedly delaying the funding of three BRI-related projects inside the Philippines. Recognizing that Japan was already investing heavily in improving public transportation in the country, Filipino officials seemed quite confident that kicking Beijing to the curb would not be a problem. In fact, the leaders of the US, the Philippines and Japan claimed that preventing the Philippines from becoming a victim of "economic coercion" mandated the LEC.

The three leaders have promised to outline further details about the LEC next month. The LEC has nothing concrete attached to it. No vetted dollar figure. No timeline of when the first project will commence. No indication of benchmarks for success. Nothing, except for suggestions from Manila that it will be the beneficiary of up to \$100 billion in investments over the next decade.

Only the most naive of people would fail to see that any arrangement the Philippines enters into with the US and Japan comes with a catch: The country could be forced to enter any future regional military conflict. The US Secretary of Defense noted just a few days ago that the Philippines was an essential piece in the US' military strategy throughout Asia. No one would be surprised to see more war material and money earmarked for defense heading to the Philippines in the near future. It being a partner in the LEC — with the baggage associated with it — is on the US' wish list.

*The author is an associate professor in the Department of Communication and Organizational Leadership at Robert Morris University in Pennsylvania. 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.*

DIANAH NGUI AND OYINTARELADO MOSES

## Progressive change

Steps can be taken to ensure that China's economic engagement is supporting Africa's energy transition

African countries are still recovering from several external shocks that have affected economic growth: the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukraine crisis and the effects of climate change. These trends have led to debt distress, fiscal deficits and strained global supply chains.



Dianah Ngui

This economic state constrains the ability of African countries to focus their resources on low-carbon development goals such as energy access and transition.



Oyintarelado Moses

Even today, 43 percent of the African population do not have access to electricity and 670 million Africans lack access to a clean source of energy for cooking.

Although Africa's green energy potential (wind, solar, hydroelectric and geothermal) is one of the highest in the world and it has the potential to improve energy access and affordability, the share of renewable energy (solar and wind) in the continent's total energy production is marginal, leaving African countries dependent on fossil fuels.

African countries may be constrained by challenging economic factors, but the energy transition presents a unique opportunity to improve energy access and affordability. Initiatives such as the African Union's African Energy Transition Program show that African countries demand consistent capital to realize energy access and transition objectives.

China has been a strong partner in supporting economic growth and sustainable development in

Africa. In fact, compared to other multilateral institutions and countries, China provided the highest amount of energy finance to African countries from 2012 to 2021, contributing to the continent's increasing electrification and export revenues from resource extraction. Given Africa's current economic challenges and energy opportunities, the next phase of China-Africa economic relations should see China playing a bigger role in contributing to African countries' low-carbon development goals.

Past trends in China-Africa economic relations, including trade, development finance and foreign direct investment, highlight how China could address this growing demand.

The Africa-China trade in goods from 2000 to 2022 shows three major trends: trade expansion, deficits and an exchange of natural resources for finished products. China has increasingly become many African countries' top trading partner, which has led to an increase in trade from \$11.67 billion in 2000 to \$257.67 billion in 2022. This exponential growth has also led to a trade deficit for African countries and trade surplus for China, due to African countries' exports of natural resource primary commodities that fluctuate in price and imports of higher-value goods, such as telecommunications equipment, footwear and machinery. However, renewable energy technologies that benefit from Africa's raw commodity inputs are not among the top goods African countries import from China.

Chinese development finance has benefited the infrastructure development of African countries but the environment and biodiversity impact should also be addressed. From 2000 to 2022, the China Development Bank (CDB) and the Export-Import Bank of China

(CHEXIM) supplied at least \$134.01 billion in financing to African countries. About 39 percent of this finance was distributed to the energy sector. Over half of the energy development finance was to fossil fuel projects that provided electrification and or extraction of primary energy commodities. Hydropower plants received 31 percent of the energy finance, while renewable energy (solar and wind) projects only received 2 percent. In the coming years, as China greens the Belt and Road Initiative, the CDB and CHEXIM are expected expand concessional financing to renewable energy sectors on the African continent.

FDI from Chinese companies is a promising stream of capital that does not burden African countries' balance sheets. From 2000 to 2022, Chinese investors announced \$112.34 billion in greenfield FDI and completed \$24.60 billion in mergers and acquisitions deals. Relative to development finance, a higher proportion of FDI (8 percent) from Chinese companies was directed to renewable energy investments, including announcements of greenfield investments for solar panels and farms. Chinese FDI has also been channeled to transition material inputs into renewable energy technologies. About 49 percent of Chinese M&A deals and 25 percent of greenfield FDI announcements were for the exploration and extraction of materials such as copper, aluminum and iron, essential inputs for electric vehicle batteries, solar modules and wind turbines. While this shows African countries' place at the upstream stage of these supply chains, there is room for China to expand these renewable energy technologies to African countries.

African countries and China can take several steps to ensure their economic engagement is supporting Africa's energy access



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

and transition goals.

African government recipients of Chinese overseas development finance should aim to advance mid-stream or downstream activities associated with the production of batteries, an area of growth that various African governments have identified as an opportunity to move up the value chain. Given that Africa is endowed with natural resources, it can invest in renewable technologies that can be used to process the unfinished products exported to China.

FDI support for fossil fuels such as oil runs counter to global energy transition goals. Although investment in essential transition materials shows African countries play a primary upstream role in the supply-chain for renewable energy technologies, African countries should enact policies to ensure that extraction of these commodities aligns with increasing energy access.

China's imports of transition material inputs for various types of

green technologies indicate that there is potential for ensuring that the extraction of these commodities is aligned with increased energy access goals. China could export renewable energy technologies that use the primary commodities imported to China to provide more support toward the development of Africa's renewable energy potential. Furthermore, to increase the share of renewable energy in the continent's total energy production and consumption, CDB and CHEXIM should push to fund accessible and affordable renewable sources that are directed toward meeting the energy access needs on the African continent.

China has already indicated that it will prioritize engagement with African countries focused on sustainable and green investments through a greener Belt and Road Initiative and high-quality China-Africa cooperation. What is more, China would see benefits from shifting its economic engagement

with African countries, such as leading a global energy transition, further enhancing relations with African countries and expanding the presence of Chinese green companies in the Global South.

Moving forward, China can rebalance to other forms of economic engagement to preserve the economic ties it has built with African countries over the past two decades. If so, the next two decades of China-Africa economic engagement could potentially be even brighter than the past two.

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## BUSINESS

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## PBOC may up bond trading

Experts: Any such move shouldn't be misunderstood as quantitative easing

By ZHOU LANXU  
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China's central bank will likely increase the trading of government bonds as a liquidity management tool, yet such a move should not be misunderstood as quantitative easing, officials and experts said.

It is appropriate for China to maintain the stability of monetary policy given the remaining scope of interest rate cuts, experts said, citing the likelihood for China to slightly cut policy benchmarks of interest rates in the second half of the year.

Financial News, a newspaper backed by the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, reported on Tuesday that the trading of treasury bonds in the secondary market can be used as a liquidity management method and a reserve of monetary policy tools.

Quoting an unidentified PBOC official, the report said China's treasury bond market has become the world's third-largest with improved liquidity, making it possible for the central bank to conduct bond buying and selling on the secondary market.

But the official drew a clear distinction between such an operation from QE, in response to speculation that China could resort to QE to bolster the economy.

Typically, QE is deployed when the scope for conventional monetary policy is exhausted — such as when interest rates are close to zero — and is conducted via central banks' direct purchase of government bonds and other financial assets.

"Some central banks in developed economies, having exhausted conventional monetary policy tools, were forced into large-scale, one-way purchases of government bonds to achieve monetary policy goals. In contrast, China adheres



A pedestrian walks past the headquarters of the PBOC in Beijing.  
JIANG QIMING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

to normal monetary policy.

"The PBOC's buying and selling of government bonds would be fundamentally different from those central banks' QE operations," the official told Financial News.

Guo Kai, executive president of the CF40 Institute, said it is now unnecessary for China to resort to QE as the current interest rate level is far from zero.

As long as bond purchases are not combined with expanded fiscal budgets, they themselves do not count as QE, said Guo, who worked with the PBOC in the past.

Channel Yeung, a market analyst at financial trading platform FXIM, said it is appropriate for the PBOC to stick with a prudent policy stance as aggressive easing measures such as QE can indeed stimulate the economy in the short term but would lead to long-term pains like sticky, high inflation, as seen in many developed economies.

Yeung further said he expects the PBOC to likely cut interest rates in the second half when the cycle of global central banks' rate cuts is in place, because cutting interest rates now could destabilize the yuan by widening the elevated US-China interest rate spread further.

The Financial News report also quoted the unidentified official as saying that China's long-term government bond yields will recover upon the issuance of ultra-long-term treasury bonds.

The yield of China's 10-year government bonds has declined sharply this year, standing at 2.25 percent as of Wednesday, compared with 2.57 percent by the end of last year, according to market tracker Wind Info.

The official attributed the recent decline in bond yields to the tight supply of risk-free financial assets, instead of a worsening of China's long-term economic outlook or depressed inflationary expectations.

Steven Barnett, senior resident representative of the International Monetary Fund in China, said on Wednesday that the IMF forecasts that inflation could quickly recover in China, with the growth in the consumer price index expected to come back to about 2 percent by the end of this year.

He made the remarks at the launch of the IMF World Economic Outlook in Beijing, co-hosted by the International Monetary Institute of the Renmin University of China.

Yao Yuxin contributed to this story.

## Briefly

## Central bank adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 2 billion yuan (\$281.5 million) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.8 percent on Wednesday. The move aims to keep liquidity reasonable and ample in the banking system, the People's Bank of China said in a statement.

## Shanxi coal-bed methane output rises 11.8% in Q1

Shanxi province extracted 3.07 billion cubic meters of coal-bed methane in the first three months, up 11.8 percent year-on-year, accounting for about 80.8 percent of the country's total, according to the provincial energy bureau.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

## Bain: PE firms can grow amid odds

By SHI JING in Shanghai  
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While China's private equity firms still face onerous challenges this year due to economic growth pressure, fewer initial public offerings and continued divergence in valuation expectations, they can still look for opportunities in emerging industries such as artificial intelligence and multinational company spin-offs, said market consultancy Bain & Co.

Despite existing difficulties in fundraising, Chinese PEs are searching for more valuable investment sectors, including AI, said Bain & Co's survey report released on Tuesday.

About 25 percent of surveyed Chinese limited partners (capital providers), general partners (capital managers) are looking for investable assets in the AI sector. Meanwhile, 33 percent of Chinese GPs and LPs are keeping an eye on generative AI's impact on due diligence processes for potential deals.

GPs on the sell side now face increasing urgency related to exit strategies. But IPOs, which are a major exit option channel for PEs, have become stagnant in the A-share market.

According to professional services provider Deloitte, only 30 IPOs were made in the A-share market in the first quarter, down 56 percent year-on-year. Proceeds raised also contracted 64 percent year-on-year to 23.6 billion yuan (\$3.3 billion).

Against such a backdrop, the industry now has more frequently opted for secondary funds, which sometimes involve strategic mergers and acquisitions, said Nancy Zheng, a Shanghai-based partner from Bain Greater China PE practice.

Bain & Co said about 79 percent of Chinese PEs will conduct more M&As this year or remain the same level as in the previous year. The stable and low interest rate environment in China, more business spin-offs, the entry of more assets in the market, the large amount of capital held by PEs and lower transaction multiples may result in a rebound in the Chinese M&A market, said the consultancy.

Acquiring post-spin-off business divisions from foreign firms' China operations will also become another emerging investment theme for Chinese PEs, as most of them are quality and mature assets, Zheng said.

Deals in overseas markets will also gain in popularity among Chinese PEs. Latin America, Oceania and North America are among popular investment destinations, she added.

According to Bain & Co's report, deal activity in the Chinese PE market fell to a 10-year low in 2023. Total annual deal value stood at \$41 billion last year, down a dramatic 58 percent compared to the five-year average between 2018 and 2022.

But this is in line with the global trend, as the world has been undergoing an economic slowdown and rising macroeconomic uncertainties, said Zhou Hao, head of Bain & Co Greater China PE practice.

Last year, renminbi fundraising reported a modest 5 percent annual growth. But China-focused dollar fundraising plunged 44 percent year-on-year. Key reasons are LPs tightening their purse strings and directing their money to other regions. Some established dollar GPs have thus ventured into the RMB market for additional fund sources, particularly in insurance and private wealth management, according to the report.

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## BUSINESS

# Carbon goals bring new boon to energy firms

TotalEnergies China to enhance ties with local partners, expand biz fields

By ZHENG XIN  
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China's carbon neutrality plan is significant for building a green future, and will lay a solid foundation for the success of multinational energy companies in the country, a top executive said.

"As China intensifies its exploration in energy transition, our cooperation with Chinese partners continues to deepen, expanding from the local market to the global market and extending from traditional industries to cover new energy fields," said TotalEnergies China Country Chair Yu Yongjian.

Amid China's efforts to transition toward cleaner energy sources, the company has been exploring and promoting cooperation with the country in various clean energy businesses and technologies, which include green electricity, biofuel hydrogen energy, and carbon capture, utilization and storage (CCUS). It also eyes further expansion locally.

China has begun to turn policies into actions, formulating dynamic and pragmatic road maps, and TotalEnergies is committed to deepening its partnerships with Chinese companies to achieve the common goal of net-zero emissions, Yu said.

As part of the company's efforts to increase its footprint to cover more of the renewables business in China, it has already developed more than 500 megawatts of rooftop solar projects in the country, through its joint venture TotalEnergies Envision Energy Services & Solutions Co, contributing to China's renewable energy capacity.

The company is also trying to engage in China's offshore wind power market, taking advantage of its experience in offshore and deep-sea operations to harness the vast potential of wind power to meet China's increasing demand for cleaner and sustainable energy, it said.

Yu said the company is looking forward to cooperating with Chinese partners to further advance the development of China's offshore wind power industry.

Multinational energy firms' burgeoning expansion within China's renewable energy sector is poised to bolster their position as key catalysts in the nation's eco-friendly evolution, said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the

Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

"These companies' strategic expansion further underscores the global energy sector's acknowledgment of the imperative for collective action in combating climate change, Luo said.

The company is also actively pursuing projects in onshore renewables, e-mobility, biofuels as well as hydrogen energy to support China's progressive shift toward net-zero.

In March, the company signed an agreement with China Petroleum & Chemical Corp, or Sinopec, to jointly build a production line with an annual capacity of 230,000 metric tons of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) to help the nation's aviation industry reduce its carbon footprint.

The planned unit will produce SAF and will process local waste or residues from the circular economy, including cooking oils and animal fats. TotalEnergies has set itself a target of 1.5 million tons of annual SAF production by 2030.

Ma Yongsheng, chairman of Sinopec, said the collaboration with TotalEnergies is in line with Sinopec's strategy for the development of low-carbon solutions for China and the world.

As the world's third-largest LNG player, TotalEnergies has also supplied more than 5 million tons per annum of liquefied natural gas to the country in 2023. The company will further develop its LNG business in China and contribute to China's energy transition.

According to Yu, energy storage is an indispensable technology for developing renewable energy. The company has expanded its business into various industries and plays an increasingly important role in the country.

"As one of the first international energy companies to enter China's offshore oil and gas exploration and refining business following the country's reform and opening-up policy, we have been present in China for over 40 years, actively engaged in the entire energy industry chain," said Yu.

"We are committed to continuing sharing experiences, technologies and expertise with Chinese partners to establish mutually beneficial cooperation as we jointly develop energy businesses at home and abroad."



Visitors gather at Nippon Paint China's booth during an industry fair in Shanghai in August. The Singapore-based Nipsea Group is the parent company of Nippon Paint China. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Nipsea coating plant in Tianjin to go online in June

By ZHONG NAN  
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Driven by an automobile production boom in China, Nipsea Group, parent company of Nippon Paint China, will bring a new plant online with an investment of 960 million yuan (\$133 million) in Tianjin in June, said its top executive.

The Singapore-based company's Tianjin plant will focus on producing industrial coatings to meet surging demand from China's automotive sector.

Nipsea will also launch a new innovation center with 1,000 researchers and staff members in Shanghai in early 2026. It will be Nipsea's largest such facility in the Asia-Pacific region.

Wee Siew Kim, CEO of Nipsea, said the company aims to consolidate its tech teams, enabling them to generate even greater value for the group's business in China by early 2026.

Nipsea, one of the world's largest coatings and construction solutions manufacturers by sales revenue, was established by Goh Cheng Liang, an overseas Chinese entrepreneur, in Singapore in 1962. Its country unit Nippon Paint China currently runs 70 plants with around 11,000 employees across the country.

"While we are currently strong in the automotive segment, this sector is undergoing significant

changes. For instance, electric vehicles currently constitute a fraction of total car sales, but this is expected to increase dramatically between 2030 and 2040 as gasoline-powered vehicles decline," said Wee.

Moreover, hybrid vehicles are also gaining in popularity. Currently, China is the largest EV market globally and is home to some of the world's leading EV manufacturers, he added.

Noting that technologies will accelerate fairly fast in China — and as a paints and coatings manufacturer with a strong entry or at least a strong presence with several original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) — Wee said Nipsea can ride the EV wave by supplying battery materials, insulation and cabling harness products.

The Beijing-based China Association of Automobile Manufacturers said local and international automakers in China manufactured a record 30.16 million vehicles in 2023. They also delivered 30.09 million units, another record, marking increases of 11.6 percent and 12 percent year-on-year, respectively.

Because Chinese manufacturers rely on talent, supply chains and products from China when expanding into Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia, the first step is for Nipsea's Chinese team to work with the company's local teams in these

“As an auto company expands internationally, its parts suppliers also move abroad. Consequently, we are seeing numerous Chinese parts suppliers establishing operations in countries like Mexico, Thailand and Indonesia.”

Wee Siew Kim, CEO of Nipsea

countries to transfer the formula for success. This collaboration ensures that customers see no interruptions or changes in their expected outcomes, said Wee.

"As an auto company expands internationally, its parts suppliers also move abroad. Consequently, we are seeing numerous Chinese parts suppliers establishing operations in countries like Mexico, Thailand and Indonesia. We are making efforts to at least secure a portion of that business," he explained.

Following China's announcement that it has lifted all restrictions on foreign investment in the manufacturing sector and implemented measures to ensure equal treatment for foreign-funded companies, Wee said that these moves have greatly bolstered Nipsea's confidence in the country.

The executive said that China serves as an excellent example, particularly in the paints and coatings industry, where it has been one of the fastest-evolving markets over the last two decades. Nipsea Group has greatly benefited from innovations in the marketplace, as well as products and business strategies originating from China, including the adoption of platforms like WeChat for mobile business operations.

Supported by 29,000 employees with 121 manufacturing facilities and operations across the world, Nipsea's arsenal of solutions for the industry covers architectural, industrial, protective, automotive and marine coatings.

China's ongoing industrial upgrade and dedication to environmental sustainability will continue to strengthen its competitive stance globally, attracting multinational corporations that are keen to establish innovation and manufacturing facilities in the country, said Wang Xiaosong, a professor at Renmin University of China's School of Economics in Beijing.



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## BUSINESSFOCUS

## CHINA UP-CLOSE

## Nike runs quickly to outpace industry in China

Initiative to drive novelty, enhance connections with younger buyers around the world

By WANG ZHUOQIONG

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Global sportswear brand Nike is doubling down on the Chinese market by leveraging a responsive and localized creative platform as well as innovations centered on its patented Air technology.

The initiative — to drive growth — aims to bring in freshness, solidify its dominant position in the sportswear industry, and enhance its connections with younger consumers globally.

John Donahoe, president and CEO of Nike Inc, said the sportswear brand will continue to invest steadily in China.

"China is a very important market for Nike. It always has been and always will be. We're committed to investing in China. We believe in China. We'll keep doubling down on our proven playbook for success in driving innovative products in China," he said.

Nike Inc posted a 6 percent year-on-year growth in sales in China to \$2.08 billion in the third quarter of fiscal year 2024, the sixth consecutive quarterly increase here for the sportswear company.

This was powered by its Dragon Year collection during the Spring Festival holiday and innovations in running, basketball, women and kids categories.

The company has leveraged its global innovation platform to drive novelty in China.

"You will see us increasingly bringing exciting innovations all over the world based on Air technology," said Donahoe. "We can hyper-localize them for markets in China and other markets."

For example, the global launch of Air Max DN shoes is expected to have a China-specific version, featuring local colorways, collaborations, campaigns and engagements with athletes, he said.

Nike has invested more than 2 billion yuan (\$276 million) in its technology center in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, and an automated storage and retrieval system in its China logistics center in recent years.

Nike is also investing in local innovation capabilities, as demonstrated by the establishment of its Nike Sport Research Lab this year.

The lab works with Chinese athletes and consumers to gain insight and develop innovations driven by, and unique to, the Chinese market.

The company is also investing in hyper-localizing its storytelling and brand through Icon Shanghai, which plans to be a creative studio program aimed at translating global messaging into locally resonant content, responding rapidly to the dynamic Chinese market.

Donahoe said it is crucial to stay close to consumers, particularly in China, where consumer preferences evolve quickly.

"We're doing things to accelerate how quickly we can respond to the



Nike showcases its latest pipeline of innovations, together with 40 world-class elite athletes, during an event in Paris in April. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

consumer. China's really the market where we're doing that the most. We're leaning in, trying new ways to pull forward innovations and get them in the market."

"We are going to speed up the innovation cycle for each season and each product based on the market feedback," he said. "We want Nike to be a global brand for Chinese consumers and it's of China."

The CEO emphasized the dynamic nature of the Chinese market, describing it as "innovative and progressive, in style and the digital world."

"We'll continue to innovate in China, enhancing both online and retail experiences across over 6,000 retail stores," he said.

"We believe that Chinese consumers are ahead of the rest of the world in many ways. We take learning from China to the rest of the world."

Donahoe said both the Nike brand and the Jordan brand have several potential opportunities in China.

The company opened its World of Flight, a top-end retail concept of the Jordan brand, in Beijing last month. Nike has run mono-brand stores such as the Nike Rise, Nike Style, and the House of Innovation, its flagship store in Shanghai.

Digitally, the company operates its own applications, as well as stores on e-commerce platform Tmall and short-video sharing platform Douyin.

"What's interesting is you don't have a digital or physical consumer. Sometimes you shop online. Sometimes you go into store. We need to be there with both," Donahoe said.

"Nike is a premium brand and we'll try to drive and deliver a premium experience in China."

#### Innovation on Air

Competition in the sportswear sector in China has intensified, with new players capturing significant market share in their respective categories.

Kemo Zhou, consultant research-

consumer preferences, according to the report.

The operational models of the fitness industry are also undergoing a transformation, with a nearly 30 percent failure rate for fitness venues.

The growth in home-based online fitness has slowed, although the trend persists, said the report.

Online fitness through short-video sharing platforms such as Douyin and Bilibili is rising rapidly. Home aerobics equipment is a priority choice, while strength training equipment is in greater demand.

In the sportswear market, international sportswear brands continue to dominate, accounting for 63.9 percent of brands selected in the survey, according to the report.

Emerging international brands such as Hoka, Arc'teryx, and Salomon are witnessing increased popularity.



A view of Nike's innovative sportswear collection in February. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

er at Euromonitor International, said in 2023 the overall sportswear market in China remained under the dominance of leading sportswear groups. However, intensifying competition from fast-growing brands has been a significant impetus for the growth of the overall sportswear category.

Zhou cited outdoor brands such as The North Face, Camel and Salomon emerging as major contenders. Meanwhile, Lululemon has maintained its remarkable growth trajectory, Zhou added.

"Initially associated with yoga apparel, the brand has witnessed a surge in popularity transcending its core market segment. Consumers increasingly integrate Lululemon's products into their everyday wear," he said.

Zhou said the increased consum-

er interest in equipment-free exercise, particularly running and hiking, has fostered demand for sports footwear brands specializing in specific activities, such as niche running shoe brands Hoka and On.

To gain market share quickly from advanced sports categories, Nike has changed its priority this year, from direct-to-consumer initiatives — an approach adopted during the pandemic to build a strong direct business in terms of market execution — to a return to innovation and technology.

The shift "marks the beginning of a multiyear innovation cycle," said the company.

This cycle is centered around Nike's patented Air technology. This is exemplified by the recent launch of Air Max DN, featuring Dynamic Air technology across all product categories.

"With AI and digital tools, we can shape Air in new and creative ways that still maintain the performance dimensions of it," Donahoe said.

To boost the innovation cycle, since the beginning of this year, Nike has worked on a project called A.I.R., which stands for Athlete Imagined Revolution.

The objective is to bridge athletes and designers with new technology and digital capabilities. The team listened to the voices of 13 top athletes around the world. The result is 13 footwear concepts that showcase the future of air technology.

On the lack of novelty over the last several years, the CEO acknowledged the difficulty of driving freshness during the pandemic when everyone was working from home.

"We are now back on the offensive, with our team back together in

person. When that all comes together, that's the magic that differentiates Nike," Donahoe said.

#### Olympics as catalyst

The upcoming Paris Olympics will serve as a stage for sportswear brands to present their latest innovations and branding principles.

Nike on April 12 showcased its latest pipeline of innovations together with 40 world-class elite athletes, including the sculpted Air unit in the new Pegasus Premium during the "Nike On Air" event at the Palais Brongniart in Paris.

The company recently rolled out a diverse range of products, including the new Alphafly 3 marathon shoes, basketball shoes, track spikes, football shoes and break-dance shoes.

"Digital tools have allowed us to do things with Air we've never been able to do. We will continue to invest in Air, both for performance and everyday life," Donahoe said.

On imitations of Nike's Air technology, the CEO said it is important to distinguish between genuine innovations and mere replicas.

"Sometimes, you may see things that are simply cosmetic, trying to copy Nike. Those are not real Air. There are no performance dimensions to it," he said.

New sports in the Summer Olympics Games, such as breaking and dancing, will change the way people perceive sports and will expand the definition of sports to include where the younger generation spends their time, said the CEO.

"As those things go from being an activity to becoming a sport, they connect with youth because they see themselves in a different way," Donahoe said.

"Sportswear brands will usher in opportunities with more brand exposure, coupled with increased sports penetration, in the context of Healthy China 2030 in the forecast period," said consultant Zhou.

"In the context of heightened competition in the market landscape of China's sportswear market, brand sponsorship of the event presents a significant opportunity to enhance brand visibility," he added.

This year, for example, brands have geared up to be seen. Adidas on April 18 announced its offering extends to the 2024 athlete pack — a 49-strong footwear collection that equips athletes across 41 different disciplines — more than 20 of which may be seen during the field of play this summer.

Puma on April 10 revealed the 17 federation kits that will be worn by athletes at this summer's Olympic Games.

Lululemon on April 16 revealed its first-ever summer athlete kit for Team Canada ahead of the Games.

The Olympic Games are also expected to generate increased interest in certain niche sports within China, and stimulate the robust development of trend-driven sportswear for categories that have yet to achieve significant market share, said Zhou.

The Olympic Games in Paris are expected to trigger consumer enthusiasm for sports, considering this will be the first Olympics after the pandemic, which helps bring back the buzz into the sportswear market as well, Zhou added.

## The fit and proper way to turn over a new leaf

By WANG ZHUOQIONG

China's fitness market is growing, with at-home weight training facilities gaining popularity and women's sportswear turning into an emerging business category, according to an industry report.

According to the 2023 China Fitness and Health Lifestyle Industry report by sports media and research platform Gymsquare Institute, 75.9 percent of fitness enthusiasts have either maintained or increased their fitness routines in the past year.

The report was based on surveys, data from major gym providers and Dianping.com, as well as sports apps.

Pay-per-use and monthly payment models have become the most preferred payment methods for fitness regimens. Flexible payment methods with small, recurring payments are more in line with current

consumer preferences, according to the report.

The operational models of the fitness industry are also undergoing a transformation, with a nearly 30 percent failure rate for fitness venues.

The growth in home-based online fitness has slowed, although the trend persists, said the report.

Online fitness through short-video sharing platforms such as Douyin and Bilibili is rising rapidly. Home aerobics equipment is a priority choice, while strength training equipment is in greater demand.

In the sportswear market, international sportswear brands continue to dominate, accounting for 63.9 percent of brands selected in the survey, according to the report.

Emerging international brands such as Hoka, Arc'teryx, and Salomon are witnessing increased popularity.

Women's sportswear has become a major business segment, with traditional sportswear brands investing more in this market, said the report.

China's fitness industry is entering a stage of industrial innovation, with traditional gyms facing cash flow pressures even as new operational models continue to emerge.

Zhu Xingliang, founder of Zhongtian Fitness Studio, said several fitness studios have found it challenging to operate due to a decrease in footfalls and a decline in performance.

According to Zhu, the gym has put in place strict cost controls. "The situation since the beginning of 2024 has been relatively optimistic... both performance and resources have returned to normal levels," Zhu said.

Simon Wang, CEO of gym platform ClassPass China, said there are now over 2,000 gym venues —

including top gyms, group fitness studios, as well as in several five-star hotels — since ClassPass entered the Chinese mainland market in 2019.

Under pressure from regulations and changing consumer habits, an increasing number of traditional gyms are beginning to collaborate with ClassPass and focusing on product quality.

Zhang Wangjie, vice-general manager of Merach, a Zhejiang-province-based high-end home gym facility provider, said its sales increased by 30 percent year-on-year in 2023, expressing a positive outlook for the online home fitness industry.

Gym chain Supermonkey has opened several new training outlets, in locations spanning Shanghai; Shenzhen, in Guangdong province; and Wuhan, in Hubei province. In addition to training venues, plans



A Supermonkey store is seen in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

are underway for private coaching centers, cycling outlets and comprehensive stores.

Supermonkey has been expanding its store types in the past two years. The company is adjusting its

group class stores in certain regions to optimize its business. As of January 2024, Supermonkey had 245 venues in nine cities nationwide, with a cumulative membership of over 30 million.