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Xi's European visit heralds new era of ties

Significance of trips to France, Serbia and Hungary goes beyond bilateral level

By XU WEI
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President Xi Jinping's six-day trip to Europe has opened new chapters of relationships with China's key partners, and the visit heralds a new era of ties with Europe through enhanced solidarity, mutual trust and confidence, according to senior diplomats and analysts.

Xi's recently concluded tour of France, Serbia and Hungary, which included over 30 diplomatic engagements with leaders of the three countries between May 5 and 10, was a resounding success, with implications and significance far beyond the bilateral level, they said.

In France, the president's visit, which coincided with the 60th anniversary of the establishment of bilateral relations, set the stage for reaffirming a long-standing partnership.

Beijing and Paris signed 18 bilateral cooperation documents in areas such as green development, aviation, agrifood, commerce and people-to-people exchanges. They also issued four joint statements on the situation in the Middle East, artificial intelligence and global governance, partnership in biodiversity and oceans, and agricultural cooperation.

In an interview with reporters after the visit concluded, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that Xi and French President Emmanuel Macron had reached a host of key consensus on developing the bilateral relations, while agreeing to consolidate the strategic stability of bilateral ties and tap the broad potential of mutually beneficial cooperation.

The two leaders pledged steps to accelerate people-to-people exchanges and build greater consensus on global cooperation.

Interactions between the two heads of state at Tourmalet — a pass in the Pyrenees mountains that is dear to President Macron because he enjoyed visiting his grandmother there when he was a child — marked a major highlight of Xi's France trip.

The Chinese president's trip to Belgrade and Budapest cemented

the elevation of ties with two of China's key European partners. This was underpinned by a host of bilateral agreements to build up economic, trade and people-to-people exchanges.

In Belgrade, Xi and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic signed a joint statement on building a China-Serbia community with a shared future in the new era, while China unveiled six major steps to support the move, including a free trade agreement and the opening of more direct flights.

Wang said that building a community with a shared future not only signifies the deepening of the long-standing friendship between China and Serbia, but also highlights the values that are common to both sides.

It will undoubtedly become a new milestone in the history of China-Serbia relations, helping both countries to accelerate their respective modernization processes and expand the vibrant practice of building a community with a shared future for mankind, he said.

A landmark moment of the trip was the gathering of around 20,000 people in front of the Palace of Serbia to greet the Chinese president, with people in the crowd waving the flags of the two nations and cheering for China.

The moment "evoked a keen feeling on the genuine sentiment of the Serbian people toward the Chinese people and their profound respect for President Xi," Wang said.

In Budapest, the traditional friendship was harnessed as the two nations pledged to build an all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership for the new era.

Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto described the visit as "a milestone in bilateral relations", saying that the elevation of bilateral ties reflected the rightfulness of the nation's China policy.

"We are very happy with the Chinese investments in Hungary. We encourage more to come because they're modern, state-of-the-art investments which create a lot of jobs. This is good for our national economy, good for our people and our families," he said.

Support for Palestine



Protesters wave flags and set off flares on Saturday during a pro-Palestinian demonstration on Waterloo Bridge, London, the United Kingdom. Israel struck parts of Gaza including Rafah on Saturday after announcing an evacuation order. The United Nations warned of an "epic" disaster if an outright invasion of Rafah goes ahead. HENRY NICHOLLS / AFP

More policy easing likely as economy recovers

By OUYANG SHIJIA
and ZHOU LANXU

China's economy is showing fresh signs of modest recovery, while pressures from still-weak demand remain, heightening the need for more stimulus to bolster the world's second-largest economy, analysts said.

They also said that policy easing is likely to continue in the following months, including a small uptick in the fiscal impulse and further reductions in banks' reserve requirement ratio — the proportion of deposits that banks must keep in cash as a reserve — and policy benchmarks for interest rates.

Their comments came as data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Saturday that the country's consumer price index, which is a key indicator of inflation, rose 0.3 percent year-on-year in April after a 0.1 percent gain in March.

The core CPI, which excludes volatile food and energy prices and is deemed a better gauge of the supply-demand relationship, grew 0.7 percent year-on-year in April, after a 0.6

percent increase in March.

"The improvement in the CPI indicates that China's economy is steadily recovering and the economy's endogenous driving force is strengthening. The consumer demand recovery trend has been further consolidated," said Zhang Xuewu, head of the price analysis and forecasting division at the National Development and Reform Commission's Price Monitoring Center.

Zhang said he anticipates a modest rise in overall price levels, as domestic demand is set to continue to improve, with a series of policies aimed at boosting consumption and expanding investment taking effect, such as advancing large-scale equipment renewal and trade-in of consumer goods.

Wu Chaoming, deputy director of the Chasing International Economic Institute, estimated that the CPI may rise around 0.2 percent year-on-year in May, backed by a modest rise in pork price levels, the steady economic recovery trend and mild recovery in services demand.

While China's consumer prices stabilized in April, the growth in

the nation's producer price index, which gauges factory-gate prices, stayed negative for the 19th consecutive month, dropping 2.5 percent year-on-year in April, following a 2.8 percent fall in March, the NBS said.

Wu said he anticipates that the PPI decline may narrow to 1.6 percent in May amid policy support, even though it is likely to register negative growth for the full year. The persistently low price levels have received attention from policymakers. The People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, said on Friday in its first-quarter monetary policy report that it "will treat maintaining price stability and promoting moderate price recovery as key considerations in the formulation of monetary policy".

The PBOC report said the fundamental reason for current low price levels is insufficient demand compared with supply in the real economy, instead of inadequate money supply, adding that price levels are expected to mildly recover during the rest of the year.

Xiong Yuan, chief economist at Guosheng Securities, said the

economy still faces pressures from weak demand as price levels remain subdued, highlighting the need for proactive fiscal policy to stay front-loaded and the rising possibility of monetary authorities delivering further cuts in the RRR and interest rates.

Financial data also pointed to lackluster demand, as the PBOC said on Saturday that the country's increase in aggregate social financing — the total amount of financing to the real economy — came in at 12.73 trillion yuan (\$1.8 trillion) in the first four months of the year, down \$3.04 trillion yuan compared with the same period last year.

Louise Loo, lead economist at British think tank Oxford Economics, said that given the increased role of banks in stabilizing the property sector and the risk of their reduced profitability, the PBOC will likely lean on tools other than aggressive outright benchmark rate cuts to maintain an accommodative liquidity environment, including RRR cuts.

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Disparaging, containing China will not make US great

Americans are going to vote in November to determine who is going to be the next president of the United States. Donald Trump, a past president, had in his last campaign used the slogan "Make America Great Again". He failed to make America great again during his tenure. He vows to come back and finish his job. Joe Biden, the current president, followed Trump's path of promoting America's interests by imposing tariffs and sanctions on various countries and companies. He also did not make America great.

The US' stature in the world has fallen to a new low, particularly after it vetoed the widely supported United Nations resolution to give Palestine recognition as a state and a member of the UN. Robert Wood, US alter-

WORLD WATCH By Ho Lok-sang

nate representative for special political affairs in the UN, disingenuously told the Security Council that the veto "does not reflect opposition to Palestinian statehood but instead is an acknowledgment that it will only come from direct negotiations between the parties".

With such disingenuousness, how can America stand in the world as a great nation? What makes a nation great? In Confucianism, a strong nation based on military might is distinguished from a great nation that is based on moral integrity. The latter is called a nation based on "wangdao" (the way of a stately nation); the former is merely a nation based on "badao" (the way of a hegemon). Nations that practice wangdao win the admiration of other nations. Nations that practice badao are despised.

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When history meets tech



Visitors stop to admire digitally restored exhibits on Saturday at the International Touring Exhibition of the Digital Restoration of the Tianlongshan Grottoes in Zappeion Hall in Athens, Greece. The tour was jointly initiated by the Taiyuan Tianlongshan Grottoes Museum in Shanxi province and domestic and international academic institutions. ZHAO JINDONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Nation's efforts to uphold humanitarian law hailed

By WANG XIAOYU
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Pierre Krahenbuhl

China is an important contributor to global humanitarian efforts and a key partner of the International Committee of the Red Cross in a world of intense conflicts, said a senior official of the organization.

"The ICRC is trying to ensure that international humanitarian law is a political priority everywhere in the world," said Pierre Krahenbuhl, director-general of the ICRC, in an exclusive interview with China Daily in Beijing last week. "And when a country like China takes a position on that, we think it's important, and we want

every single country in the world to take this very seriously."

Krahenbuhl said an important and resonant message from China was when President Xi Jinping highlighted that humanitarianism is the great consensus that can unite different civilizations during a meeting in September with ICRC President Mirjana Spoljaric.

"I find that a voice like China's is heard on the need to respect civilians in times of armed conflict, on the importance of protecting prisoners of war, as well as (the importance of showing) respect to women and children and refugees, displaced persons in times of war," he said.

Disrespect for international humanitarian law is documented every day, evidenced by the loss of lives and suffering inflicted by violence in several countries and regions.

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TOP NEWS

Visa-free entry to bring more European tourists

Travelers applaud positive change, ease of short-stay visits

By HOU CHENCHEN

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China decided last week to extend the short-stay visa-exemption policy for citizens of 12 countries, of which 11 are European nations, to the end of 2025. This extension underscores the prospects of China-Europe engagement in the years ahead and will bring a fresh wave of European tourists to China, analysts said.

The nation announced a visa-free policy for five European countries — France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain — from Dec 1 of last year to Nov 30 this year, with people from these countries allowed to stay on the mainland for up to 15 days for business, tourism, family trips or transit without a visa.

The visa-free policy was then extended to another six European countries: Switzerland, Ireland, Hungary, Austria, Belgium and Luxembourg, from March 14 to Nov 30 to further boost inbound tourism.

During his visit to France last week, President Xi Jinping said that China welcomes visits by more people from France, and will extend the short-stay visa-exemption policy for citizens from 12 countries, including France, to the end of 2025.

"The recent extension of both the time limit and the list of countries brings a positive outlook for the long run. It alleviates concerns among European stakeholders regarding the policy's duration," said Peng Han, chief analyst for tourism media company Travel Daily.

Travel Daily data shows that the total number of inbound tourists from visa-exempt countries in Southeast Asia such as Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand increased by about 2.5-fold year-on-year during the Labor Day holiday. In contrast, inbound tourism from Europe as of this year stood at only 30 percent of 2019 figures.

According to Peng, European operators typically formulate outbound tourism plans for the following year in June and July, and decisions on whether to engage with Chinese products hinge on whether they receive a clear answer in time.

"Will China's visa-free policy for European countries continue next year, or will it be discontinued? The



Foreign tourists walk around on Wednesday near the Palace Museum in the Chinese capital, Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

industry has been keeping an eye on a long-term China-Europe relations and the continuity of the visa policy," he said.

He added that now that China has given a clear answer on opening its door to Europe through successive policies, it signals to the world the promise of a prosperous future.

Although there has not been a sharp rise in the number of European tour groups coming to China till now, the number of independent travelers indicates the upside of the visa-free policy.

Ctrip data said that on March 14 alone, when the visa-free rules took effect, the number of inbound tourism orders from the six newly-added countries more than doubled compared with last year. The number of orders from Belgium, Hungary and Switzerland tripled.

According to data from tour operator Tongcheng Travel, flight bookings to China from European countries on the first visa-exemption list have shown remarkable

growth. Since April, there has been a year-on-year increase of over 150 percent in bookings from France, a 110 percent increase from Germany, and nearly double the growth from Italy.

According to the National Immigration Administration, more than 170,000 international visitors entered China visa-free through Shanghai Pudong International Airport in the first quarter of this year, showing an increase of 23.6 percent year-on-year.

Shanghai, one of the top destinations for European tourists, has prepared itself for a surge in inbound tourism.

"The resumption of international flights, the visa-free policy, and the full recovery of business at Shanghai International Cruise Home Port will contribute to the number of inbound tourists arriving in Shanghai, especially free independent travelers," said Zhou Weihong, deputy general manager of Spring Tour, a travel company in Shanghai.

To accommodate the sudden increase of independent tourists after the implementation of the visa-free policy, tour agencies have designed personalized mini-tour products and city walks in Shanghai. They have also established tourism itineraries covering Shanghai, the Yangtze River Delta and other cities, Zhou said.

Voices from visitors

David Huang, a French national who studied at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, and who now works for a French chocolate company in Beijing, said that he has applied for both student and work visas in the past.

"The student visa requires at least two months of preparations, including submitting various documents. I also spent more than two months preparing for my work visa after graduating from UIBE. My French friends have heard about the visa-free access, and it is

indeed a positive change," he said.

Young French travelers avoid countries that have lengthy visa application procedures, he said, adding that being on a limited budget, paying for airfare only to have a visa application rejected makes little financial sense for them.

"My colleagues in global companies find it much simpler to travel. When organizing events that require inviting foreign guests, we shouldn't have to worry about visa processing time. Two-week visa-free access allows people to explore business opportunities in China."

Laura Carbonell, a sales manager in Toledo, which is about 75 kilometers away from the Spanish capital Madrid, said she visited China in November before the visa-free policy was introduced. Even something like how far away an embassy or consulate is from a potential visa applicant's home can influence their travel decisions, she said.

"I really wanted to visit China to enjoy its culture and scenery. How-

ever, Spain has only two diplomatic missions, the embassy in Madrid and a consulate in Barcelona. People like me who reside in other cities are forced to travel long distances to apply for a visa."

For European countries not on the visa-free list, the application procedures have been streamlined. China has been simplifying its entry visa procedures worldwide, including canceling appointment requirements and fingerprints for qualified applicants temporarily. Visa fees for travel to China before December from all countries have also been cut by 25 percent, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Chinese embassy in Washington announced the simplification of the tourist visa application process for United States citizens starting from January 1 this year. US citizens can now enter China for tourism purpose without providing round-trip air tickets, hotel reservations, itineraries and an invitation letter.

"From the implementation of the visa-free policy for six European countries to recent high-level meetings on optimizing inbound tourism payment services, the future looks promising," Peng of Travel Daily said. "The revival of inbound tourism to its previous peak may simply be a matter of time."

While China is sending clear signals of openness, political factors in the West are casting a shadow over cross-border travel. In March the US said it is "taking steps to impose new visa restrictions on multiple Hong Kong officials", without elaborating on the visa measures or the officials targeted.

Last July the US issued a travel warning against China, advising US citizens to "reconsider" whether to travel to the country for "the risk of wrongful detention". Furthermore, the US has long restricted visa applications for Chinese students for "national security" reasons.

The US narrative has had a significant impact on biased perceptions about China in Europe, the US and other countries, said tourism analysts.

"Our travel agencies agree that a trip to China is the best remedy. When European tourists actually visit China, most of them will revise their preconceptions," Peng said.

"With China opening its door, a firsthand experience will expose the falsehoods spread by some Western media."

Kuang Hanying contributed to this story.

Red Cross: Deeper ties with Chinese institutions urged

From page 1

"We value when states take a leading voice on calling for better respect," Krahenbuhl said, noting that China was among the first signatories to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which has been the cornerstone for upholding human dignity amid armed conflicts for 75 years.

When China ratified the Geneva Conventions in 1956, then premier and foreign minister Zhou Enlai said in his message that the nation recognizes these conventions

because it found them to be generally conducive to peace among all countries, Krahenbuhl said.

"China is a very important country, and as a state party to the Geneva Conventions, it plays an important role in highlighting the importance of respecting the rules during times of armed conflict."

Krahenbuhl made a visit to China last week — his first overseas trip since he assumed the role of ICRC director-general in April — to hold a series of meetings with Chinese government bodies and

attend events including one to celebrate the 120th anniversary of the Red Cross Society of China, which was held in Beijing on Wednesday.

"The ICRC is really developing contacts and dialogue in many parts of these Chinese establishments and we welcome that," he said.

He noted that the Red Cross Society of China has not only played a significant role at a national level in delivering emergency response to natural disasters, enhancing first-aid capabilities and promoting blood donations, but has also con-

tributed to international humanitarian efforts such as supporting the ICRC's operations in Afghanistan and Ukraine in recent years.

"There is another dimension that we value greatly, which is the fact that the Red Cross Society of China has invested a lot of energy and attention in developing its international academy that focuses strongly on the humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law," he said.

As the year 2024 marks the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, Krahenbuhl said that disre-

spect for the rules of the conventions can lead to increased suffering and greater destruction, while better respecting the rules of international humanitarian law is a step toward resumption of peace talks.

Dialogue, which is essential to resolving conflicts and restoring peace, also holds the key to ICRC's cooperation with China since it established its regional delegation for East Asia in Beijing in 2005.

"When we opened this delegation here in Beijing, our objective was to deepen our understanding of China's perspective and experiences related to development, to cooperation, to peace," he said, adding that it is also important for the ICRC to

share with China its expertise on international humanitarian law and its practical work in reducing suffering amid violence and war.

"We felt that it was of great importance to have a deeper relationship with Chinese institutions to be able to exchange (experiences) about these, to learn from each other," he said.

Having observed "very positive and important" development of such work in China, Krahenbuhl said the ICRC "will always be very interested — and I will always be very interested — to continue the conversation with (the) Chinese leadership and with Chinese institutions".

Narrative: Country feared is not great

From page 1

Palestine's lack of statehood is helping Israel to continue to occupy Palestinian land and subject Palestinians to exploitation. There is a clear conflict of interest in asking Israel and Palestine to come to an agreement. Israel is backed by the US and is armed to the teeth. Palestine is impoverished and weak militarily. The two are not on equal standing. How can a fair agreement come about?

The point of this article is not so much about Palestine's statehood as about the relationship between moral integrity and a country's greatness. A country that is just feared but not admired cannot be great. Living in the 21st century, we have so many urgent things that we need to address just to survive, but the US is ignoring these existential issues facing humanity. Drumming up false narratives to bad-mouth China and doing all it can to contain China so it can retain its hegemony over the world can never make America a great nation.

2023 has been confirmed as the warmest year in global temperature data records going back to 1850. We probably have no records from earlier. 2023 had a global average temperature that was 0.17 C higher than the previous highest annual reading in 2016. According to "Underfunded. Underprepared," the new report from the United Nations Environment Programme, "progress on climate adaptation is slowing on all fronts, with the financing gap now at a staggering \$194-366 billion per year."

China has invested heavily to fight climate change. China's National Greening Commission reported that the country added 3.998 million hectares of forest in 2023, up from 3.83 million hectares of afforestation in 2022. China restored 4.379 million hectares of degraded grassland and treated 1.905 million hectares of sandy and stony land. The country's investment in its "new three" key products — electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and solar panels —

has helped reduce their prices, making these key products for fighting climate change accessible to more consumers, especially those in developing countries. However, the decline in prices of these products is eroding profits for many suppliers, leading to allegations that China has an "overcapacity problem". Although some companies are going to go under, this is unavoidable. If we are transitioning to green energy, electric vehicles must be affordable. To say that prices of Chinese solar panels and electric cars are too low and threaten the survival of many producers is effectively to say that these products should continue to be so costly that they should remain unaffordable to many. If so, how can China reduce the carbon emissions to be compatible with its targets of peak carbon by 2030 and carbon-neutrality by 2060? How can the rest of the world achieve their respective targets so we can reverse the trend of global warming?

In order for America to be great,

it needs to keep its word, stand with the people of the world to stop and prevent wars, and behave in a responsible way when managing its own finances. It must not say one thing and do another.

America has repeatedly declared it abides by the one-China principle — Taiwan is part of China — but is arming Taiwan and continues with its support for its separatist government. America used to be a defender of free markets and fair play. But politicians from both major US parties have introduced a new bill that would ban TikTok unless its parent company, ByteDance, agrees to sell the app to a non-Chinese company. They alleged without any evidence that the Chinese government could force ByteDance to hand over data on TikTok's 170 million US users. This accusation is entirely groundless, as are the alleged "genocide" of the Uyghurs and "forced labor", which independent auditing agencies have found to be untrue.

The author is director of Pan Sutong Shanghai-HK Economic Policy Research Institute, Lingnan University. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Flash floods kill 330



A boy looks on while standing next to a wheelbarrow on Saturday after floods ravaged the Sheikh Jalal District of Baghlan Province in Afghanistan. More than 330 people were killed as torrential rain and flash floods submerged large parts of Baghlan, Takhar, Badakhshan and Ghor provinces. SAYED HASSIB / REUTERS

CHINA

Beijing to have 5,000 km greenway network by 2035

By DU JUAN
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Beijing will establish a greenway network over 5,000 kilometers long by 2035 as part of efforts to create a greener, healthier urban landscape for residents, the municipal government said last week.

The plan, unveiled by the Beijing Municipal Commission of Planning and Natural Resources on Wednesday, says the comprehensive greenway network will seamlessly connect the heart of the city with the plains and mountains, offering residents the opportunity to conveniently immerse themselves in green scenery.

Greenway planning and design guidelines issued by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development describe them as corridors relying on and formed by natural elements that link urban and rural recreational and leisure green open spaces, primarily for recreation and fitness, while also serving as pathways for green commuting for residents and wildlife migration.

Beijing has been working on more than 40 greenway projects since 2013, including the Second Ring Road greenway, the "Three Mountains and Five Gardens" greenway and the Garden Expo greenway.

It now has about 1,465 km of greenways that have restored and integrated ecological resources along their routes, making them vital links for the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

"The plan prioritizes human-centric design principles and convenience, catering to the varied needs of residents utilizing greenways," said Feng Yawei, director of the commission's overall planning division. "Leveraging technological advancements and smart applications, the



Cyclists pose for photos to capture a moment on a greenway at Wanghe Park in Beijing's Chaoyang district on April 16. WANG FEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

plan aims to enhance connectivity, comfort and accessibility throughout the network."

Thirty-nine routes totaling more than 2,000 km are poised to blanket the entire city, linking over 5,000 residential areas, 780 villages, more than 460 scenic spots and parks, around 460 historical and cultural sites, and over 150 subway stations, according to the commission.

The plan underscores the urgency of constructing 10 city-level branded greenways, with the Second Ring Road greenway poised to epitomize the historical and cultural allure of the ancient capital. Running for

about 33 km, it will weave through iconic landmarks such as the Ming City Wall Ruins Park and the Temple of Heaven Park, offering residents a nostalgic stroll through historical Beijing.

"Shaded pathways on the way to work, glimpses of parks from the windows and the melodious chirping of birds in the city ... this has already become a reality for me," said Bai Cuicui, a 32-year-old resident of Haidian district.

She said she often cycles to work when the weather is good, and even when she drives to work, she can see the greenery on both sides.

With Beijing's forest coverage reaching 44.9 percent and meeting all 24 criteria required, the city was officially bestowed the title of "National Forest City" by the National Forestry and Grassland Administration in January.

Tang Fanglin, deputy director of administration, lauded Beijing's achievements in balancing forest resource development, optimizing the ecological landscape and enhancing public well-being. The efforts have laid a solid foundation for the city's journey toward becoming a world-class, harmonious and livable capital, Tang said.

Xinjiang's Tianchi scenic spot embraces smart power

By LI JIAYING
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The Tianchi scenic spot, a popular tourist destination in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, is now using intelligent power protection technology to enhance grid reliability and efficiency.

Mobile sensing terminals developed by Xinjiang Changji Power

Supply Co provide real-time monitoring of critical power nodes, replacing manual inspections and instantly reporting faults during outages. They have enabled faster and more precise fault identification and repair.

The terminals address growing demand for seasonal and temporary power protection, especially in tourism areas. Traditional methods

requiring manual inspections are resource-intensive and less efficient.

The initiative aligns with a national push for the development of a smart and digitalized power grid. The goal is to transform the power distribution network by 2030, with increased investment in research and development of digital solutions.

"The electric power sector should

leverage digital technologies to achieve intelligent management and optimize complex power supply networks," said Liu Yanhua, honorary director of the national committee of experts on climate change.

Tianchi plans to further develop its digital power protection platform, ensuring a more secure and stable electricity supply for visitors and the tourism industry.

Experts visit Cambodia to promote rice-fish farming

By WANG XIN in Shanghai
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With the aim of promoting rice-fish and rice-shrimp farming in Cambodia, a research team from Shanghai Ocean University wrapped up an investigative and training visit to the Southeast Asian country recently, seeking to contribute to the construction of the Fish and Rice Corridor between the two countries.

According to a China-Cambodia joint communiqué released in September, the two nations will expedite the building of the corridor to increase their bilateral agri-trade volume, with cooperation on the agricultural sector focusing on developing aquaculture, agro-processing, ecological agriculture, modern machinery, new agricultural technology and human resources.

"Cambodia boasts an existing rice cultivation area of 3.3 million hectares. However, the area used for freshwater pond aquaculture in the country is only 1,350 hectares, which has led to the insufficient supply and high market prices of aquatic products such as giant freshwater prawn and tilapia," said Wu Xugan, leader of the research team and a professor at the School of Aquatic and Life Sciences at Shanghai Ocean University. "There is huge potential in the two nations' cooperation in the building of the Fish and Rice Corridor."

During the team's stay in Cambodia from April 21 to 27, it visited several regions, carried out in-depth investigations and held promotional events and technical training courses in a bid to learn more about local conditions and help farmers improve their rice-fish farming skills.

From 2021 to 2023, the team carried out a project in Cambodia focusing on technical cooperation on rice-fish farming and poverty



An agricultural expert from Shanghai Ocean University helps farmers grow fish and rice in Cambodia in April. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"I am very grateful to the Chinese government and Shanghai Ocean University for giving me both knowledge and opportunities to develop rice-fish farming in Cambodia."

Virakbot Hou, Cambodian postgraduate student in Shanghai

reduction through aquaculture in the Lancang-Mekong River region.

The team's recent visit was related to that project, which was renewed this year and has been expanded to include efforts to cultivate local talent.

Working with a technical team led by Thay Somony, director of the

Department of Aquaculture Development at the Fishery Administration of Cambodia's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the research team visited three rice-shrimp farming demonstration bases it helped build in Takeo province, and provided training courses to over 30 farmers on site.

"We provided technical guidance at the base, starting with basic principles, and then we introduced general techniques," Wu said.

He said the way rice-fish farming is conducted in Cambodia can sometimes be quite different from how it is done in China, due to the varied climate, landscape and production conditions as well as the lack of infrastructures such as reservoirs.

"Unlike the synchronized rice-fish farming pattern in China, many places in Cambodia can cultivate either rice or fish only during dry and rainy seasons, as they don't have reservoirs to regulate water usage and have difficulty fending off the risks that come with those seasons (such as droughts and

floods)," Wu said. "Also, we see the scale of aquaculture there is small — most of the farms are operated by a few families — and has not yet become commercialized. The farmer's underdeveloped rice-fishing skills and the lack of a complete industrial chain have led to low productivity and the high cost of fish feed."

Despite the challenges ahead, the research team remains committed to making more efforts to help Cambodian farmers develop rice-fish farming.

"We learned more about the local conditions during the visit," Wu said. "We will start with optimization efforts to help locals protect fishery resources, then expand to large-scale rice-fish farming and pond aquaculture practices in the future."

Given that local rice-fish farming talent is essential to Cambodia's sustainable industrial development, the Shanghai Ocean University team also worked to attract more Cambodian students to the field by holding promotional events at high schools during its visit.

Virakbot Hou, a 31-year-old Cambodian postgraduate student majoring in aquaculture at Shanghai Ocean University since 2022, joined the team to share his experiences.

He has been involved in research on rice-shrimp farming in Takeo province, which has improved the livelihoods of 20 farming families.

"I am very grateful to the Chinese government and Shanghai Ocean University for giving me both knowledge and opportunities to develop rice-fish farming in Cambodia," he said. "In the future, I hope to see more Cambodian rice-fish farming professionals with the university's help. I also hope that Cambodia can establish a sustainable rice-fish farming industry chain, so that more farmers can embark on the road to prosperity."

Gender gap narrowing, says report

Survey finds working moms doing more housework, but dads help out

By LI MENGHAN
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As Mother's Day fell on Sunday, a joint report by recruitment portal Zhaopin and the National School of Development at Peking University has shed light on the circumstances of working mothers in China.

A survey conducted over the first two months of this year showed that despite their professional success, working mothers still shoulder the majority of household chores, with 77.2 percent of them spending over two hours a day on housework — up from 67.5 percent from the same two-month period in 2023 and significantly higher than the 47 percent of working fathers spending two hours on chores each day, the report said.

However, only 16 percent of working fathers spent that much time on housework last year, with the survey indicating that a growing awareness of gender equality has encouraged working fathers to see chores at home as a shared responsibility.

Regarding income allocation, 54 percent of working mothers said they spent most of their income on child care. More mothers are also using their money to pay rent or mortgages — 38.7 percent reported doing so in January and February, up from 24.6 percent last year.

The proportion of working mothers spending on education and self-improvement dropped to 21.9 percent this year from 32.3 percent in the January-February period in 2023, according to the report, suggesting that the increase in critical expenses such as rent has squeezed out funds they could be using for career development.

Meanwhile, nearly three years after the implementation of China's third-child policy, only 3.1 percent of surveyed working mothers said this year that they plan to have a third child, lower than the 4.6 percent of working fathers.

However, the 3.1 percent figure is higher than the 2.6 percent of unmarried women and 0.5 percent

of married women without children planning to have children this year.

When asked about factors influencing their fertility plans, the top concern among survey participants was the financial burden, with 48.6 percent of working mothers and 44.4 percent of working fathers highlighting it. Among working mothers, the second-highest concern was "fear of losing freedom and personal space," accounting for 35.1 percent, significantly higher than the 27.8 percent of working fathers with the same concern.

Working mothers were also confident about their personal development. The survey found that 23.3 percent of married women with children believed it was "likely" or "certain" that they would get promoted, higher than the 20.4 percent for unmarried women and 18.4 percent for married women without children.

"Compared to women without children, women with children boast greater advantages for career advancement in my line of work, due to their relatively older age, increased experience and greater family stability," said Li Kexin, 31, a nurse in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, who gave birth to her daughter in 2019.

"Our hospital is relatively humane, as it offers ample time for maternity leave, doesn't schedule night shifts during pregnancy and lactation periods, and supports their employees' further studies," Li said, adding that she plans to apply for an on-the-job postgraduate program that could help her achieve a promotion.

Still, some experts admit the gender equality gap remains wide.

"Society is becoming more supportive of gender equality and childbirth with more systems in place. However, there is still a long way to go to provide women with more opportunities," said Pang Shi, director of the Chinese Academy of Personnel Science's department of employment and entrepreneurship.

Giant panda in Zoo Atlanta not neglected

By ZHANG YI
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Yang Yang, a male giant panda at Zoo Atlanta in the United States, is in good health, the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding said over the weekend, addressing online rumors that he had been seen gnawing on walls due to hunger.

Concerns were raised recently after videos of Yang Yang, one of a pair of pandas sent to the US in 1999, spread online. They showed him foaming at the mouth, vomiting and gnawing on walls, and led some people to ask whether Yang Yang was being treated improperly.

In a detailed response posted on social media on Saturday that explained panda behavior, the panda research base in Chengdu, Sichuan province, denied rumors that Yang Yang had been fainting or lacked food.

It said foaming at the mouth is a normal physiological response for giant pandas during extensive movement, and vomiting is a natural way for the animals to expel mucous.

The base also said that gnawing and scratching are common behaviors when giant pandas explore their environment.

It said the giant pandas at Zoo Atlanta are adequately provided for and are not experiencing any issues related to insufficient food intake. Each animal is offered over 40 kilograms of bamboo or bamboo

shoots a day, with small amounts of fruits and vegetables and high-fiber biscuits as supplements.

Chinese and US teams had confirmed that what online rumors had described as diarrhea was in fact a mix of bamboo shoot feces and urine, the base said.

Since their arrival in Atlanta, Yang Yang and Lun Lun have produced seven offspring. In accordance with agreements between China and the US, the pair's repatriation is being prepared.

The base said it has established a stable and effective communication channel with Zoo Atlanta to ensure regular exchanges on the care and medical treatment of the giant pandas.

"Each giant panda residing overseas serves not only as an adorable 'ambassador of friendship' but also as a precious national treasure, with their every action touching our hearts," it said.

The base closely monitors the living conditions of each overseas giant panda, provides guidance to their foreign caretakers and sends experts to conduct annual on-site inspections in collaboration with foreign teams, it said.

Based on an international conservation and research cooperation signed by China and the US in February, two giant pandas — Yun Chuan and Xin Bao — will be sent to San Diego Zoo in California.

Beijing sent the first pair of giant pandas to the US in 1972, just weeks after then-US president Richard Nixon's historic visit to China.

CHINA

Alarm sounded for 'crispy skin' youths

Self-deprecating generation braces for 'premature' health challenges as pressure of modern life takes toll

By WANG XIAOYU

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Common conditions associated with aging, from arthritis and high blood pressure to fatigue and osteoporosis, are becoming more prevalent in people of younger ages in China due in part to unhealthy lifestyles, academic and work pressure in today's fast-paced society, according to many experts.

Young people who experience signs of old age prematurely have taken to the internet to make light of their situation by calling themselves *cui pi niang qing ren*, or "crispy skin youngsters", digging at their frail bodies that seem to be teetering on the brink and easily collapse at the slightest tap.

The self-deprecating term first emerged in a news report in early October. Local media in central China's Henan province reported that in September of last year alone, the emergency care department of Zhengzhou Central Hospital received more than 1,700 relatively young patients, an abnormally high number, according to the hospital.

"Most were age 18 to 25 and visited the hospital for trauma, abdominal pain, chest tightness, hyperventilation, acute alcohol poisoning and swelling of the gallbladder," said Cheng Xiaodan, deputy director of the department.

"These conditions are usually caused by irregular circadian rhythms, staying up late and poor diets," she said during an interview with local media.

Health experts said the prevalence of unhealthy habits is sickening young adults and potentially pushing the onset of some conventionally geriatric problems.

More efforts are needed to spread health awareness and motivate them to build self-discipline and adopt and stick to healthier ways of living, they said.

Health issues

Memory decline, mood swings and a weakened immune system have become the most common health issues confronting people born after 1985, according to a survey of over 1,330 people conducted by a research center affiliated with the China Youth Daily newspaper.

Yaya, a resident in Jiangsu province who uses a pseudonym to protect her privacy, said she often has allergies and develops fevers running for about a week from time to time.

"I get rashes on my neck and arms when I have to work overtime for three straight days or more," said the 29-year-old. "I think the condition is related to my lack of exercise. Toxic substances — both physical and mental — build up in my body, and the heavy workload can trigger these allergic symptoms to appear."

Liu Jinying, head of the nutrition department at the Shenzhen Center of the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences' Cancer Hospital, said that the top three health issues are interlinked with each other.

"Sleeping late can cause poor sleep quality and affect memory and mood. Unbalanced diets can lead to

metabolic disorders, decreased immunity and diminished memory in the long run," she said.

Official data has shown that more serious diseases requiring medical interventions have become more prevalent among young people.

Around 44 percent of people age 20 to 39 either have a heart condition or are at high risk. The rate among adults in their 20s has reached 15 percent, according to a white paper released by the National Alliance of Cardiovascular Disease in 2019.

"Cardiovascular illnesses among the young population are on the rise. We found through surveys that the average age of patients who experience heart attack or stroke for the first time is trending downward," said Hu Shengshou, director of the National Center for Cardiovascular Diseases.

Diabetes and high blood pressure — warning signs of heart disease ahead — are creeping up on young people at the same time.

"Around 80 percent of visitors to our department are young and middle-aged adults, and only 20 percent are elderly," said Cheng Liwen, head of the high blood pressure center at Beijing Anzhen Hospital, during an interview with Health Times. "There were few young patients with high blood pressure a decade ago, but in recent years, such patients have become regular hospital visitors."

The National Health Commission said that the prevalence rate of high uric acid levels — a precursor of metabolic arthritis if left untreated — among Chinese adults stands at about 14 percent, and an increasing number of young people are getting the condition.

"It is a condition closely linked to longtime consumption of high-calorie foods, excessive alcohol and high-fructose drinks," the commission said.

Online diagnosis

A number of widely circulated social media posts have recorded some extreme cases, such as an individual being diagnosed with respiratory alkalosis for playing video games too excitedly, or suffering a knee injury after squatting.

Ling Chumian, an anesthetist at Wuhan Union Hospital of China, shared several examples of these so-called crispy skin youngsters on his personal social media account.

"An 18-year-old college student hit her big toe on the corner of a wall while rehearsing for a dance performance and was later diagnosed with bone fracture," he said. "A young man with extreme myopia suddenly found his vision blurry and dark while using his mobile phone in bed. He was diagnosed with retinal detachment."

While not exclusively symptomatic of being a "crispy skin youngster", these types of injuries are more associated with intensive or combative sports, the doctor said, but instead they came from a lack of exercise during high school years and oversight over safety when working out.

Seeking treatment

However, the alarming rise of health conditions being discovered in youngsters could also be attrib-



LIANG LUWEN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Left: Young people receive traditional Chinese medicine treatments at a night market in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, in August. LI JIE / FOR CHINA DAILY Right: Doctors conduct voluntary consultations at a clinic in Jiaxing, Zhejiang province, in January. JIN PENG / FOR CHINA DAILY



ed to the fact that more people have better and more convenient access to healthcare, and that young people are paying more attention to their health and seeking treatment.

"Over the past four decades, the rapid urbanization and economic and social development have brought about a lifestyle shift," said Hu.

He said that while the eating of fruit, vegetables and dairy products has increased significantly, Chinese people are consuming fewer whole grains and nuts or beans, and more fats and oil.

"The World Health Organization recommends 2.5 to 3 hours of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise a week, but Chinese people do not work out sufficiently overall," he said. "At workplaces, people move around much less and spend long hours seated."

"Many young people have to cope with mental stress and sleep deficiency," he added.

Hu suggested young people adopt a healthy diet, exercise regularly and ensure sufficient sleep. It is also important to engage in

group activities and go through regular and standard health examinations.

"Calling themselves 'crispy skin youngsters' also reflects a tendency among the youth to tease their weak body constitution," said an article published by researchers from the School of Chinese Language and Literature at Harbin Normal University.

"They are using humor as a means to make fun of and make light of pressure and grievances in their real lives," it said.

REPORTER'S LOG

Strength needed for positive lifestyle changes

I have never considered myself a "crispy skin youngster" or thought of myself as weak physically. I work out daily even when I get a cold or sprain my ankle. Ice cream is a staple in my diet all year around and is a must after a spicy hotpot feast.

But after turning 30 last year, I began feeling signs of aging, or cracks in my iron crust.

The most tangible change lies in my sleep quality. I used to sleep like a log. On weekends, I could sleep for more than 15 hours a day to make up for all-nighters I pulled on weekdays to meet assignment deadlines and feel refreshed on Monday.

But these days, I find it hard to fall asleep even when I'm exhausted. I can wake up as many as five times a night and often have disturbing or scary dreams.

Lack of sleep gives me more than dark circles under my eyes, but also skin breakouts, drowsiness at work and difficulties in focusing on tasks.

Years of bad dietary habits — eating super-fast, skipping breakfast and regularly snacking at midnight — are also taking a toll on my health. A traditional Chinese medicine specialist said two years ago that I had polyps on my intestines.

As a result, my New Year's resolution for 2024 is to quit snacking before bedtime and go to bed before midnight.

I stuck to the goal for two days but faltered on the third day, falling prey to a bag of potato chips, a bar of milk chocolate and several slices of white bread at 1:30 in the morning. Since then, I have not pressed the restart button.

Reflecting on the moment I failed myself, I think I just let myself go too easily. I was telling myself: "You are still young. Your health is not in a crisis. Some potato chips will not hurt. Potato is a great source of starch."

In the meantime, I was intimidated by the prospect of no late-night snacks for the rest of my life. How could I do away with such a guilty pleasure after a long day of hard work or a good workout in the evening?

But I have come to terms with myself and decided to take baby steps, such as grabbing a bottle of sugar-free iced tea rather than a can of Coke at the convenience store.

The conventional wisdom is that developing a new habit can take from a few weeks to several months. For me, the fostering of a healthy lifestyle could be years in the making, but I am glad I've realized the necessity to make a change in my early 30s.

WANG XIAOYU

Youngsters becoming more fitness-conscious

By WANG XIAOYU

For centuries, the concept of *yangsheng* — a Taoist and traditional Chinese approach to self-care and maintaining good health — has mainly been popular among retirees and the elderly.

But in recent years, *yangsheng*, literally meaning nurturing health in Chinese, has gained popularity among young adults as they become more inclined to spend on their well-being and health services and products.

A survey on consumer habits jointly released by China Central Television, the National Bureau of Statistics and China Post last year shows that among people age 18 to 35, spending on health and longevity items ranked in the third place, after spending on tourism and electronic devices such as computers and mobile phones.

Ling Jian, an accountant in Linyi, Shandong province, said she began practicing *baduanjin*, a low-impact traditional Chinese exercise comprising eight movements, about a year ago to unwind and relieve stress after work.

"I am not an athletic person and am intimidated by the competitive vibe in gyms, so doing *baduanjin* at home or in a park near my home suits me best," said the 32-year-old.

A mild form of exercise, Ling said that it takes persistence and patience to feel its benefits.

"More importantly, I think *baduanjin* serves as a gateway for me to learn more about traditional wisdom in preserving health, and I am also paying more attention to a diet with low salt and low oil," she said.

Another report on the consumption of nutrition and health supplements shows that urban residents spent 1,000 yuan (\$140) annually per

capita on these items, and nearly 84 percent of consumers making these purchases fall into the age range of 18 to 35.

The report, published in 2022 by several healthcare enterprises and Xinhua News Agency, also showed that a large number of young adults were not satisfied with the nutritional status of their bodies, and they bought vitamins, minerals and supplements for improving immunity and sleep quality.

However, more than half the survey participants also admitted that they tend to give up on healthy diets and lifestyles easily, and over 60 percent said they felt like money spent on nutritional products was wasted eventually.

Zhang Boli, a traditional Chinese medicine specialist and a deputy to the National People's Congress, the top legislature, said during this year's two sessions —

the largest annual political event in China — that an increasing number of Chinese people are experiencing symptoms of cardiovascular diseases in their early 40s.

However, he said that taking health supplements is not a one-size-fits-all cure to offset the harmful effects resulting from unhealthy lifestyles.

"Many young people can recalibrate their health to a better state simply by adopting a lighter diet and eating more fruits and vegetables," he said. "It's also important to rest sufficiently, avoid sleeping late or drinking too much alcohol, coffee or tea."

Zhong Can, head of the outpatient department at the Red Cross Hospital in Wuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, said during an interview with China Youth Daily that headache, neck stiffness, dizziness and insomnia are common complaints among



Joggers run at Anlong Limestone Resort, a park dedicated to mountain outdoor sports in Qianxinan prefecture, Guizhou province, in December. LIU CHAOFU / FOR CHINA DAILY

young adult patients.

"In one case, a 30-something male patient who sat in front of the computer screen for hours in the daytime and continued to play computer games or stare at his mobile phone at home visited me for discomfort in his neck," she said.

Instead of prescribing him any medical therapies, Zhong said that she persuaded him to cut time spent on electronic devices and asked his family members to supervise him. The patient's condition was soon alleviated without any medical interventions, she said.

WORLD

Russia claims advances in Kharkiv area

Mass evacuations prompted as Ukraine calls for urgent military aid from allies

MOSCOW/KYIV — Russia on Saturday said it had captured five villages in Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv region during a surprise ground offensive that prompted mass evacuations, as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky made an urgent call for military aid.

Moscow's defense ministry said its troops had "liberated" five villages in the Kharkiv region near the Russian border as well as taking one village in the Donetsk region.

Ukraine's defense ministry said on Friday Russia had launched an attack on the Kharkiv region, making small advances into a border zone. Later on Saturday, Ukraine's military command said Russia's ground troops had air support.

Groups of people fleeing the border area were arriving in vans and cars loaded with bags at a reception center for evacuees near Kharkiv, Agence France-Presse reported.

Around them, volunteers assisted evacuees toward a few wooden benches where they registered and received food before being evacuated toward Kharkiv, the regional capital. "In total, 4,073 people have been evacuated," governor Oleg Syneghobov wrote on social media.

Ukraine's military chief said on Sunday his country's forces were facing a difficult situation in fighting in the Kharkiv region, but that they were doing all they could to hold the line. The country's commander-in-chief Oleksandr Syrsky said the situation in the Kharkiv region had "deteriorated significantly" and was "complicated". Zelensky said in his nightly address on Saturday that Ukrainian troops had been carrying out counterattacks in border villages in the Kharkiv region.

Troops must "return the initiative to Ukraine", Zelensky said, again urging allies to speed up arms deliveries. "It is important that our partners support our soldiers and Ukrainian

resilience with timely deliveries — really timely ones," he added. "The package that really helps is the weapons brought to Ukraine, not just the announced ones."

Washington on Friday announced a new \$400 million military aid package for Kyiv.

It is the third tranche of aid for Ukraine since Congress passed supplemental funding in late April after months of gridlock.

Kyiv has said several months of delays by the US Congress to vote through a massive aid package have cost it on the battlefield. It now hopes significant quantities of the newly approved assistance will arrive quickly to shore up the defense effort.

On Saturday, a missile strike killed three people when it hit a restaurant called Paradise in Donetsk.

The attack, using US HIMARS precision rocket launchers, killed two diners and a restaurant worker and wounded nine, officials from the Russian-backed administration said.

Seventeen people have been hospitalized following the massive shelling of Russia's border region of Belgorod by Ukrainian forces, regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said on Sunday.

The shelling took place on Saturday, he said, adding that two of the injured were in critical condition.

"After the evening's massive shelling, 29 people were affected, 12 of whom, after receiving outpatient care, are already at home," Gladkov said.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin on Saturday approved the structure of Russia's new government, which will consist of one first deputy prime minister and nine deputy prime ministers.

According to the new decree, "On the Structure of Federal Executive Bodies", which Putin signed, the new government will see a shift in the distribution of responsibilities among the deputies, one of whom will act as the Russian Federation and Presidential Plenipotentiary Envoy to the Far Eastern Federal District.

There is also a deputy prime minister who will assume the role of Chief of Staff of the Government Executive Office.

The reappointed Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin is required to submit his deputy candidates for consideration to the State Duma, or lower house of parliament.

AGENCIES—XINHUA



Fatal crash

Officers clear the debris and belongings of passengers after a bus crash in Subang, West Java Province, Indonesia, on Saturday. At least 11 people were killed and dozens more injured when the bus carrying high school students lost control and veered to the left, crashing into a car and three motorcycles, police said on Sunday.

TIMUR MATAHARI / AFP

Boeing's issues continue to rattle US aviation regulator

NEW YORK — The US Federal Aviation Administration, sharply criticized after the crashes of two Boeing planes in 2018 and 2019, is again being dragged into a maelstrom surrounding the major US aerospace manufacturer.

The dramatic midflight blowout on Jan 5 of a fuselage panel on an Alaska Airlines plane precipitated the departures of a series of top Boeing officials — including chief executive Dave Calhoun, who is set to step down at the end of the year — and the reduced production of the 737 MAX.

However, as Boeing faces multiple inquiries and audits in the United States and abroad, it has repeatedly assured critics that it is working "with full transparency and under the oversight" of FAA regulators.

The FAA, which has seen four bosses come and go since August 2019, has been unable to evade a share of the responsibility.

"The FAA has to be held accountable as well," said Senator Richard Blumenthal, who heads a subcommittee investigating Boeing's safety practices.

After the panel incident in Janu-

ary, the agency dispatched a team to inspect Boeing factories, and gave the firm 90 days to provide an "action plan" to address several problem areas.

"I think the FAA is doing the best that they can and that they have greatly improved their surveillance of Boeing" since the 2018 and 2019 crashes off Indonesia and in Ethiopia, which killed 346 people, said Jeff Guzzetti, an aviation consultant and former head of the agency's investigation division.

"But they did fail to catch production problems," he said, noting that for decades the FAA relied on manufacturers themselves to "self-report problems".

The FAA, short on money and personnel, has long delegated the job of quality assurance to preapproved employees of the airplane manufacturers.

That creates "a conflict of interest," said Hassan Shahidi, president of the nonprofit Flight Safety Foundation.

"There needs to be a shift where the FAA has more direct responsibility for oversight," he said.

Like Guzzetti, he said he has seen some improvement but believes the FAA must dispatch more of its own inspectors — and not delegate so much regulatory authority to manufacturers.

But the agency "is on the right track now," said Richard Aboulafia, managing director of the Aero-Dynamic Advisory consultancy.

"It's nothing that can't be corrected with additional oversight and resources," he said.

Those resources depend directly on the US Congress, and the Senate on Thursday approved a "record" amount of agency funding for the next five years.

Funding for inquiries

"We need to show (the public) that we are asking for, implementing and holding accountable the FAA to a gold standard for safety," said Senator Maria Cantwell, who chairs the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee.

The "record" level of funding, Cantwell added, would allow the FAA to step up inspections.

Industry shortages of qualified personnel, from mechanics to engineers, were made worse by the pandemic, affecting every stage of manufacturing — from supply procurement to production and maintenance.

The FAA has specifically struggled to fill its hiring needs because workers can find higher pay and better benefits in the private sector.

Investigations into the 2018 and 2019 Boeing crashes showed that the company knowingly concealed from the FAA problems in a software system linked to the accidents, whistleblower Joe Jacobsen told Blumenthal's committee in mid-April.

Jacobsen, who worked for the FAA for 25 years after 11 years with Boeing, said the agency had become "too captive to Boeing."

The FAA falls under the US Transportation Department, whose inspector general in June 2022 opened an audit into the agency's supervision of 737 and 787 production. A final report is expected this summer.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Kenya woos investors to shore up manufacturing sector

By EDITH MUTETHYA

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Riding on the deepening relationship between the two countries, Kenya is calling on Chinese investors to take advantage of the opportunities in its manufacturing sector to contribute to the country's industrialization.

Juma Mukhwana, the principal secretary for the State Department of Industry, assured investors of a huge market once they set up factories in Kenya, saying the government has signed several agreements aimed at opening up the market for locally made goods.

Mukhwana, who spoke at a China-Kenya economic, trade and investment collaboration roundtable in Nairobi on Friday, said the

country had just concluded the Kenya-European Union Economic Partnership Agreement under which Kenyan goods gain duty-free and quota-free access to Europe.

Kenya is also working with other major economies such as the United States and with other African countries to facilitate exports to these countries, which will provide opportunities to investors in Kenyan manufacturing, he said.

Kenya aims to raise the contribution of manufacturing to GDP from 7.5 percent to 15 percent by 2027 and to 20 percent by 2030, calling for more international investment in manufacturing in Kenya.

Kenya also plans to establish industrial parks in all its 47 counties, Mukhwana said. Eighteen industrial parks have been built in 18 counties and another 18 will be

built next financial year, with plans to cover all 47 counties within the next three years, he said.

There are huge investment opportunities in textiles, leather, avocado, coffee, macadamia nuts, tea, pharmaceuticals and automotive sectors, he said.

The government is now looking at increasing cotton production to ensure adequate supply for the textile industry.

Mukhwana said the country is also looking for investors who want to invest in large-scale agricultural production, noting that Kenya has huge tracts of fertile land sitting idle.

"This is the appropriate time to invest in Kenya. As a government, we are ready to hold your hands wherever you want to invest and help you set up a factory to achieve your dreams."

China has been the biggest trading partner, and the biggest source of imports and foreign direct investment for Kenya. Bilateral trade was worth \$8.5 billion in 2022, 23 percent more than in the previous year, according to official figures.

Yuan Lin, of the Department of West Asian and African Affairs in China's Ministry of Commerce, said China has invested in e-commerce, transportation and logistics, green environmental protection and other emerging industries, playing an effective role in fostering the development of related industries in Kenya and other African countries.

By the end of last year China's average annual investment flow in Africa was about \$3 billion, with more than 3,500 Chinese companies engaging in various types of business activities across the continent, he said.



People from the village of Lyptsi wait in a minivan at an evacuation point in Kharkiv on Saturday. ROMAN PILIPEY / AFP

China and Africa tied together by roots of agriculture

By YANG RAN
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Li Yi and Kiprotich Wesley Cheruiyot share a common quest but are separated by the best part of 9,000 kilometers.

In fact, they don't even know one another. Yet they are the quintessential model of international people-to-people exchanges. The Chinese Li lives in Kenya and is now making social contributions to her adopted country; the Kenyan Kiprotich has lived in China for the past 10 years, getting an education that he hopes soon to turn into a good account in his homeland.

Another thing they have in common is a hands-on passion for agriculture, which would have been scarcely plausible just three years ago when Li appeared to be destined for a stellar career in the commercial world.

In 2021, as she sat in her office not far from downtown Nairobi, she had every reason to feel highly satisfied with her career. Li, 27, from Nantong in Jiangsu province, had spent four years studying at Pomona College in California and had gained a bachelor's degree in economics.

From there, she landed a job with the global consulting company McKinsey and worked in its Los Angeles office for a year before being transferred to Beijing in 2017 and then to Kenya in 2019.

Yet after more than a year in Nairobi, Li felt something was missing. She had joined a project aimed at helping local small and medium-sized enterprises to survive the economic fallout of COVID-19. At first, she was thrilled to be working on something with a direct social impact, but soon she realized that it seemed to be impossible to transform great ideas on paper into help for those in need.

Real life was passing her by, she felt, so one day she decided to quit her job.

Rather than trying to persuade her to change her mind, the McKinsey partner to whom she announced her decision applauded it and suggested she find work with an agricultural company. In an instant, Li, a management consultant, was transformed into Li, a prospective agricultural worker.

Three years later the decision to head off into new pastures appears to have paid off handsomely, not only for her but also for Kenya.

She is now the chief executive of an agricultural company called FarmWorks which aims to improve the productivity and consistency of local agricultural production and raise the living standards of local farmers.

Kiprotich's interest in agriculture and his hands-on approach to it germinated a little earlier than was the case with Li when he was about 20.

In 2013, when he was a senior college student at Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology in Nairobi, he took part in a training program on ridge-furrow planting technology with plastic film mulching and recycling for local farmers in Kenyan fields under the leadership of a Chinese expert, Professor Xiong Youcai.

He was fascinated by the technology Xiong demonstrated, so after he graduated he applied for a place in a postgraduate program guided by Xiong at Lanzhou University in Gansu province, where he would take a closer look at the technology.

According to statistical data observation of years at multiple points, the ridge-furrow planting technology with plastic film mulching and recycling that Xiong's team developed can increase the average yield of staple crops (corn and wheat) by 70-80 percent and improve the average water use efficiency by 90-100 percent.

Introducing technology

In the past 13 years, Xiong and his team have shuttled back and forth between China and Kenya more than 30 times, introducing this technology to Kenyan farmers.

After studying agriculture in China for a decade Kiprotich's goal is to

take this technology back to Kenya.

Kenya, with its vast agricultural potential, struggles with low agricultural productivity, Li says. Most of its agricultural production is conducted by smallholder farmers, making it challenging to achieve economies of scale and mechanization.

Smallholders' yields are only a fraction of what they could be, with productivity hovering at 10-20 percent of those of developed countries, and that presents a significant opportunity for improvement, Li says.

FarmWorks has three core activities: growing, buying and selling vegetables. "At the heart of our operations is a dual focus, namely managing production and sales," Li says. "We're keen to expand our sales network across Kenya. This approach aims to tackle the market access problem that smallholder farmers face, offering them a reliable outlet for their produce."

On the production side, the company owns three farms covering 66.67 hectares, where it has adopted the latest farming practices. The company obtains additional produce from growers elsewhere and turns a profit by distributing its own and others' vegetables to local supermarkets and farmers' markets and exporting high-end vegetables to Europe.

"We're now working with about 5,000 local smallholder farmers,



Li Yi, who is promoting agricultural technologies, works on a farm with her colleagues in Nairobi in April 2022. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

many of whose incomes and yields have risen significantly as a result of working with us."

The income of FarmWorks' external partner growers has risen by as much as a third after just one season, or three to four months, of being involved with her company, Li says.

FarmWorks is helping to change the way smallholder farmers operate in Kenya, Li says, improving their agricultural productivity.

Like Li, Kiprotich is effusive about the benefits his project work offers Kenya. "In the minds of Kenyans, there are two major Chinese projects. One is the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway, the first modern railway constructed in Kenya since its independence, and the other is the ridge-

furrow planting technology with plastic film mulching and recycling. "I want to master this technology and take it back home and drive positive change for Kenya."

Xiong's team has set up eight technology demonstration sites across Kenya, where local agricultural technicians and farmers frequently come to visit. His team has trained more than 1,500 smallholder farmers and 220 agricultural technicians.

Kiprotich, who is doing his post-doctoral research at Lanzhou University, says he wants to further promote the technology in Kenya, which will not only help guarantee the food security of the country but also help empower farmers and improve their livelihood.

WORLD

UK accused of double standards regarding Rwanda bill

GABORONE, Botswana — Botswanan experts have accused Britain of double standards regarding the deportation of asylum seekers to Africa.

Last month, the British parliament passed a controversial bill that paved the way for the country to send asylum seekers to Rwanda.

Thapelo Bulawa, a senior law lecturer at the University of Botswana, said British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak had pushed for the bill to be passed over the past two years despite strong opposition.

Lawmakers and activists did everything within their power to scupper the legislation on human rights grounds, but the British government remained determined, Bulawa said.

"Imagine a refugee from Palestine, Afghanistan, or some war-torn country finding his or her way into Britain, only to be deported to Rwanda under the deal that the two countries agreed to," Bulawa said.

"This kind of hypocrisy is what is happening under the Rwanda Asylum Plan." Under the plan, the first asylum seeker was sent to Rwanda from Britain on April 30.

Tendai Ruben Mbofana, a human rights activist and the director at Botswana Network for Social Justice, a local think tank on human rights issues, said that those fleeing persecution should be provided with protection.

Lack of moral obligation

"There is a moral imperative to help people escape violence and upheavals. And Britain has shown a lack of moral obligation by rejecting asylum seekers before passing them to another country," said Mbofana. Mbofana said the actions taken by Britain clearly show that "it does not care about the humanity and dignity of those seeking assistance."

Botswana Minister of Foreign Affairs Lemogang Kwappe said Botswana was approached by British authorities but turned down the proposal "because it is riddled with controversy."

"We have got a reputation to protect as a country. It is not that we are refusing to host asylum seekers, but things have to be done correctly," Kwappe said.

Britain was offering large sums of money to many African countries to accept rejected asylum seekers, but Botswana could not fall into the trap because "we did not want to regret in future for entering into a dodgy deal with Britain," said Kwappe.

Britain's opposition Labour Party on Friday pledged to scrap the Rwanda policy if it comes to power, replacing it with a tougher more joined-up approach to tackling irregular migration.

Labour, which is widely expected to win the next general election later this year after 14 years in opposition, has been under mounting pressure to say what it will do if it is voted into office.

In a speech, Labour leader Keir Starmer called Sunak's "stop the boats" policy an ineffective "gimmick" that was neither a deterrent nor value for money.

More than 8,800 people have crossed the Channel from northern France already this year, while a backlog in asylum claims has left about 52,000 stuck in government temporary accommodation, he said.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

Port anniversary



Two tugboats set off fireworks during the tugboat ballet at the 835th Hamburg Port Anniversary on the Elbe River in the harbor of Hamburg, Germany, on Saturday. Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa issued a charter on May 7, 1189, exempting the people from duty for ships on the Elbe from Hamburg to the North Sea. People of Hamburg celebrate the day as the birth of their harbor. GEORG WENDT / DPA VIA AP

Optimism ignited for cross-Strait relations

Political and community leaders cite cultural exchange, economy as drivers

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
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A meeting between Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, and Ma Ying-jeou, former chairman of the Chinese Kuomintang party, last month, ignited optimism for improved relations across the Taiwan Strait, as political and community leaders call for peaceful reunification, citing cultural exchange and economic ties as key drivers.

"Xi's warm reception of Ma and his delegation in Beijing is truly commendable. It is a gesture of utmost goodwill toward Taiwan," said Wu Cheng-dean, chairman of Taiwan's New Party, during a recent visit to San Francisco Bay Area.

Expressing confidence over the future of cross-Strait relations, he said that "Xi's demeanor, wisdom, charisma, and elegance make it clear that as long as we adhere to the one-China principle and the 1992 Consensus, we can transform the cross-Strait relations."

Wu was referring to a meeting on April 10 in Beijing at which Xi met a Taiwan delegation led by Ma.

The delegation, which included young people, visited historic sites, and interacted with youth in the

mainland. The visit is seen as a "breakthrough" for the strained cross-Strait relations by Fred Zou, deputy secretary-general of the Alliance for China's Peaceful Reunification, USA.

He emphasized the trip's focus on cultural exchanges between young people, aiming to enhance understanding of each other.

Zou cited the example of Zhong Mingxuan, a social media influencer in Taiwan who initially supported Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party, or DPP, but changed his stance after visiting the mainland early this year.

Firsthand experience

"Due to the lack of communication between the two sides, many young people in Taiwan, without firsthand experience of the mainland, are likely to be completely deceived and blinded by the DPP," Zou told China Daily.

Zhong's example illustrated the problem that many young people in Taiwan are misinformed about the mainland, but it also demonstrated the benefit of exchanges, he added.

Wu further emphasized the economic benefits of peaceful cross-Strait relations for Taiwan people. He noted that the Chinese mainland is the world's largest manufac-

turing base and Taiwan's biggest trading partner.

"This is the fundamental reason why cross-Strait relations must maintain peace and stability, and why the two sides should actively seek integration to achieve mutual benefit and win-win results," he said.

"The two sides of the Strait are one family and should draw upon the wisdom of the Chinese nation and strive for mutual understanding," said Wu, accusing the DPP of putting its own interests ahead of the well-being of the Taiwan people.

He expressed concerns over the role of the US military-industrial complex in fueling tensions across the Strait.

"Those politicians in Taiwan, for their own personal gain, are willing to sacrifice the livelihood and well-being of the Taiwan people, allowing arms dealers and war brokers to constantly add fuel to the fire," he said.

"We should strive for fully resuming cross-Strait tourism and cultural exchange, allowing people-to-people bonds to drive political dialogue," he said.

Zhu Fenglian, a spokeswoman for the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, said at a conference in Beijing late last month that despite some obstacles to cross-Strait exchanges and cooperation made by Taiwan authorities, with the joint efforts of people on both sides, cross-Strait exchanges and cooperation will have a bright future.



Miracle survival

A man raises his hand on a stretcher as rescue workers carry him to an ambulance after he was rescued, having survived 118 hours after a deadly building collapse in George, South Africa, on Saturday. Western Cape Premier Alan Winde said it is "nothing short of a miracle." Thirteen people have been confirmed dead. HERMAN PIETERS / VIA REUTERS

AGENCIES—CHINA DAILY

Thailand eyes ambitious tourism revenue target

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok
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Thailand's newly appointed Tourism and Sports Minister Serm Sak Pongpanit has reaffirmed the government's plan to maintain the tourism revenue target of 3.5 trillion baht (\$95 billion) this year.

The government plans to earn 2.3 trillion baht from 40 million foreign visitors and 1.2 trillion baht from 200 to 220 million domestic tourists, according to Thai media.

As the country will host Southeast Asia's first FIFA Congress on Friday, Serm Sak said the ministry will be promoting sports tourism, including Thai martial arts, which is also called Muay Thai.

He said several measures would be taken to achieve the target, including offering visa-free travel for people of some countries during the off-season and travel packages that promote healthcare and wedding tourism.

The ministry will hold tourism campaigns and events during the peak season to attract tourists from cold countries, he said, adding it will also promote new travel destinations in less popular provinces.

Serm Sak said a comprehensive plan would be drawn up to provide adequate information for tourists. Tourism services will be improved to facilitate those trav-

eling to tourist sites spread across the country, he said at a conference last week.

He launched a special campaign will be held before China's Golden Week in October.

A total of 12.6 million foreign visitors had traveled to Thailand this year as of May 6, generating a revenue of 605.2 billion baht, the ministry said. Chinese tourists accounted for the maximum number with nearly 2.5 million visitors.

Thailand's Kasikorn Research Center estimated that hotel occupancy rate in the country will be about 70 percent this year due to an increase in the number of tourists.

The center's recent report indicated that the income generated from the hotel industry will reach 950 billion baht this year, a year-on-year surge of 16 percent. It also said the revenue will help boost the incomes of people.

To boost income from tourism, the Tourism Authority of Thailand, or TAT, has been promoting tourism in second-tier cities over the past few months. Thapanee Kiatphaibool, governor of TAT, said the authority would launch campaigns to boost domestic tourism during the off-season.

As poll looms, electoral heft of Asian Americans grows

By BELINDA ROBINSON
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Asian Americans have become the fastest-growing group of eligible voters in the United States over the past 20 years, creating a crucial voting bloc for the candidates in this year's presidential election.

Over the past four years the number of eligible voters who are Asian American rose by about 15 percent, or 2 million people, compared with a rise of 3 percent for all other eligible voters, according to the Pew Research Center in Washington.

Christine Chen, executive director of the Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote, a non-partisan nonprofit group in Washington dedicated to "engaging, educating and empowering Asian American and Pacific Islander communities," said: "Political parties could be doing more outreach to court the crucial AAPI voting bloc... While there has been some improvement, the data shows AAPI voters are still being underestimated and overlooked by many campaigns."

Both the Democratic and Republican national committees have announced plans to court AAPI voters this year.

This month President Joe Biden's reelection campaign launched a \$14 million advertising blitz, saying at least \$1 million of the funds will be used to target AAPI, black and Latino voters via the media.

The Biden campaign sees some areas such as the Midwest, the Sun Belt and the Southwest as crucial to win against the presumptive Republican nominee, former president Donald Trump. The Biden administration is also touting several economic successes that it

says have benefited AAPI voters.

"We have lowered the Asian American unemployment rate to pre-pandemic levels," the White House said last year. "(We have) achieved the highest Asian American employment rates since 2008."

A spokesperson for the Republican National Committee said it would spend millions of dollars on communicating with AAPI communities in key states.

However, Chen said: "According to our most recent survey, around 50 percent of Asian American voters polled say they were not contacted, or were unsure if they were, by either the Democrats or the Republicans. More needs to be done to bridge this gap, especially as AAPIs become the margin of victory in an increasing number of districts and states."

It is estimated that at least 15 million Asian Americans will be eligible to vote in this year's general election. The group is 6.1 percent of all eligible voters, according to Pew Research Center projections. Many of these voters live in California, Hawaii, New Jersey, New York and Texas.

The US Census in 2020 put the number of Asian Americans in the country at 24 million.

Wayne Au, Interim Dean and Professor at the University of Washington Bothell School of Educational Studies, said the term Asian American grew out of mobilization against racial injustice in the late 1960s.

Political analysts are closely watching the history of the Sun Belt and the Southwest as crucial to win against the presumptive Republican nominee, former president Donald Trump. The Biden administration is also touting several economic successes that it

not by chance but was "years in the making."

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Briefly

JAPAN

China envoy calls for peace and stability

China's Special Representative of the Chinese Government on Korean Peninsula Affairs Liu Xiaoming addressed the 32nd Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue in Tokyo, Japan, saying China stands ready to work with other parties to uphold peace, development and stability of Northeast Asia. On the sidelines of the two-day dialogue starting from Wednesday, Liu had separate meetings with representatives of countries including the United States, the

Republic of Korea and Japan, exchanging views with them on the situation in Northeast Asia and the Korean Peninsula, as well as issues of shared interest.

BRAZIL

Death toll from floods continues to climb

The death toll from heavy rains in Brazil's Rio Grande do Sul state had risen to 136, the local civil defense government body said on Saturday, up from 126 in the previous day, while another 125 people remained unaccounted for. Storms and floods battering the South

American country's southernmost state had also left about 537,000 displaced, according to the local civil defense body, a significant increase over the 340,000 reported a day earlier. About 446 urban centers have been impacted, affecting the lives of more than 2.1 million people.

NIGERIA

Over 100 kidnapped in raids on villages

More than 100 people were kidnapped by gunmen during Friday night raids on three villages in northwest Nigeria, a district head

and residents said on Saturday, the latest abduction of villagers in a region blighted by widespread insecurity. Kidnapping has become endemic in Nigeria's northwest as roving gangs of armed men abduct people from villages, highways and schools, and demand ransom money from their relatives. Alhaji Bala, head of a district in the Birnin Magaji local government area of Zamfara, said gunmen attacked the villages of Gora, Madomawa and Jambuzu and that 38 men and 67 women and children were missing.

BUSINESS

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Stabilizing economy augurs well for global growth

Rebound of trade, investment, manufacturing, and tourism boom key positives

By OUYANG SHIJIA
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China's economy is showing fresh signs of stabilization with a solid first-quarter performance this year, laying a strong foundation for achieving its preset growth target of around 5 percent for 2024, said economists and global executives.

Expressing confidence in China's economic trajectory, they said they foresee the nation maintaining its pivotal role as a primary contributor to global economic growth in 2024.

They, however, also cautioned the latest economic data showed a mixed picture of recovery, and advocated intensified endeavors to bolster domestic demand, address structural challenges and continuously deepen reforms and opening-up.

Liu Xueyan, director of the Macroeconomic Situation Research Office at the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research, said China got off to a good start in 2024 with strong first-quarter GDP growth, steady growth in manufacturing and brightening social expectations.

"With a robust foundation laid in the first quarter, renewed market confidence and ample room for policy adjustment in the pipeline, China will be on track for steady recovery in the second quarter," she said.

Looking ahead, Liu said she believes China's 2024 annual growth target of around 5 percent is achievable. "With rapid growth in resident incomes, improving urban employment, coupled with policy support, optimism is brewing over China's consumption growth this year."

The five-day May Day holiday again proved to be a bumper time for tourism this year. It saw 295 million domestic trips, with a 7.6 percent year-on-year growth and an increase of 28.2 percent compared to that of 2019. Domestic tourism revenue reached 166.89 billion yuan (\$23.16 billion), up 12.7 percent year-on-year and an increase of 13.5 percent over the same period in 2019, according to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

"In terms of investment, with the optimization and adjustment of real estate policies, the downward impact of real estate investment will weaken this year," Liu said. "Meanwhile, manufacturing and infrastructure investment will continue to rebound backed by forceful fiscal support, including the issuance of ultra-long-term special treasury bonds and local government special bonds."

On exports, Liu noted China's foreign trade with countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative is expanding from traditional export markets to broader regions, and exports of the "new three" — passenger electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and solar cells — will continue to support the steady growth in foreign trade.

Latest data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed an official snapshot of the stabilizing economy, as China's manufacturing activity expanded for the second consecutive month in April.

China's official purchasing managers index for the manufacturing



Export-bound vehicles await loading at Lianyungang Port, Jiangsu province. WANG CHUN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Employees work on the production line of a tractor manufacturer in Luoyang, Henan province. ZHANG YIXI / FOR CHINA DAILY



An employee works on the production line of a textile plant in Fuyang, Anhui province. LU QIJIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

sector stood at 50.4 in April versus 50.8 in March, NBS data showed, above the 50-point mark that separates growth from contraction. The country's official composite PMI, which includes both manufacturing and nonmanufacturing activities, came in at 51.7 in April, down from 52.7 in March, the NBS said.

Meanwhile, the Caixin China General Services Purchasing Managers' Index, which focuses more on small and medium-sized enterprises and exporters, came in at 52.5 in April, down from 52.7 in March, media group Caixin said. Caixin's composite PMI, which includes both manufacturing and services activities, rose to 52.8 in April from 52.7 in the previous month, recording the highest level since May 2023.

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

He said China's economy still enjoys favorable conditions and factors, given a potential soft landing of the US economy and the stronger growth in the global economy. "I think exports are the primary positive factor."

While China's growth target of around 5 percent for this year seems challenging, Simpfordorfer said he believes the goal is "still achievable if the real estate sector begins to stabilize."

He added that "the real estate sector will remain a drag", and the correction in real estate investment and sales will take at least another six to 12 months.

"There's good reason for policymakers to maintain an easy interest rate and credit policy this year," he said.

To further bolster China's economic recovery, Simpfordorfer advocated that policymakers should increase fiscal spending in key fields

such as health and education.

"That might provide consumers, especially low-income ones, with greater certainty in their household finances and greater confidence to start to spend more on other types of goods and services," he said. "To see a stronger recovery this year, we need to see consumer spending accelerate."

Huang Yiping, dean of Peking University's National School of Development, said that the nation's economy is relatively stable. "There is hope that the economy may continue to improve, given that the government will expand its fiscal spending and provide more support to economic growth in the coming months."

"The US economy looks like it is experiencing a soft landing, which should be positive for our external economic environment and exports."

Huang called for more efforts to

boost economic recovery and stabilize employment, which will bolster consumer sentiment and increase incomes for households.

He added that the government is allocating more resources to support social welfare, pension and health-care systems, trying to revitalize rural areas, as well as supporting households in replacing their consumer durables with new ones. "These subsidies, spending and so on would be positive for consumption."

Given China's better-than-expected economic performance, both Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs have raised their outlook for China's economic growth this year.

Morgan Stanley has revised China's 2024 real GDP growth forecast from 4.2 percent to 4.8 percent. Goldman Sachs raised its forecast to 5 percent from 4.8 percent.

Erik Berglof, chief economist of the Asian Infrastructure Investment

Bank, said: "China has been and will remain an important contributor to global growth in the foreseeable future. There is huge potential in the Chinese economy. China graduates around 1.5 million engineers every year."

Erik Berglof,
chief economist of the Asian
Infrastructure Investment Bank

Bank, said: "China has been and will remain an important contributor to global growth in the foreseeable future. There is huge potential in the Chinese economy. China graduates around 1.5 million engineers every year. There's a lot of potential for technological development, more productivity and more economic growth."

But there are challenges as well, as the broader economy is still facing pressures, including uncertainty in the private sector and weakness in the property sector, which may continue to drag down growth in the short term, he said.

"What China needs to do is exactly what is being announced," he said. "China needs to create clear conditions and rules on how the private sector can contribute. It needs to focus on innovation, and try to bring new ideas and new ways of organizing things. All that is part of China's contribution to the global economy."

A meeting of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee in April said the country will make moves to actively expand domestic demand, advance large-scale equipment renewal and trade-in of consumer goods and introduce more consumption scenarios and promote people-centered new urbanization. The meeting also called for research on policies and measures to reduce housing inventory and improve the quality of newly added housing.

Xiong Yuan, chief economist at Guosheng Securities, said the key meeting mainly focused on deepening reforms, implementing existing policies, boosting domestic demand and stabilizing the property sector, which will significantly increase market sentiment and stabilize expectations.

"China's proactive fiscal policy will stay front-loaded. The country will issue ultra-long-term special treasury bonds as soon as possible, and speed up the issuance of local government special bonds," he said. "On the property front, potential moves may include central funding to support reducing housing inventory and further property policy easing in first-tier cities like Beijing and Shanghai."

Lu Ting, chief China economist at Nomura, said potential risks in the property sector will remain the major challenge facing China's broader economy. "We need to take more measures to tackle the property woes, including further proper easing in first-tier cities and some second-tier cities as well as more steps to ensure delivery of presold homes."

China's green automakers – champions of smart mobility

REPORTER'S LOG

By Ouyang Shijia

I witnessed a collision at the 2024 Beijing International Automotive Exhibition — that of innovation and progress. Throngs of energetic visitors appeared to feed off the powerful, colorful, shapely beasts on display, whose engines' horsepower specs and other tech details showcased the rapid strides made by

the auto industry, especially its electric vehicle sector. The expo was a testimony that the world's largest auto market is fully embracing a high-tech and green future.

Even until a decade back, car expos were known to attract visitors, especially males, as much for their latest vehicle models as for the female models that heightened the event's glamor and oomph. Not anymore. The focus has shifted to the titans of industry. Media cameras now chase visionary entrepreneurs such as Lei Jun, CEO of Xiaomi; Li Xiang, CEO of Chinese NEV startup Li Auto; and

Li Bin, CEO of Nio. Their endeavors have been driving China's new energy vehicle sector, which is known for its innovations.

At the sprawling exhibition halls, I sensed a pattern emerge, reflecting the accelerating pace of China's automotive prowess. Between 2020, when the exhibition was last held, and this year, a remarkable transformation has taken place, with Chinese carmakers ramping up efforts to catch up with their foreign counterparts. Homegrown brands like BYD, Great Wall Motor and Xpeng hire vast exhibition spaces to showcase a diverse array of

their latest NEVs.

Themed "Driving to Smart Mobility", the recently concluded 10-day expo captivated nearly 900,000 visitors with its sheer scale and innovation. Automakers unveiled 117 new models, while 278 NEVs were put on display.

The show came as NEV sales hit a milestone in the first half of April, accounting for more than 50 percent of cars sold in the country, as per data from the China Automobile Dealers Association.

During the January-March period, China's production and sales of NEVs reached 2.12 million and 2.09 million units, respectively, reporting

growth of 28.2 percent and 31.8 percent year-on-year. NEV sales accounted for over 30 percent of cars sold in China in the first quarter, data from the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers showed.

Xiao Xinjian, director of the Research Department II of Xi Jinping Thought on Economy Study Center, said China's burgeoning NEV sector enjoys huge growth potential, effectively driving the nation's green transition and providing the world with China's solution for green and low-carbon development.

Xiao noted that China's edge in the NEV sector is powered by market forces, especially sufficient market competition, expressing optimism and confidence about the sector's future growth prospects.

According to a report by the International Energy Agency, global EV sales are estimated to reach 45 million units in 2030, more than triple the global sales in 2023 and 4.5 times that of 2022.

Xiao dismissed the allegation by some Western countries that China's green industries are hammering global industrial chains with "overcapacity", saying "the capacity utilization rates of China's large NEV makers stand at a reasonable level of around 80 percent to 82 percent."

"The robust growth of China's new energy vehicle industry has met the global demand for quality products, contributing to global efforts to address climate change and build a green and low-carbon system," Xiao said.

BUSINESS

Steel industry likely to be stable as recovery steady

Decline in demand for metal used in real estate sector may narrow this year

By OUYANG SHIJIA
and LIU ZHIHUA

China's steel industry is forecast to maintain stability this year as the world's second-largest economy is on track for a steady recovery, said industry experts.

"China's steel demand will likely remain steady or report slight growth this year given the country's around 5 percent annual GDP growth target, the recovery in downstream demand, and the move to accelerate fixed-asset investment and promote large-scale equipment renewal and trade-in of consumer goods," said Zhang Longqiang, president of the China Metallurgical Information and Standardization Institute.

Zhang said the decline in demand for steel used in the real estate sector may narrow this year, as the country has doubled efforts to promote the construction of government-subsidized housing, build dual-use public infrastructure that can accommodate emergency needs and redevelop urban villages.

Zhang estimated that infrastructure investment will remain stable this year with a growth rate of at least 5 percent, suggesting a steady growth of steel demand for infrastructure construction.

"Demand for steel in energy and manufacturing industries will keep growing, especially in fields like wind and solar power, nuclear power, new energy vehicles, shipbuilding and marine engineering."

Zhang said the implementation of China's plan for driving large-scale equipment renewal and promoting trade-in deals for consumer goods is expected to create an additional over 14 million metric tons of annual steel demand. New urbanization will continue to promote steel buildings and the construction of "new infrastructure" will also boost steel demand, he said.



Masteel Group employees measure the temperature of a steelmaking furnace in Maanshan, Anhui province, in April. ZHANG MINGWEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed that China's crude steel output fell 1.9 percent year-on-year to 257 million tons in the first quarter. Apparent consumption of crude steel decreased by 4.7 percent year-on-year to 232 million tons during the January-March period, said the China Iron and Steel Association.

Jiang Wei, vice-president of the association, attributed the notable decline in apparent consumption of crude steel to factors like the lack of

effective downstream demand and a slow demand recovery after the Spring Festival holiday.

"The steel industry still faces challenges like temporary severe imbalances in supply and demand, notable declines in steel prices and rising iron ore prices," he said.

Facing pressures from challenging market situations, the steel industry has been actively accelerating the cultivation of new quality productive forces, and promoting high-end,

intelligent and green transition.

Jiang said the demand for steel used in the manufacturing sector has grown over the years, with the sector accounting for 48 percent of the overall steel demand in 2023, up from 42 percent in 2020.

"The steel industry has significantly accelerated the adjustment of its product structure, in a bid to meet the increasing demand for steel used in the manufacturing sector, including fields like automo-

biles, ships and household appliances," Jiang said.

According to a survey by the association, 40 percent of surveyed steel enterprises have applied three-dimensional visual simulation technology on major production lines, 79.6 percent have piloted big data models, and 18.4 percent have already deployed partial applications of artificial intelligence. As of April 23, some 136 steel companies completed or partially completed

ultra-low emission transformation and assessment monitoring.

Despite challenges ahead, the steel industry will focus on opportunities from rising demand in sectors like manufacturing and energy, Jiang said.

"More efforts should be made to adjust and optimize the offerings and create more high-value items."

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By YUAN SHENGGAO

Shenzhen Design Week, which wrapped up on May 6, vibrantly showcased the city's ongoing effort to rebrand itself within the culture and fashion scene, according to local officials.

With the theme "Design for a Better Life", the event kicked off on April 27, featuring a wide range of cultural activities and exhibitions. Besides the opening ceremony, the City of Design Roundtable Dialogue and the World Designers Congress, the Kumpeng Global Design Award ceremony and award-winning works' exhibition were held, along with a series of brand promotion events.

Representatives from the UNESCO Creative Cities Network and the International Council of Design, and industrial insiders from Asia, North America, Europe, as well as representatives from Hong Kong, Macao, designers from cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan and Chongqing, and experts and scholars from domestic design schools, were invited to the event.

Rebranding city's role

Shenzhen in South China's Guangdong province is known as one of the country's primary tech hubs. In 2023, the city government released a three-year action plan with the goal of building itself into a "City of Design". In the inaugural year of that action plan and the seventh year since the establishment of Shenzhen Design Week, Shenzhen revamped the positioning and operation of its design week event to create a multilayered exhibition and communication platform.

In the new context, more than 20 series of branded events, including the fashion week events and other key innovative design activities throughout the year, are organized under the Shenzhen Design Week framework and serve as an experiential platform for urban management and improving residents' quality of life.

The just-concluded Design Week advocated the fusion of design and creative industries, and utilized various forms of creative design activities to promote Shenzhen's industrial development. During the roundtable dialogue, a special segment was organized to facilitate design industry exchanges among global design



The City of Design Roundtable Dialogue is held during the 2024 Shenzhen Design Week event. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Design and fashion take center stage in Shenzhen to showcase local culture

organizations, institutions, businesses and schools, catalyzing collaboration and innovation in the global design sector.

Subactivities of the Design Week were organized throughout the city, with each having its own features. One major highlight came from the design work of *Dream Wings*, which was exhibited at the Rail In shopping mall. The Shenzhen city image film *Leading the Way*, which premiered at the opening ceremony of the Design Week, has become a sensation. Consisting of more than 700 components in its intricate structure, the work embodies a tangible expression of the spirit of Shenzhen.

An international typography design exhibition, another representative activity affiliated with the Design Week, was held at the Nantou Ancient Town in the city. It showcased a respected attitude to the long-standing Chinese characters and allowed visitors to explore the potential of future design.



A major piece of art embodying the Shenzhen spirit is exhibited during the design week event.

Many young students came to the exhibition, among them one surnamed Lu, a sophomore from Guangzhou. "We are very interested in design. We heard the activities of the Shenzhen Design Week are particularly rich, so we finally came during the May Day holiday to see this horizon-broadening event," said Lu.

The Shenzhen-Hong Kong-Macao

Digital Creative Design Exhibition also attracted a large number of visitors with its imaginative design, interactive experiences and strong visual impact. A female visitor described the exhibition as "refreshing, as some traditional cultural elements became more vivid and interesting through digital technology. It was delightful to see so many

cutting-edge works in Shenzhen that were aligned with new media trends."

In addition, several exhibition areas in Shekou, Overseas Chinese Town and Nanshan Museum have attracted many local visits with diverse traditional craftsmanship revival projects, contemporary art, and light and shadow design.

Appealing award and works

On April 27, the Shenzhen Global Design Awards, known as the Kumpeng Global Design Award, were handed out after evaluating about 5,000 entries from 18 countries and regions. After a professional evaluation by 25 international and domestic judges, a total of 331 award-winning works were selected in the five major design categories of urban design, industrial design, fashion design, digital design, and communication design, with total prize money of 5 million yuan (\$691,970).

Zhang Ling, head of the city's com-

munication department, said this year marks the 16th year since Shenzhen was awarded the title of "City of Design" by the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, and noted the Kumpeng award emphasizes respecting traditional culture and drawing design inspiration from the long history of civilization and distinctive local culture. "In Shenzhen, every creative idea will be respected. Shenzhen will create a better environment for the design industry and promote the commercialization of award-winning works," said Zhang.

As a core component of the Shenzhen Design Week, the award was supported by the organizing committee of the Shenzhen Design Week and administrated by the Shenzhen Innovation and Creative Design Development Office.

This year's gold award winner in fashion design is the *Dragon Flight* brooch designed by Shenzhen Yinghe Taifu Jewelry. The brooch integrates poetry, painting and Chinese philosophy, evoking thoughts and nostalgia with its romantic and aesthetic design. Its lead designer, jewelry artist Wu Fenghua, said the inspiration for the piece came from a line in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) poem *Spring River in Flower Moon Night*. The core design concept aims to express the ultimate life ideal of transforming like a fish into a dragon and benefiting the world.

Ni Qiaobo, a project officer of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network and UNESCO Cities Platform, said Shenzhen is the first city in China to join the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. With the successful organization of the Shenzhen Design Week accompanied by many other activities, Ni said Shenzhen plays a leading role and has achieved significant accomplishments regarding tech-driven development and innovation. It is also gaining increasing recognition internationally.

Alessandro Antonicelli, a design teacher from Italy, said the Shenzhen Design Week was very important for the creation of design culture in the city because it provides a platform for people to think and learn more about design, while Dhruv Bharat Shah from Kenya said: "I learned different concepts of design and what design means to my peers in different industries. And that makes a big difference to someone like me who's not a design student."

BUSINESSINSIGHT

Why China's 'new three', green push irk West

EAGLE EYE

By Zhang Yansheng

One of the issues raised by US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen during her visit to China last month is the so-called overcapacity in China's "new three" industries — new energy vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and photovoltaic products.

But seen from the global governance level, what the world lacks most now is a mechanism for redressing global imbalances, a mechanism for handling global losses, gains and compensation, and an arbitration mechanism for conflicts and coordination among major economies.

Thus, the focus of such an issue can be traced to how major global powers take the responsibility of building a mechanism for global rebalancing and adjustment.

Yellen, as a professional economist, believes that China's current production capacity is excessively large, and other countries in the world simply cannot digest it. She also claimed to be concerned about China's long-term macroeconomic imbalance, which is caused by insufficient household consumption and excessive corporate investment.

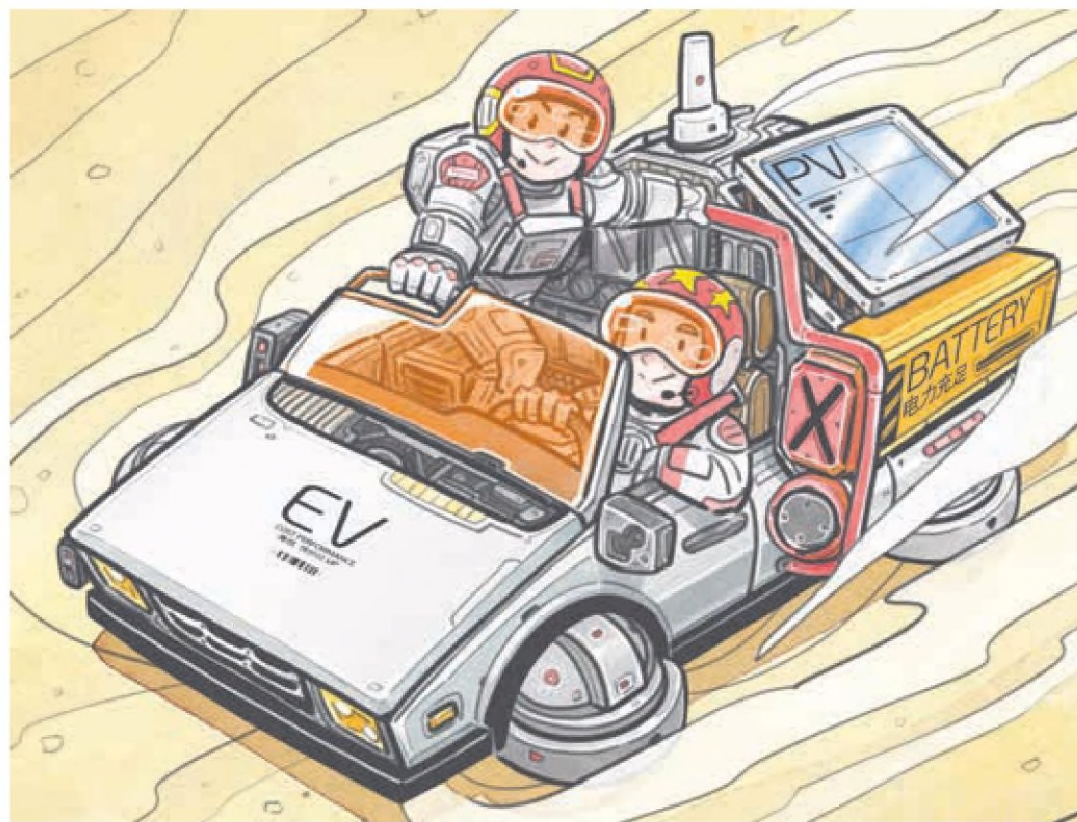
Yellen believes that it is the government's industrial policies that have supported emerging industries in China, such as electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and solar energy.

On Sept 13 last year, the European Commission also announced the launch of an anti-subsidy investigation into electric vehicles imported from China. At that time, I was doing research in Europe, and several major European associations told me that this investigation was initiated by the EC instead of the European business community, and was targeted at China's "new three" industries. They added that not only did the EC intend to take action against China's "new three" industries, but also the US government would follow suit soon.

All these suggest that noneconomic factors are at play behind this so-called overcapacity problem.

According to the International Energy Agency, global demand for NEVs in 2030 will reach 45 million units, which is 4.5 times that of 2022. Global demand for newly installed capacity for photovoltaic products will reach 820 gigawatts, which is about four times that of 2022. This shows that current production capacity is far from meeting global market demand.

In response to the accusation by Yellen and European regulators, US economist David Goldman raised several questions: Is



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

the overcapacity problem primarily due to China's excessive investment, or is it due to insufficient investment in the United States and other Western countries? Does the increase of China's production capacity have an impact on demand for industrial products? In other words, could an increase in supply lead to an increase in demand? Who is buying more Chinese products? Is it the US, which buys a large number of Chinese products at the expense of its own industries, or are Chinese products being sold to countries without competitive industries?

During the global financial crisis in 2008, the US introduced a theory of global economic imbalance, claiming that China was the initiator of such global economic imbalances and that China should foot the bill for the global financial crisis.

When discussing it with my US friends, I drew two charts: one showing the US' current account deficit and the other showing China's current account surplus. The charts show that the US deficit accelerated starting from 1991, peaking from 2005 to 2007. The

root of the deficit lies in the tech bubble in the 1990s and the financial bubble in the 2000s.

Meanwhile, China's surplus accelerated from 2005, making it a victim of the two bubbles led by the US. Yet, the US demanded that China should take responsibility for the international financial crisis and foot the bill to mitigate global imbalances.

Over the past few years, the US has taken massive economic stimulus measures in response to the COVID-19 crisis. As a result, by June 2022, inflation rates in the US and Europe reached 9.1 percent and 8.6 percent, respectively. Subsequently, aggressive interest rate hikes were implemented to counter inflation. This year, the US is expected to have a fiscal deficit of \$1.6 trillion, with total debt reaching \$35 trillion and annual interest payments reaching \$1 trillion, indicating a towering debt burden.

As for the geopolitical game between China and the US, on the one hand, the US is engaging in a comprehensive reassessment, correction and reboot of its education, tech-

nology and industrial policies of the past 40 years, attempting to address the hollowing out of its manufacturing sector. On the other hand, the US is leveraging new protectionism, industrial policies and government intervention to undermine the solid foundation of China's production and supply chains.

In this context, is the US once again using global imbalances as a pretext to make China foot the bill for alleviating global imbalances? This time, there is a stronger tint of geopolitical confrontation, with a tendency to oppose China at every opportunity. The progress that China has made in the "new three" industries is politically incorrect for the US, along with its allied countries.

This retrogressive approach is not only unfair to Chinese companies and global consumers, but also a step backward in the global transition toward sustainability.

Currently, the global economy is entering a new era of green revolution, new energy revolution and digital technology revolution. There are two different trends in the

global green revolution. One is romanticism, which only talks but doesn't act. In some developed countries, there is even a new trend of regressing from dual carbon goals. The other is realism, which starts from reality and progresses step by step. China, adhering to the principles of "seeking truth from facts", being pragmatic and progressing step by step, encourages technological innovation and high-quality development of new energy and NEVs.

Thanks to the joint efforts of various entities in China, significant technological and industrial progress has been made in strategic emerging industries represented by the "new three" industries in the green transformation of traditional industries including transportation, chemicals, metallurgy and construction.

If there were no negative spillovers of geopolitical tensions, protectionism and over-generalization of security, the supply and demand of NEVs, photovoltaics and lithium batteries would reach a dynamic equilibrium on a global level.

At the same time, China will further deepen market-oriented reforms, expand high-standard opening-up, improve the legal system, and enhance the institutional framework for fair competition, green development and the advancement of clean energy domestically.

China is accelerating the development of new quality productive forces, which will make a greater contribution to achieving global sustainable development. New quality productive forces are in and of themselves green productivity, which will promote a comprehensive transformation from controlling energy consumption to controlling carbon emissions.

China will achieve more technological and industrial breakthroughs in fields such as green revolution, new energy revolution and digital technology revolution. However, Chinese-style modernization requires us, as a responsible major country, to not only focus on our own development, but also drive common global development.

We cannot just pursue winner-takes-all or zero-sum games, but should promote shared benefits, cooperation and shared development. We should not only focus on exporting green goods and services, but also pay more attention to importing green products and services, and promote comprehensive international cooperation in green development. China will continuously improve market-oriented reforms and achieve new progress.

The writer is chief researcher at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

What 'overcapacity'? Nation playing key role in global economy

MAIN STREET

By Wang Jinbin

In the midst of an ongoing trade dispute, the United States has been persistently raising concerns over the so-called overcapacity in China.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen recently claimed that China's new energy sector suffers from overcapacity, leading to global price distortions and adversely affecting US businesses and workers. However, this viewpoint is unfounded and lacks substantial evidence.

First of all, in the era of economic globalization, the prices and sales of goods are determined by global market forces.

The concept of green development has become an inherent requirement of China's modernization. China has laid out wide-ranging targets to mitigate climate change — its "dual carbon" goals aim to peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.

Global consensus on the significance of green development has been growing steadily. It is widely acknowledged that transitioning to renewable energy sources and fostering the development of green industries are key historical trends that will shape the future of the global economy.

China's success in green development can be attributed to its sustained focus on technological innovation. The country has continuously improved its green supply chain system, ensuring a robust and competitive market environment for the rapid growth of the new energy industry.

In 2023, China's exports of "new three" products — new energy vehicles, photovoltaic products and lithium batteries — were worth 1.06 trillion yuan (\$147 billion), up nearly 30 percent year-on-year.

As the world recognizes the need for

sustainable solutions, China's efforts in promoting new energy imports and exports, as well as green technology transfers, have played a crucial role in facilitating the transition toward a greener world.

The global new energy industry is currently facing a shortage of high-quality production capacity rather than an issue of "overcapacity".

According to estimates by the International Energy Agency, the global demand for NEVs is projected to reach 45 million units by 2030, a staggering 4.5 times the levels recorded in 2022.

Similarly, by 2030, the global photovoltaic sector is expected to witness a fourfold increase compared to the levels in 2022 in new installed capacity, with the demand by 2030 reaching 820 gigawatts.

Contrary to concerns about overcapacity, the current global production capacity in the new energy sector is far from sufficient to meet potential market demand. This observation holds true not only at the global level but also within China's domestic market.

While China has been a leading exporter of new energy products, there remains significant untapped demand in its vast urban and rural areas. This untapped demand presents a substantial and enduring market space, ensuring stable and long-term demand for China's new energy products. Consequently, the production capacity in China's new energy sector is also far from excessive.

The notion that China extensively exports new energy products at low prices is not borne out by the facts. In fact, Chinese NEVs are generally sold at higher prices overseas; yet, their sales volume continues to grow rapidly.

These observations indicate that the pricing and sales of new energy products are determined by the dynamics of international market supply and demand, reflecting the outcomes of a fully competitive market economy.

In addition, a fundamental economic principle — the principle of comparative

advantage — emphasizes the benefits of specialization and trade. However, deviating from this principle can have adverse effects on consumer welfare.

In market economies, imbalances between supply and demand are a common occurrence. It is not uncommon for any country or region to experience overcapacity in certain products. (This is not to say that China currently has overcapacity in the new energy sector.) However, market competition and technological advancements naturally eliminate excess capacity that lacks market demand.

China's new energy sector has showcased its global leadership in quality production capacity, as evidenced by the remarkable export figures and market share dominance achieved in key segments.

In 2023, China's exports of electric vehicles exceeded 1.77 million units, marking a staggering 67 percent year-on-year growth. Additionally, the country currently holds over 60 percent of the global power battery market share.

The early establishment of the new energy industry, the significant effects of industrial clusters, substantial investments in research and development, improved cost management efficiency, stable and efficient logistics, and the driving force of the domestic market have all contributed to the rapid growth of China's new energy sector.

This division of labor is a result of Chinese companies' own efforts in the fiercely competitive global market, rather than reliance on low-cost dumping or industrial protectionism.

In contrast to China's focus on technological innovation and quality production, the US government has been vigorously promoting a "100-percent Made in America" narrative. In November 2021, the Biden administration signed the largest infrastructure bill in half a century, amounting to a stupendous \$1 trillion.

The Biden administration aims to incentivize US businesses to use domestically sourced materials through subsidies, with the intention of boosting the domestic man-

ufacturing industry. However, this approach contradicts the principles of global comparative advantage and is likely to exacerbate inflationary pressures in the US while reducing consumer welfare.

The US has found itself embroiled in hypocrisy when it comes to its approach to green energy subsidies. On the one hand, the US government has implemented large-scale subsidies to promote the development of new energy sources.

On the other, it has been quick to criticize China's subsidies for green energy, disregarding the facts and invoking the notion of "fair competition". Such actions not only undermine China's rights to green development but also hinder the progress of environmental sustainability worldwide.

Observers have begun to see through the US government's strategy of advocating free markets when it is competitive, only to resort to protectionism when its own competitiveness wanes.

The rise of China's advanced manufacturing capabilities has posed a significant challenge to the US' leading position in the advanced manufacturing sector. The claims of China's overcapacity in the new energy sector are seen as nothing more than an excuse for the US to implement further trade protectionist policies, employing old rhetoric to hinder China's technological advancement.

In the current era of green development, many countries, including China, are facing challenges in industrial restructuring and labor adjustments. The advancement of new energy technologies is driving a profound realignment of global production and supply chains. With global competition intensifying, the redistribution of resources and interests is an inevitable outcome of market forces.

China's rapid development in the new energy industry has presented a substitute effect on the global market shares of developed countries like the US, resulting in a shift from trade surplus to deficit in this sector for some nations. The growth of China's new energy sector has reshaped global

market dynamics, raising concerns among certain countries about their competitiveness and market share.

Conflicts and differences in international economic and trade cooperation should be managed properly based on the fundamental principles of fair competition and open cooperation within the framework of market economy and in accordance with the rules of the World Trade Organization. It is imperative for countries to collectively uphold the stability of global trade order and the resilience of production and supply chains.

The US' approach of politicizing trade issues, including concerns related to production capacity and other economic matters, has sparked significant trade frictions among major nations. This attempt to disrupt China's crucial role in maintaining stability within the global production and supply chains goes against the principles of market economy.

Moreover, it not only hampers the development of domestic industries but also poses a threat to the stability of the global economy, and severely undermines the realization of the global climate agenda.

In fact, China welcomes the US to engage in fair competition in the international emerging sectors. China has fully lifted foreign investment market access restrictions in the manufacturing sector, allowing countries to fully share the development opportunities of China's vast market, thereby enhancing the competitiveness of both the Chinese and global markets.

China has emerged as Tesla's second-largest market globally, with the US carmaker selling over 600,000 vehicles in China in 2023, representing a year-on-year growth of over 37 percent. The Chinese new energy sector is taking concrete actions to fulfill the global climate agenda.

The writer is a research fellow of the National Academy of Development and Strategy at Renmin University of China, and vice-president of the School of Economics at the university. This article is a translation of his op-ed, first published on the official WeChat account of the China Macroeconomy Forum, a think tank. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

COMMENT

Editorials

By acting as a proxy for Washington
Philippines has clearly lost the plot

There have been times when the Chinese and Philippine governments have agreed their relationship is much bigger than their South China Sea disputes.

In those times, those disputes were managed relatively well, as were bilateral ties in general.

Yet those times seem to be over, at least under the current administration in Manila, and a regrettable lack of wise helmsmanship from it is sending the once manageable ties toward a dangerous fractiousness. To make things worse, third parties, in the region and beyond, are deliberately exacerbating the frictions.

As Chinese and Philippine government officials continue trading accusations over the World War II ship Manila grounded on China's Ren'ai Reef in 1999, the encounters between their maritime forces are grinding toward a spark. Manila has deployed several ships to "monitor" the supposed illegal activities of China, said the office of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Multiple vessels of the Chinese People's Liberation Army's Southern Theater Command Navy have been sent to the South China Sea for a "combat training exercise".

As both governments insist, neither side wants the altercation to spiral out of control. But as their latest dispute over the alleged telephone conversation between a Philippine admiral and a Chinese official indicates, the drain of mutual trust is amplifying mutual animosity. And those ill feelings are increasingly poisoned by outsider interference.

According to Chinese diplomatic sources, Chinese and Philippine officials had reached a "gentleman's agreement" on the latter's missions to supply

its troops on the grounded warship with life necessities. Per the transcript of the phone conversation between Philippine Vice-Admiral Alberto Carlos and an unidentified Chinese official, they agreed to a "new model" for such missions. The "new model" limited resupplies to food, fresh water and other humanitarian materials on condition prior notice was given to the Chinese side. After violating it by sending building materials to the grounded vessel, Manila now flatly denies the existence of the agreement despite Philippine and Western media publishing a transcript of the conversation that makes clear the agreement was made.

First there was the Armed Forces of the Philippines chief of staff denying the authenticity of the transcript, claiming "it appears to be a malign influence effort" from Beijing. Then came the Philippine national security adviser, who accused the staff members in the Chinese embassy in Manila of violating their domestic law, and appealed for their expulsion.

Manila has clearly been emboldened by its closer association with regional and extra-regional powers, from the security partnership it just formulated with the United States and Japan to the recent US decision to deploy medium-range missiles on Philippine soil. But for all its willingness to make peace, Beijing cannot afford to budge on a matter of national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Beijing and Manila once demonstrated they could make peace on their own. Sadly the latter seems more than ready to consign its own future to outsiders preoccupied with strategic rivalry with China, whatever the cost.

With friends like US, who needs enemies

The US Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security added 37 more Chinese entities to the Entity List, claiming that the move demonstrated its commitment to safeguarding US national security. Tellingly, it also said that the new additions were in support of US foreign policy, which, as evident to all, aims to curtail China's development.

The new additions bring the number of Chinese entities the Joe Biden administration has put on the Entity List to 355 — more than any prior administration, as a statement announcing the move proudly boasts.

Highlighting the political nature of the administration's latest additions to the list in the run-up to the presidential election in November, 11 entities were added for their involvement in China's "High Altitude Balloon" program, which BIS said poses significant national security concerns.

Despite later acknowledging that the balloon that entered US airspace early last year was a wayward meteorologic balloon, it seems that the administration is going to hype up its scaremongering on that score ahead of the election. The latest additions build on previous actions the US took in February 2023 to target China's aerospace programs. The distance between a weather balloon and aerospace cause just exposes the extent to which the US is ready to stoop to a new low to contain China's technological progress.

Other Chinese entities being targeted include 22 for their participation in China's quantum technology advancements, which is aimed at trying to thwart China's progress in quantum technology research, development and application, where the

US side has no obvious advantages over China.

Meanwhile, along with the enlarging of the Entity List, US media report that the Biden administration is to raise tariffs on electric vehicles from China from 25 percent to about 100 percent in the coming days, and batteries and solar panels from China will also be targeted. These protectionist moves cannot spearhead US green technology's competitiveness, and they will only hinder global green transitions as a whole.

Such "blatant economic coercion and bullying in the field of technology", as Beijing described the moves, came shortly after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen wrapped up their visits to China, supposedly as part of the Biden administration's efforts to repair ties and manage differences responsibly by leveraging the role of consultation mechanisms in such areas as diplomacy, economy, finance and commerce that have ostensibly agreed to restore or establish to resolve bilateral disputes.

Biden has repeatedly claimed that his administration does not want to curtail China's development, and does not seek "decoupling" from China. But the latest rounds of new sanctions and threats of exorbitant tariffs on Chinese green products clearly show that the Biden administration is hellbent on saying one thing and doing another in handling China relations, feeling no qualms about overdraw further on its already bankrupt credibility. That leaves China no choice but to take necessary measures to resolutely safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese enterprises, and reevaluate the US' commitment as well as its own input to repair ties.

Time for Seoul to reassess its borrowed policy

While the planned visit of Republic of Korea Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul to China from Monday to Tuesday is not expected to mend the bilateral relationship, it is anticipated that it will at least help both sides work toward that end.

Cho's visit comes at a time when the ROK has a trade deficit of \$18 billion with China, which was previously the source of its largest trade surplus. This is the first trade deficit the ROK has had with China since the two sides forged diplomatic ties in 1992. The reason is political rather than economic.

As ROK-based East Asia Daily pointed out, China imported \$4.48 billion worth of semiconductors from the ROK in 2023, 20.3 percent lower than in 2022. This is due to the United States cajoling the ROK to limit its chip exports to China. In other words, it is the ROK that has suffered most heavily by faithfully heeding the US' call for its allies to cut their chips supply to China.

Thus when the ROK Foreign Ministry told the media that the two nations would talk about "issues of common interest, from bilateral relations, the trilateral summit and the Korean Peninsula, to regional and global issues", they need to know the plain truth that the two nations' common interest can only be

ensured by Seoul pursuing an independent foreign policy. That applies not only to trade but also security considering its worsening relationship with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

With the ruling People Power Party performing poorly in the congressional election in April, the Yoon Suk-yeol government has almost become a lame duck. It needs to uphold strategic autonomy that serves the nation's own interests rather than those of the US. Thus Seoul is accelerating its steps to improve relations with its neighbors.

The fact that the ninth China-Japan-ROK leaders' meeting is scheduled to be held in Seoul on May 26-27, according to ROK sources, offers the opportunity for the three countries to find ways to work together for their mutual benefit.

Seoul deserves credit for actively promoting the resumption of the meeting mechanism that has been suspended since 2019. Yet the challenges faced by the trilateral relations over the past five years should remind Seoul, as well as Tokyo, that it is imperative to carry out exchanges in good faith if the three neighbors are to delve into the issues where their ties really rub, and work together to deliver on their potential with concrete and earnest actions.

Song Chen



Opinion Line

Biden cannot butter the bread
on both sides regarding Vietnam

US President Joe Biden always boasts that his diplomacy with Vietnam is a "highlight" of his foreign policy. The US Department of Commerce held a public hearing on whether to recognize Vietnam's "market economy status" on Wednesday. It will complete the review and make a final decision on that before July 26.

But the heated discussions at the hearing demonstrate that Biden's attempts to court Vietnam as a strategic ally conflict with his desire to secure the votes of union workers.

During Biden's visit to the Southeast Asian country last year, he announced that the US-Vietnam relationship would be upgraded to a "comprehensive strategic partnership". Later, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen called Vietnam a "friendly" investment destination, and declared that the country is a suitable supply chain alternative for the US.

More than 10 countries, includ-

ing China, Russia, Vietnam, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Azerbaijan, are listed as having "nonmarket economy status" as designated by the US Department of Commerce.

For the "nonmarket economy" countries, the US imposes high tariffs on goods imported from them and allows the imposition of so-called antidumping tariffs.

The US Department of Commerce has established a set of criteria to "determine" whether a country has market-driven economic attributes: whether the country's currency is freely convertible; whether its wage rates are freely negotiated between labor and capital; whether joint ventures or other foreign investments are allowed; whether the means of production in the country is owned by the state; whether the state controls the allocation of resources and price and output decisions; wheth-

er human rights and labor rights are protected in the country.

Yet these criteria are nothing but excuses trying to cover up the fact that the "nonmarket economy" list is a geopolitical tool. Washington has launched many antidumping investigations against Vietnam over the years. In January this year, a number of US senators and representatives wrote to the US Department of Commerce stating that granting market economy status to Vietnam would exacerbate ongoing trade distortions, erode the US' manufacturing base, and threaten US workers and industry. Things that many workers' unions have also expressed concerns about.

As such, to try and grant Vietnam market economy status before the US presidential election stems from the Biden administration's needs to cater to some voters' demands for "decoupling" from China.

— BEIJING NEWS

Home purchasing restrictions outdated

After Hangzhou and Xi'an annulled their restrictions on nonlocal residents buying homes last week, only Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Tianjin and Haikou are still carrying out the policy that was introduced about 10 years ago with the aim of checking the bubbling of the housing market then.

To reboot the lackluster real estate market, which concerns many upstream and downstream industries, investment, consumption, national financial security and government revenue, it is projected that these cities will also adjust their restrictive policies in the near future. The national housing inven-

tory for sale now has already exceeded its historical high in 2015.

Therefore the policymakers urgently need to release effective purchasing power, activate housing market transactions, hedge against declining demand, restore market momentum, and stabilize price signals and market expectations.

The first-tier cities should pay attention to meeting the demand for housing purchases by the migrant population and singles. Currently, the average age of marriage and childbirth in large cities is delayed and the proportion of single people is increasing.

However, the final effect of lifting

purchase restrictions remains to be seen. The housing prices are still high in light of people's income, even if home mortgage interest rates fall.

The following factors should also be taken into account: the low birth rate, the aging and shrinking of the population, the reduction in residents' savings rate, the unemployment situation, the downward pressure on the economy, and that many migrant workers and college graduates have already moved from the big cities to small and medium-sized towns and to their hometowns in rural areas where home purchase restrictions were never imposed.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

What They Say

UNSC not arena to promote hegemony but peace

The United Nations General Assembly voted by a wide margin on Friday to grant new "rights and privileges" to Palestine and called on the UN Security Council to reconsider the request of the Palestinians that Palestine become the 194th member of the United Nations.

Although the US can still veto Palestine's UN membership in any UN Security Council vote on the issue, as it did on April 18, the result of the latest UN General Assembly vote reflects the wider support for full membership of Palestine in the UN, which means greater pressure on Washington not to act against the will of the world.

US Deputy Ambassador to the UN Robert Wood said on Friday that for the US to support Palestine's statehood, direct negotiations must guarantee Israel's security and future as a democratic Jewish state and that Palestinians can live in peace in a state of their own.

But by saying that the US side just pretends to be blind to the fact that it

is the Israeli side that has been recklessly killing the Palestinian people on their land. And even if the Hamas Oct 7 attack is taken into account, what the Israel has done in the region since the end of World War II must also be borne in mind as well, which clearly shows the right and wrong of the Palestinian question.

The world can see clearly that the statehood of Israel has not only been fully guaranteed but also the country has prospered. In the process, it has continuously expanded its influence to the Palestinian side beyond the 1967 borders, and even invaded neighboring countries, including Syria and Lebanon.

Over the years, Israel, as the occupying power, has technically eroded the foundation of the two-state solution. The current conflict, which has lasted for more than seven months, is more likely to completely ruin the prospects of the two-state solution agreed by the international community.

So it is not the security or future of

the Israeli people that has become a question of grave concern, but that of the Palestinians, whose survival in Gaza has even become a question today thanks to Israel's aggression, which has been indulged and supported by Washington.

That Israel intensified its attack on Rafah on Saturday, with the US acquiescence, in response to the Palestine-related vote in the UN General Assembly the previous day, presents a grave provocation to the common will of the international community, and also serves to put an end to its peace talks with Hamas in Cairo that has lasted for days, in which Hamas made big concessions for a cease-fire.

The US should put aside its own interests and work for world peace and humanity, undertaking its global responsibility. The UN Security Council is a platform to resolve issues and not create divisions or hijack the global peace agenda for one's own narrow ends by abusing its veto power.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Fallacy of Chinese Overcapacity

Editor's note: By hyping up China's so-called overcapacity problem, the US-led West has shown its disregard for economic principles. With complete industry and supply chains, China's manufacturing sector has ranked first worldwide for years. And its high-quality but affordable electric vehicles display the advantages of having a complete industry chain, which the West refuses to accept. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Otton Solis

Overcapacity or over-competitive China

For nearly 40 years, from the time the "Washington Consensus" took shape till the start of the Donald Trump administration, the US led the West in proclaiming the wonders of free trade. Playing by the rules was to take measures according to the tenets of that paradigm. Hence, open market competition and the central role for supply and demand in determining the prices of goods and services were to be accepted by any country expecting to be treated as a respected member of the global community.



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Washington Consensus refers to a set of economic policy recommendations for developing countries, Latin America in particular, which the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the US Department of Treasury agree on. According to the Washington Consensus, if demand exceeds supply, prices would adjust upward, thereby reducing demand and encouraging an increase in supply. In contrast, if supply exceeds demand, prices would adjust downward. If at the new lower prices, some enterprises could not make profit, they would disappear, making way for the most efficient ones to thrive and consumers to reap the benefits of higher consumption at a lower price. Any attempt to hinder these dynamics, say, by means of import tariffs or quotas, or voluntarily agreed export restraints, would undermine the advantages of market competition regarding the productivity of the factors of production and consumers' welfare in both the exporting and the importing countries.

Within the context of the paradigm, the concept of "oversupply" is a non-

starter, except as a very short-term event in exceptional cases in which, due to lack of information, prices did not adjust downward as soon as supply exceeded demand. That was the lesson and those were the rules to be guided by. Price and quality competition, and free trade had all the answers.

But then Chinese enterprises became so efficient, competitive and technologically advanced in some sectors that they started to outperform some Western enterprises and take increasing market shares. This led to massive trade surpluses vis-à-vis most Western economies and with other countries that were traditionally the realm of those economies. As such, the free trade paradigm became a nuisance for the US-led West, which had propagated it in the first place.

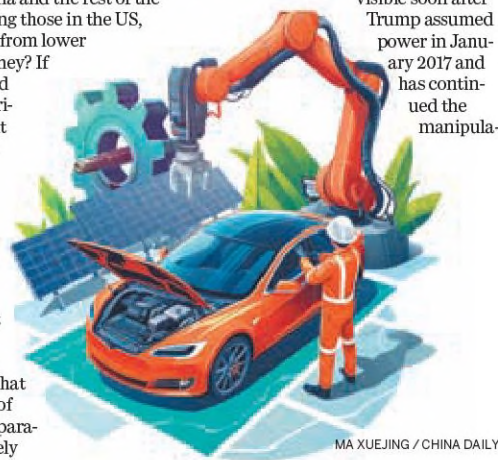
As China, following the rules, became an unprecedented economic success, the developed world started accusing it of violating intellectual property protection rights, dumping, posing a threat to other countries' national security and, of late, oversupplying due to overcapacity, which, according to US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, "can lead to large volumes of exports at depressed prices".

Even if that were the case, what is the problem? "Depressed" prices with respect to which prices? Those of less efficient Western enterprises? Consumers in China and the rest of the world, including those in the US, would benefit from lower prices, won't they? If those supposed "depressed" prices is the result of higher productivity and efficiency, then what the Western enterprises should do is to get their act together and become more competitive. That is the essence of the economic paradigm intensively

advocated by the West and even imposed, through the Washington Consensus-induced cross-conditioned lending, on developing countries facing dire financial problems.

Prices are depressed because of overcapacity derived from Chinese enterprises' willingness to lose money, that is the latter's problem and, for sure, of no concern to third parties. But if indeed there is overcapacity and depressed prices and if they are the upshot of the Chinese government's support policies aimed at increasing exports, as Yellen has suggested, some remarks are called for. First, we should be grateful to China for channelling its taxpayers' money to allow consumers in the rest of the world, including in the US, to improve their standard of living by enhancing the purchasing power of their incomes. In particular, consumers of the Global South, should be happy and grateful that thanks to Chinese enterprises, they are able to buy China at "depressed prices" instead of having to buy more expensive goods, for example cars, from Western manufacturers.

Second, and more important in the context of Yellen's remarks, since 2017 the US has implemented a number of policies to strengthen US enterprises through import tariffs and taxpayer-funded subsidies and grants. This "visible hand" of the US state became visible soon after Trump assumed power in January 2017 and has continued the manipula-



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

tions, with even greater zeal, under the Biden administration. The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, along with other bills, is an apt example of that.

Billions of dollars of grants are being given to US companies and those from friendly countries relocated to US soil. The policy's explicit objective is to blunt Chinese enterprises' market edge in some advanced technologies. Paradoxically, it is expected to achieve that objective not through competition and free trade but via the very strategy which China is being accused of using.

And, third, China has played a substantial role in increasing consumption over the last four decades and more. By lifting over 800 million people out of poverty, an achievement unprecedented in history, China has boosted global demand far more than any of the economies that are accusing it of overcapacity. Is it not audacious for those countries to blame China for eventual market gluts?

The truth is that, in the face of China's highly competitive economy, some countries are desperately trying to find ways to check its development. The explanations tossed as vindicators of trade defensive measures have ranged from China's supposedly low environmental and labor standards to likely national security threats to the urgency of preventing a socialist model from emerging victorious (never mind the fact that market reforms are at the core of China's economic success, as Yellen herself has rightly stated). Overcapacity seems to be only the latest excuse.

Yet if China or any other country had overcapacity in drugs or weapons, then it would deserve the cursing of the rest of the world. Depressed prices on such goods will end up causing addictions, wars and deaths. But being from a country like Costa Rica, I welcome the oversupply of products such as electric vehicles, because they are tools to mitigate climate change (the same is true for solar panels), their "depressed" prices and such a market solution to the "problem".

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Ni Yueju

Western industrial rhetoric nothing but an economic fallacy

The United States and its Western allies have been hyping up the non-existent China's "overcapacity" issue to justify their protectionist measures and to paint China as a threat to international trade. A closer analysis, however, shows this narrative is deeply flawed and those using it are overlooking the complexities of global economic dynamics. Rather than representing an existential threat, China's purported overcapacity reflects the evolution of its industrialization process and its efforts to meet shifting market demands.

Overcapacity, in general, refers to a situation in which production capacity exceeds market demand. While it is undeniable that China experienced periods of overinvestment and misallocation of resources during its rapid industrialization process, viewing the country's current economic landscape solely through the lens of overcapacity is oversimplifying a complex reality. By resorting to such accusations, the US-led West refuses to acknowledge the significant strides China has made in optimizing its industrial structure and enhancing the quality and competitiveness of its products.

During the initial stages of China's industrialization, spurred by market reforms and globalization, there were instances when the country's industrial output outpaced domestic and global demand projections. Sectors such as steel, coal and cement had overcapacity as a result of ambitious investment initiatives and optimistic growth forecasts. However, it is necessary to recognize that overcapacity is not a static phenomenon but rather a dynamic process influenced by market forces and technological advancements.

In response to the challenges posed by overcapacity, the Chinese government initiated comprehensive reforms in order to address the structural imbalances and promote sustainable growth. Through initiatives such as supply-side structural reforms, capacity reduction programs and efforts to promote innovation and technological upgrading, China has made concerted efforts to optimize its industrial base and align production capacity with evolving market demands.

One of the most notable achievements of China's industrial transformation is the significant improvement in productivity and product quality. By investing in automation, digitalization and process optimization, Chinese manufacturers have achieved economies of scale and sharpened their competitive edge in international markets. Also, China's emphasis on research and development, and innovation has helped advance cutting-edge technologies and high-value-added products, particularly in sectors such as consumer electronics, renewable energy and electric vehicles.

Contrary to the narrative propagated by some Western politicians, China's rise as a manufacturing powerhouse cannot be attributed solely to the country "dumping" cheap products in global markets. Instead, it reflects the country's growing capability in producing high-quality goods that meet the diverse needs of consumers worldwide. Chinese products have earned a reputation for their reliability and affordability, positioning China as a key player in the global supply chains.

In projecting China's industrial prowess as a threat to Western economies, the US-led West is not only being misguided but also reflecting its narrow understanding of the dynamics of global trade. Rather than viewing China's manufacturing prowess as a zero-sum game, Western countries should appreciate the mutual benefit of trade and cooperation. The overcapacity narrative is a deliberate attempt to reject the interconnectedness of economies and the shared opportunities for development.

Moreover, the focus on China's overcapacity distracts attention from the structural challenges facing Western economies, including declining industrial competitiveness, stagnating productivity growth and widening income inequality. Instead of scapegoating China for their domestic economic woes, Western policymakers should focus on addressing internal challenges and fostering a more inclusive and sustainable economic model.

It is essential to approach economic relations between countries with pragmatism and mutual respect, rather than succumbing to the rhetoric of economic nationalism and protectionism. The demonization of China's economic policies not only lowers the prospects for constructive dialogue and cooperation but also risks escalating tensions and triggering a cycle of retaliatory measures.

In today's increasingly globalized world, "overcapacity" not only concerns the industrial development of individual countries but also serves as a touchstone for international relations. The core purpose behind the US-led West's hype over China's overcapacity is to safeguard their own economic interests and competitive advantages, reflecting deeper contradictions and power struggles brought about by changes in the global economic landscape.

The US and the West should respect the principles of market economy and fair competition, and work with other countries to maintain the stability of the global industry chains. If they continue to take measures to curb China's industrial development using the pretext of "overcapacity", they will not only face a backlash from the international market but also strengthen China's resolve to intensify its industrialization campaign.

Rather than viewing China as a threat, Western economies should recognize the opportunities for collaboration and mutual benefit the country offers. By adopting a more nuanced and inclusive approach to economic relations, the West and China can build a more resilient and prosperous global economy for all.

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Chen Qi

US hidden agenda in EV sector unmasked

China's electric vehicle (EV) industry has come under intense scrutiny, with the United States and the European Union deciding to launch investigations into Chinese-made EVs to determine whether they pose a threat to national security. Ostensibly projected as efforts to promote fair competition and safeguard national security, such investigations suggest the US has a hidden agenda rooted in protectionism and strategic apprehension.

The US claims that China's EV sector is plagued by overcapacity, and the Chinese government gives unfair subsidies to EV manufacturers (as well as buyers). However, such accusations are unfounded, divorced from reality, and those leveling such accusations overlook the dynamic nature of capacity building inherent in rapidly evolving industries. Also, those accusing China of giving price subsidies fail to acknowledge the market dynamics and technological prowess that underpin China's competitive edge. Independent analyses have consistently shown the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of Chinese EVs, dispelling the narrative of unfair advantage.

Chinese-made EVs are highly cost-effective because of China's efficient supply chains, technological prowess and market dynamics, rather than subsidies and/or dumping policy. A comprehensive analysis by UBS shows that the overall cost of EV-maker BYD's Dolphin model is 35 percent lower than that of similar models manufactured by Volkswagen in Europe.

Besides, China's low export rate for EVs indicates domestic consumers comprise the main market for Chinese-made EVs, and the penetration of EVs in the overall automobile market is still relatively low. More impor-



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tant, if market share alone is used as a criterion to determine whether there is overcapacity in a certain industry of a country, then Germany's and Japan's auto sectors, France's wine industry, the United States' large aircraft industry, and Italy's luxury goods sector all suffer from overcapacity.

The hypocrisy of the US and the EU is exposed by their selective application of standards. While condemning China for alleged impropriety, they themselves engage in a global subsidy race to bolster their own EV industries. The US Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, for example, provides about \$369 billion in tax breaks and subsidies for the clean energy industry, with subsidies for EVs expected to reach \$14 billion by 2031.

Such glaring double standard not only undermines the credibility of their claims but also exposes the disingenuous nature of their rhetoric. By weaponizing trade probes on the pretext of promoting fair play in order to stifle competition, they violate the principles of free and open markets they purportedly champion.

The actions of the US and the EU also contradict their professed commitment to environmental stewardship and climate action. By erecting barriers against high-quality, cost-effective Chinese-made EVs, they are undermining their own leadership in the global fight against climate change. This is a disservice to the

global community and a betrayal of their responsibility to combat climate change.

Behind the US' claim of promoting fair competition and safeguarding national security is a hidden agenda driven by fear and protectionism. The US and the EU are grappling with the disruptive forces unleashed by China's industrial transformation and the emergence of new economic powerhouses. Faced with the prospect of losing their privileged positions in the global economic order, they are resorting to desperate measures to maintain their stranglehold on key industries. The investigations into China's EV sector are but a symptom of this broader malaise — a last-ditch effort to maintain their economic dominance.

For the Joe Biden administration, launching a trade investigation against China is also influenced by electoral considerations, particularly in a US presidential election year. Accused of being "soft on China", the administration believes the investigation against Chinese-made EVs will project to the American public that the president has taken a very tough stance against China, which in turn will help him to win crucial swing states such as Michigan — the center of the US' auto industry.

The resilience and ingenuity of China's EV industry cannot be underestimated. Despite facing relentless scrutiny and unfair competition, Chinese companies have continued to innovate and excel on the global stage. Their commitment to quality, efficiency and sustainability has earned them accolades from consumers worldwide. And their proactive engagement with emerging markets and commitment to global cooperation bode well for the future

of the EV industry.

In these times of degradation of international trade norms, it is imperative that the Chinese government and EV manufacturers shoulder the responsibilities of a major power. They should uphold the principles of fairness, openness and win-win cooperation to propel global economic and trade cooperation and foster global economic recovery.

To begin with, China should use multilateral trade arbitration mechanisms to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of its enterprises and help reform the international trade governance system centered on the World Trade Organization, so as to adapt to the economic and trade activities of the green era. Thanks to the current inability to litigate subsidies under the WTO's Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures — because it became ineffective in 2001 — subsidies for environmentally-friendly products today lack institutional safeguards.

Also, China needs to more actively engage with countries and regions, including in fields such as low-carbon technology and green transformation cooperation to create a favorable external environment for the promotion of new energy products. And Chinese car companies should take measures to strengthen cooperation with their US and EU counterparts in areas such as research and development in high-tech, restructuring of global industry chains, and brand joint ventures. By leveraging their respective strengths, they can jointly expand the global EV market, using market forces to overcome political barriers erected by certain countries.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

SLAVICA STAMENIC

A sincere friend on the New Silk Road

Serbia can, by advocating transparency and fair trade, deepen China-EU cooperation, thus positioning itself as an important figure in a major geopolitical narrative

Last year marked the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative, which is focused on boosting regional connectivity and fostering a prosperous economic future by developing infrastructure and expanding trade routes across Asia, Europe and beyond. This initiative gathers about 150 countries, or three quarters of the global population. Serbia, a small country in the Balkan region, has emerged as a significant partner in this initiative. Its strategic location makes Serbia a crucial hub for the BRI. Thanks to this initiative, many substantial and mutually beneficial achievements have been made regarding cooperation between the two countries.

Fifteen years have passed since bilateral relations between China and Serbia entered a new phase. In August 2009, the Serbian government promoted China as one of the four most important pillars of Serbia's foreign policy.

In June 2016, during President Xi Jinping's visit to Belgrade, a comprehensive strategic partnership was formalized. Since then, this relationship has grown rapidly and deepened, encompassing mutually advantageous cooperation across all key sectors.

Politically, Serbia and China support each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity in global forums and organizations. China steadfastly supports Serbia's endeavors to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity and to seek a resolution for Kosovo via dialogue under the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244. At the same time, Serbia consistently supports China on the Taiwan question and adheres to the one-China policy.

On economic issues, Serbia and China collaborate on numerous significant projects, including the construction of the Belgrade-Budapest high-speed railway, a cornerstone of the BRI.

China has invested heavily in Serbia's infrastructure, energy, and technology sectors, viewing the country not just as a transit route, but also as a strategic industrial hub. Noteworthy projects include the construction of bridges and roads, as well as the revitalization of the Smederevo steel factory by a Chinese steel conglomerate. Chinese companies such as HBIS, Zijin Mining, and Zijin Copper are now among Serbia's top exporters. Moreover, China has become Serbia's main trading partner. Last year, a free trade agreement between China and Serbia was signed in Beijing. Its primary goal is to significantly reduce both tariff and non-tariff barriers, including various quotas and certification requirements. This agreement is expected to alleviate Serbia's trade deficit with China and boost the Serbian economy through increased employment, investments and exports.

Cultural ties between Serbia and China are deepening through educational and cultural exchanges. Programs such as scholarships for Serbian students to study in China and the establishment of Confucius Institutes in Serbia are deepening mutual cultural understanding. Last year, the Chinese Cultural Center was established in Belgrade, at the site of the former Chinese embassy. As we mark 25 years since the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, President Xi paid a state visit to Serbia, reflecting the enduring friendship between China and Serbia.

However, since 2018, the negative narrative regarding China has increased. On the one hand, some Western countries perceive the BRI as a Chinese attempt to create a Sinocentric world order. Western criticism and pressure on China partially stem from the expansion of its automotive industry. The entry of high-quality, competitively priced Chinese vehicles is particularly troubling for Western markets. On the other hand, the European Union, while considering Serbia's Euro-integration, has expressed concern about Chinese influence in

the Balkans. The partnership has invited negative comments regarding the so-called Chinese debt.

In fact, some European countries are obsessed with concocting the "China threat" theory and refuse to recognize China's development. They should cooperate with China to upgrade European manufacturing industries, and compete fairly with Chinese companies.

Within the BRI, China has fostered mutually beneficial cooperation, aiding developing countries in infrastructure and economic development without imposing political conditions, unlike some European counterparts.

As Serbia deepens its strategic partnership with China, it increasingly stands at the intersection of East-West politics and economics. Deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Serbia toward the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind is the fundamental concept of Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy. This represents a concentrated expression of the collective pursuit of values for all humanity and has brought tangible benefits to people in all countries.

By advocating for transparency, fair trade, and sustainable development, Serbia can strengthen its position as a crucial mediator, not just in fostering bilateral relations with China but also in enhancing wider cooperation between China and the European Union. In pursuing these strategies, Serbia not only promotes its own interests but also assumes a more proper role in the stability and prosperity of the region, positioning itself as an important figure in a major geopolitical narrative of our era.

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HUANG MENG MENG

Point of reference

Hungary's pragmatic and balanced economic foreign policy boosts Sino-Hungarian cooperation

The geopolitical competition among great powers has become increasingly intense since the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis. The economic and foreign policies of the European Union present a trend of "pan-securityization", in which trade and investment have become part of the security issues.

Discussion about reducing economic dependence on China, critical infrastructure protection and controls on dual-use technology exports is endless. Due to the rising competitiveness of Chinese enterprises in the fields of new energy, electric vehicles and digitization, many European politicians assume that the nature of EU-China trade relations has changed from "complementary" to "competition". In light of this, the EU has launched a foreign investment screening mechanism, a supply chain act, and the European Economic Security Strategy, as well as an anti-subsidy investigation into China's EVs, all of which are trade protection measures.

However, while the EU links trade to geopolitical and security issues, Hungary has taken a different approach to dealing with international geopolitical risks, maintaining economic resilience through a pragmatic "Opening to the East" policy, which is an effective alternative to the "de-risking" approach. Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjardo has warned that any move to decouple, or de-risk, from China would be an act of "suicide" for Europe, and he has appealed for a realistic approach, saying that closer economic cooperation between the East and the West is needed more than ever before. In this sense, Hungary is seeking to strengthen the country's connectivity and fight against the rise of political and economic blocs. Thus, in recent years, Hungary has become a popular investment destination for China's EV manufacturers based on its pragmatic and balanced foreign and economic policies and industrial strategy.

The idea of Hungary's economic and foreign policies is to shape balanced trade and investment relations between the East and the West, strengthening the resilience of its economy. The liberal policies in the post-Cold War period did not improve Hungary's economic position in Europe. Thus, in 2011 the

Hungarian government launched the "Opening to the East" policy with the aim of developing diversified trade relations and achieving a balance of East-West direct investment in Hungary, to extend the country's economic growth space. Over the past decade, Germany's share of foreign direct investment in Hungary has fallen from 26 percent to 17 percent, the United States' share from 19 percent to 7 percent, and the share of Asian countries has increased from 18.8 percent to 34 percent. But Hungary's goal is not to replace its dependence on the West with dependence on the East, but rather to become a meeting point between the East and the West and to access more economic and technological resources. In particular, Hungary is welcoming investments from China and the Republic of Korea in the EV and related industries while maintaining and retaining supply chains in EU countries. Against the volatile geopolitical backdrop, Hungary's effort to keep an East-West trade balance is conducive to its economic recovery and job preservation. In 2023 China was the top foreign investor in Hungary, with 380 Chinese companies operating in Hungary, employing more than 16,000 local people.

Hungary's "Opening to the East" policy and China's Belt and Road Initiative are synergistic in promoting pragmatic economic cooperation with global partners, which is conducive to achieving a win-win situation. The common goal of both initiatives is to build a diversified and open global trade network, promote connectivity and economic prosperity, and oppose the forming of "trade camps". Thus, China and Hungary share similar views on the promotion of globalization, opposing confrontational policies such as "decoupling" and the forming of "small yards with high fences".

Chinese automaker BYD's investment in the southern Hungarian city of Szeged is seen as a high-tech investment that will create thousands of local jobs. According to polling data from 21 Kutatóközpont, a Budapest-based think tank, in January, 85 percent of local interviewees supported this investment. Hungary's industrial strategy is in line with China's overseas investment goals. As 20 percent of Hungary's GDP depends on the automotive industry, and global automotive manufacturing is currently undergoing a major technological transformation, Hun-

gary needs to seize the diversified investment opportunity to promote the transformation of its automobile supply chains to gain a competitive advantage. It is expected that EV and batteries will become Hungary's most important export commodities in the next few years.

However, it is worth noting that even though China and Hungary share similar ideas in their foreign economic policies, Chinese investment in Hungary is not without obstacles. The EU sees the trade and investment issues as security-related and suggests member states to set up a stricter foreign direct investment screening framework at the national level, which is not conducive to the restoration of the EU's economy in the crisis era. Hungary, as an EU member state, needs to follow the EU's directives. Under such circumstances, Chinese companies urgently need to gain more political and social trust in Hungary. They also need to create value-added products while following the EU standards. For this reason, in a complex geopolitical environment, Chinese companies going abroad need to not only familiarize themselves with EU regulations and standards, but also actively communicate with local communities to maintain the sustainability of their investments.

In addition, the key to competition in the EV industry lies in battery technology, user demand and the price advantage of Chinese EVs. The EU's anti-subsidy investigation is also based on the fact that the EU automotive industry is currently struggling to gain the same competitive advantage as the Chinese industry in a short time, which is why the EU has taken trade protection measures.

Chinese companies investing in Hungary are not unilaterally benefiting from the development of the country's supply chain to enter the EU market, but will create more industrial added value, leading to transfer of technology, management skills and know-how, to maintain the sustainability of the investment to achieve a win-win situation.

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LIFE



Actor-director Chen Minghao.

Friends use festival to stage theater dreams

Partnership built up over decades helps duo create a wave of enthusiasm for seaside spectacle, **Chen Nan** reports.



Director Meng Jinghui.

While he was studying acting at the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing during the 1990s, Chen Minghao got to know theater director Meng Jinghui, who also graduated from the same university.

They met one day while Chen was playing soccer. "Meng came over and spoke to me. He wanted me to accept a role in his play. When I asked for the script, he told me that he didn't have one yet," Chen says, adding that Meng asked him whether he'd like to be part of the production or not.

"He said that we could work on the script together, and create a great play."

With no idea what Meng planned to do, Chen nodded. It was the start of a decadeslong collaboration that Chen describes as "crazy."

Fast forward several decades, and Meng has become one of the country's leading and most pioneering theater directors, while Chen not only appears on stage in various theaters, and in movies and TV dramas, but has also become a director himself.

The pair appeared in Beijing last month for the announcement of the third edition of the Aranya Theater Festival, where they both serve as artistic directors.

The festival, which also has well-known actress Zhang Ziyi as an artistic director, will take place by the sea at the Aranya community in Qinhuangdao, Hebei province, from June 20 to 30. It will bring together 29 theater productions from China and abroad for more than 100 performances.

"After so many years, we still have lots of crazy ideas for theater," Meng says. "We love the idea of a theater festival, which allows us, as well as many other directors and performers, and those who love theater or are new to theater, to immerse themselves in a unique space, enjoying moments, hours and days of being surreal and wild."

"When we recall our younger days producing theater, we feel the same excitement as we did when we were making plans for this theater festival," Meng adds.

Chen says that he made the transition from actor to director through theater festivals. "We want to create a platform for young actors to develop their voices," Chen says.

As China's first seaside theater festival, the Aranya Theater Festival launched in 2021 under the theme, "Half-Water, Half-Stage". In 2022, it was postponed due to the pandemic and in 2023, it returned under the theme of "Howls and Whispers".

This year's theme is "Exception and Rule".

"What makes the festival special is the sea and the different architecture in the community," Meng says.



Clockwise from top: *Five Acts of Life: Lao She's Short Stories*, directed by Lin Xiyue, marking the 125th birth anniversary of Chinese writer Lao She (1899-1966); *Entrelinhas* by Portuguese director Tiago Rodrigues; and *The Castle Tower* by Japanese director Satoshi Miyagi will be staged during the Aranya Theater Festival in Qinhuangdao, Hebei province, this June. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"We put on shows that the audience can enjoy in traditional theaters, and we also surprise them with programs in unconventional locations."

About 15 distinctive buildings in the community, both indoor and outdoor spaces, including the Solitary Library, the North Coast Chapel and the Aranya Art Center, have been adapted for use as theater venues. According to Ma Yin, founder of the community, new theaters will also be opened.

"When we launched the first Aranya festival, we were excited about bringing international artists to this seaside community. The second year, our plan was hindered by the pandemic, but our passion remained. Now, we are about to

have our third festival, which will continue our goal of bringing international artists to China, and making it a great celebration of theater," Ma says.

Eight directors, who head top international theater festivals, will present productions this year.

They include French director Olivier Py, former artistic director of the Festival d'Avignon, who is producing *Hamlet in the Imperative!*, his adaptation of the Shakespearean tragedy, *Hamlet*. Portuguese director Tiago Rodrigues, current artistic director of the Festival d'Avignon, will stage *Entrelinhas*, which explores the enigmatic relationship between writer and actor.

Japanese director Satoshi Miyagi, who is also artistic director of the World Theatre Festival Shizuoka, and who presented *A Doll's House* at last year's festival, will return with *The Castle Tower*, a love story drawing on elements of traditional Japanese theater.

Director of the Wiener Festwochen, Milo Rau, from Switzerland, will bring his play, *The Interrogation*, for which he worked with best-selling French author Edouard Louis to present a personal story about doubt and failure.

"We have traveled around the world to watch plays by different artists in different countries. We also staged performances at theater festivals around the world," Meng says. "This year, we are inviting the great

artists we've met over the years back to our home here in China, which is like coming full circle, and is very fulfilling."

Meng's play, *The Suicide*, an adaptation of Russian playwright Nikolai Erdman's play of the same title, will be performed during the upcoming festival.

Last year, Chen experimented with an unconventional location and time slot for his play, *Romeo and Juliet by the Sea*. It took place at the Seaside Theater and began at 3 a.m. Night, dawn and sunrise all played important roles as the play unfolded.

This year, Chen is taking his theatrical experiment to another level by building a tower, the Galileo Tower,

as the main site for his new play, *Galileo by the Sea*. The play includes different elements, from sound, paintings, physical theater and literature. The three parts of the play will be performed in three separate shows each day, with the audience attending at breakfast, lunchtime and dinnertime. It will be performed for seven days.

"Food will be a part of the production, and we will serve the audience three meals a day," Chen explains. "Audience participation is key to the success of a theatrical production. I want to build a world for them where they can dream and imagine things."

Director Ma Junfeng's play *Blossoms* will be staged at the newly opened Nine Theater. Remaining faithful to the novel, the play is about the journey of Ah Bao, an ambitious everyman opportunist who rises to become a legendary figure in Shanghai's most elite commercial circles in the early 1990s. The plot follows his subtle and ambiguous romance-like relationships with three women. The play is an adaptation of Mao Dun Literary Prize winner Jin Yucheng's novel of the same title, and it has had 100 performances nationwide. A TV series based on the novel by Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai became a phenomenon early this year, making the novel popular with young people.

Another highlight of the festival will be a new version of *Five Acts of Life: Lao She's Short Stories*, directed by Lin Xiyue, son of well-known theater director Lin Zhaoxia, and starring veteran actor Wang Jinsong.

Marking the 125th birthday of Lao She (1899-1966), an iconic modern Chinese writer, the new version also pays tribute to Lin Zhaoxia, who directed the successful play based on five short stories by Lao She in 2010 to celebrate the writer's 111th anniversary. Lin Xiyue revived his father's classic play and offers his own interpretation of Lao She's literary understanding and deep insight into human nature.

Apart from performances, visitors can also book to attend script reading sessions presented by directors including Yang Ting, Liu Chang, Meng and Chen, free of charge.

A project, 300 Migratory Birds, inviting 300 theater enthusiasts and practitioners to stay in 300 tents pitched on the beach at Aranya and spend 300 hours creating works of theater together, will also be part of the festival. Additionally, the outer wall of the Solitary Library will be used for screenings, and visitors can sit on the beach to watch classic films and recordings of theater performances.

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African team joins village super league in exchange goal

GUIYANG — A friendly soccer match between the Liberia Community Football Team and the Liaoning Donggang Football Team drew widespread attention at the Village Super League in Rongjiang county, Guizhou province, earlier this month.

It was the first time for an African team to play in the league, which is known as the *cunchao* in Chinese.

The league has started to gain popularity in African countries including Benin and South Africa. The connection between the *cunchao* and Africa has led to the beginning of a friendship between the small village and the African team and since this year, international matches have been held at the Village Super League stadium.

The visit of the 21-member Liberia Community Football Team was overseen by officials from the Liberian embassy. Moses Barclay, who has been an official at the Liberian embassy in China for eight years,

saw festive league scenes in videos.

"The people here love football, and the atmosphere was impressive," says Barclay, adding that this was his first visit to Rongjiang, and that he hoped the friendly match would bring joy to fans and tourists alike.

The day before the match, the Liberians visited Rongjiang's Dali Dong village, to experience its ethnic culture, and sang songs with villagers.

"It was my first time experiencing Dong culture, which was special. The people in the village were friendly, and I was deeply touched," says Godrich Samwely, a young college student, adding that if he had the chance, he would like to visit Rongjiang again.

"This was a journey of football and friendship," says Jose Jacobs, who has played soccer for more than 20 years.

Rongjiang is home to a wealth of ethnic cultures, and the team hopes



Left: Cheerleaders bring snacks to the soccer field during the Village Super League in Rongjiang county, Guizhou province, earlier this month. Right: African soccer players from the Liberia Community Football Team interact with spectators during the village league in Rongjiang this month. PHOTOS BY WANG BINGZHEN / XINHUA

to enhance mutual exchange and understanding through soccer, Jacobs adds.

This was not the first time a Liberian team contacted the league.

Wang Yongjie, head of the new media communication department for Village Super League, says that in March and April, the league was replicated and promoted in Parakou

in Benin and Cape Town in South Africa as a new model of integration and development for soccer and ethnic culture.

At the end of March, on a soccer field in Benin's Belle Cite village, where a China-assisted cotton technology project is located, 12 village teams launched the first edition of the "African Village Super League";

which takes place on weekends and runs until the end of this month.

Shou Xiaoyong, head of the technical team at the project, says that the tournament not only features competitions but also includes ethnic cultural activities by villagers, including martial arts performed by Chinese agricultural experts.

At the beginning of this year, Shou returned to China on vacation and learned about the popularity of the *cunchao* in China. Shou says that they hope their Village Super League expands outside Africa and that they'll be able to take their teams to compete at China's Village Super League stadium.

"Over the past decade, China has promoted cotton planting technology and helped train agricultural technicians in Benin," says Shou, adding that improved living conditions have given local people more recreational needs.

Barclay hopes to enhance friend-

XINHUA

LIFE

Blossoming realizations about living

A dance drama set in Guangzhou tells the story of a mother with Alzheimer's and her son who struggles alongside her, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports.

For the past year or so, Beijing-based choreographer Fei Bo has been living in the "city of flowers" — Guangzhou, Guangdong province — creating a dance drama about the vibrant blooms that add color to life.

While working at the Guangdong Song and Dance Ensemble, he has become familiar with the trees and plants that grow in the yard. To him, flowers are not just decorative but are quiet yet unwavering companions that symbolize various sentiments and convey different ideas.

Along with the creative crew, Fei decided to center the production on the relationship between a mother and her son, setting it in a tiny flower shop in Guangzhou.

Directed by Fei, written by Wen Fangyi, a playwright and teacher at Nanjing University, and produced by the Guangdong Song and Dance Ensemble, the dance drama, *Blooming Life*, premiered on April 26 at the Guangzhou Opera House as the closing performance of the theater's seventh women's art festival. It was performed for a second time on April 27.

The moving story unfolds with the hardships and drudgery faced by the protagonists. The mother is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, and the son grapples with pressure from working as a landscape designer while navigating his mother's confusion discerning between reality and delusion. As snippets of past memories emerge, the son recalls his mother's life and the care and nurturing she once gave him.

"I've never felt the need to focus on grand subjects to emphasize the significance of a production," Fei says.

"To me, sincerity is paramount. I hope that our work is able to touch the audience, so that they believe the story, see its authenticity and understand its message."



Left: In the dance drama *Blooming Life*, the mother dreams of a fictional country in Chinese mythology, where everyone has pure white skin and hair. Top right: The production portrays the relationship between a mother with Alzheimer's disease and her son, and is set in a flower shop in Guangzhou. Bottom right: The mother character is depicted as being born into a fishing family in South China. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The crew visited hospitals and nursing homes to understand life with Alzheimer's disease, and they also consulted experts to learn about the disease's stages and symptoms.

To represent the symptom of the loss of color perception in the dance, the mother dreams of a fictional country in Chinese mythology,

where everyone has pure white skin and hair.

Difficulty in interpersonal relationships is another symptom highlighted in the production, as the mother gradually becomes estranged from, and even hostile toward, neighbors and her son.

Despite the afflictions faced by the patients and their families, Fei

aims to convey a sense of hope and positivity. The dance revisits the earlier days of the mother's life, when she experiences the feelings of being a young woman hopeful about the future, which allows the son to see her in a different light.

"When doing the promotional photo shoot, I told the performers to smile as they held back tears,

which I believe encapsulates the emotional state of the characters. They are undoubtedly living difficult lives, but they accept reality and bravely confront suffering," he says.

"For me, this resembles the moment of flowers coming into bloom. Such moments are full of vitality. You can feel their warmth. I

want to portray these crucial moments of nature onstage, so that a flower will bloom in everybody's heart."

Guangdong's cultural elements are merged into the production, including stage design that adopts local architectural styles, such as *qilou*, a type of building with overhangs that allow pedestrians to walk underneath to shelter them from sun and rain.

The mother is born into a fishing family, who spend the majority of their lives on boats as part of a unique community of people in South China. According to Chen Jianzhong, the production's literary consultant, this backstory provides cultural context for the characters and highlights the resilience of the women.

"This production possesses its own expression and narration that intertwine reality and illusion. It combines vivid, relatable scenes of everyday life in Guangdong province with symbolic dream scenes," Chen says.

Multimedia technology is also integrated into the stage, lighting and sound design to showcase the contrast and achieve a smooth transition between reality and fantasy.

"*Blooming Life* tells of the human yearning for life and the struggle against inevitable illnesses and setbacks. On the stage, the audience can see a flower of humanity coming into bloom," says Feng Shuangbai, president of the China Dancers Association, who is the artistic consultant on the production.

"Love permeates through this production — the mother's love for her child, society's care for people with Alzheimer's, the bonds among neighbors and the son's love for his mother that matures over time. Together, they form the universal love of human existence."

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A view of the Wuhan Economic and Technological Development Zone. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Wuhan's profile and preferential policies big draws for investors

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The Wuhan Economic and Technological Development Zone has become a desirable destination for foreign investors by continuously upgrading its business environment and preferential policies.

Located in Wuhan, capital of Hubei province, the development zone is the city's largest industrial area. According to official data, total output value from industrial enterprises in the zone with annual revenue of at least 20 million yuan (\$2.77 million) reached 360 billion yuan in 2023. Known as China Auto Valley, it is one of the country's most concentrated regions for the automotive industry.

In 2023, the development zone rolled out a pair of three-year action plans, targeting pure electric, hybrid, and hydrogen energy technologies. They prioritize auto parts, accelerate the development of intelligent automobile software industries, and aim to establish more resilient new energy automobile industry supply chains by introducing over 30 key auto component projects.

In March, Aptiv, a Fortune Global 500 company and globally renowned auto parts supplier, invested 2 billion

yuan into the construction of a connector systems factory in the development zone, marking the company's third major investment in the area. The factory is expected to begin operation in the first quarter of 2025, producing products such as high-voltage charging sockets for new energy vehicles and high-voltage connectors for such vehicles.

Bill Presley, vice-chairman and chief operating officer of Aptiv, said Wuhan boasts many advantages, including abundant scientific and educational talent, strategic transportation location, strong industrial foundation, and rich ecological resources. He said Aptiv will accelerate project construction and collaborate with local universities and research institutions to stimulate aggregation of more innovative resources in the zone.

The development zone is one of the most concentrated areas for foreign-invested enterprises in Hubei province. Since 2022, established businesses including French manufacturers EFI Automotive, Valeo Group and Faurecia, Germany's ZF and Cummins Inc of the United States have increased their investment and operations, and in 2023, a

total of 30 foreign-funded businesses increased their investment in the zone by more than 100 million yuan.

With industry structural upgrades, foreign investment in Hubei is no longer solely focused on profit, but rather on continuously enhancing competitiveness in the local industry chain with a commitment to long-term development.

Last year, ZF Group, one of the world's three largest transmission system providers, announced an additional investment of 150 million euros (\$161.62 million) to establish its largest airbag production base in the Asia-Pacific region and a new airbag product sample trial center in the development zone. Establishment of the new base in Wuhan responds to the need for business growth and optimization, and brings a clustering effect of talent, supply chain and industry chain, said Renee Wang, president of ZF China.

Increased foreign investment in Hubei can be attributed to the development zone's constant efforts to provide foreign investment and businesses with dedicated services and preferential policies. In 2022, the zone issued 10 measures for foreign investment, covering areas such as enterprise registration, headquarters incentives, site support, research and development innovation, talent attraction and international lifestyle support, providing comprehensive support for foreign-invested enterprises seeking to invest and operate in the zone.

The zone has also released 10 "golden measures" to accelerate talent development, including policies for training, innovation of management systems and protection guarantees. These measures aim to attract and train 100 leading talents, 1,000 high-level professionals, and 10,000 science and technology talents for the automotive industry, cementing Wuhan's reputation as a national industrial innovation hub.

In recent years, the zone has also implemented a strategy of developing itself into a talent-strong hub, investing more than 800 million yuan annually to support talent innovation and development. So far, it has attracted and nurtured 31 academicians, 38 high-level talents at the national and provincial levels, and 136,000 professionals and technicians, according to local officials.

Global automotive forum focuses on expansion in overseas market

By YUAN SHENGGAO

China's auto industry maintains great potential in expanding overseas development as the sector sees progress in continued technological innovation, said officials and business insiders.

Long Yongtu, chairman of the Sino-International Entrepreneurs Federation, told a recent forum in Wuhan, Hubei province, that China has become the largest automotive production base and consumer market in the world, and development of the domestic automotive industry "has fully demonstrated that industrial development cannot be achieved in isolation and success can only be attained in an open and collaborative environment".

With a theme focused on intelligently reconnecting the world, the 2024 Sino-International Entrepreneurs Auto Valley Forum was held in late April in the Wuhan Economic and Technological Development Zone, gathering business representatives and experts in the automotive industry to explore new opportunities for collaboration between the Chinese and foreign automotive industries.

"The biggest advantage of the Wuhan economic and technological development zone lies in its batch of enterprises producing new energy vehicles, and their brands have already entered Europe and other parts of the world. Europe is the most developed automobile market in the world, and the fact that our cars can enter the European market is a remarkable achievement," Long said. "We should continue to improve our technology to make it more refined and competitive in any situation."

Xavier Horent, president of Mobilians, said: "The cooperation between China and France, especially among manufacturers, suppliers, distributors and repair shops, is very prosperous. This demonstrates the vitality and dynamism of the China-France relationship. The professional and technical

influence of China and France is profound. Through the combination of French and Chinese technologies, we can jointly tackle the challenges of even climate change and environmental protection."

Marc Mortureux, president of La Plateforme Automobile, added: "Wuhan is a very unique place, especially considering the significant importance the automotive industry holds for France. It is, in fact, the birthplace of our entire (auto) industry's development in China. Building factories in China, especially in Wuhan, is of utmost importance to us. Wuhan is a critical hub, and we have had a long history of cooperation. This demonstrates our commitment to continuing and further strengthening this cooperation."

In 2023, China became the world's largest automobile exporter, with over 30 million vehicles produced and sold. Dongfeng Group, headquartered in Wuhan, played a significant role in the growth of the country's automotive industry.

"The automobile industry is deeply globalized, enabling Chinese automobiles to enter the global market and open up new areas for deep cooperation between domestic and foreign automobile

industry chains and supply chains," said You Zheng, deputy general manager of Dongfeng Group. "Dongfeng Motor is deeply rooted in China Auto Valley and working closely with the development zone to jointly promote high-level opening-up and cooperation, cultivate the new frontier of international development and upgrade the automotive industry."

According to You, brands under Dongfeng Motor Group have accelerated their overseas expansion over the past few years. Its NEV marque Voyah has become the fastest-growing domestic high-end NEV brand in several international markets, including successful entry into Norway, Denmark and Italy.

In recent years, the development zone has leveraged export opportunities to expand into international markets. To improve international economic cooperation, the zone has partnered with industry think tank China EV100 to create the Yangtze River automotive supply chain platform.

The platform will provide a supply chain solution, enhance industry and value chains, and benefit both domestic and foreign automotive enterprises, according to local officials.



New energy vehicles roll off the production line at a Voyah's plant in Wuhan, Hubei province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ADVERTORIAL

CULTURE

Cave explorer discovers deep love of China

French adventurer moved to Guizhou province because of its landscape but stayed because of its people

By LI CHUNYAN in Paris
For China Daily

At first glance, it is not immediately obvious what connects Jean Bottazzi to the remote caves of Southwest China's Guizhou province.

But Bottazzi is a globally recognized cave explorer and representative of the French Federation of Speleology in China, and he resides in Shuanghe Cave village in Suiyang county, Zunyi city in northern Guizhou, where he is surrounded by one of the world's most spectacular caves: the Shuanghe Cave.

The extensive network of caves spans about 430 kilometers and is still being actively explored, but the caves that have already been charted are enough to rank it as the world's third-longest cave system, according to Bottazzi.

The importance of the caves on the world stage has led to the establishment of a geopark there, and the development of innovative tourism that benefits the entire region.

For Bottazzi, "it is an art to incorporate aesthetics and poetry into a large-scale tourism development enterprise."

Bottazzi has been in Guizhou since 2007, when he left his job in France to settle there.

"I made this decision out of curiosity and passion," he says. "I wanted to test a simple idea as a speleologist: could it meet the needs and expectations and be in harmony with Guizhou society? I have traveled throughout China, but Guizhou remains my favorite land, with explorations spanning over 30 districts within this province alone."

Bottazzi's passion for cave exploration started in his youth. Born into a French family in 1962, with an older brother who was a caver, he began caving himself at 16, and soon joined the French Federation of Speleology. "I started in France, exploring caves all across the Alps," he remembers.

His journey in China began in 1986, when he participated in his first Franco-Chinese caving expedition alongside other French and Chinese speleologists and scientists.

Together, they explored and conducted topographic surveys of about 40 kilometers of galleries across various regions in Guizhou province and conducted research on geology, geomorphology and hydrogeology, with a particular focus on cave sediments and groundwater.

"I stumbled upon Guizhou by chance, as it was the first province in China that I visited, known for its abundant caves," he says. "We were captivated and embarked on subsequent expeditions, which grew more frequent."

Bottazzi highlights that Guizhou's natural resources are protected and valued, particularly through the United Nations-recognized reserves and geoparks.

"It's very difficult not to be enchanted by these mountains, the beauty of the local voices, and the joy of the dances," he says. "What one discovers by visiting Guizhou and pursuing their passion is that nothing is impossible, this could be linked to a project, a story, or perhaps even a legend."



Above: Jean Bottazzi serves as head coach for cave rescue techniques training and translator for experts from the French Federation of Speleology during a Sino-French event on sharing cave rescue techniques in Shuanghe Cave National Geological Park in Guizhou province in 2016. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Spirit of adventure

In addition to his regular scientific research in cave exploration and his involvement in establishing a geopark in Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, Bottazzi has conducted specialized expeditions or projects that require a precise understanding of caves. He has also provided training to Chinese people in caving techniques and rescue operations.

"Firefighters encounter challenges rescuing people from seemingly impossible locations. As speleologists, we possess highly secure and rapid techniques," he explains.

While caves in Guizhou and France share similarities in their limestone geology, perpetual darkness and damp conditions, Guizhou's caves are notably larger and generally warmer.

Outside of those years most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been at least one and sometimes several cave explorations involving cavers from the two nations each year, often in Guizhou, but sometimes in other Chinese provinces.

However, he says, there remains potential for that collaboration between France and China to be enhanced even further, with Chinese cavers so far not having participated in cave exploration in France. But Bottazzi says he thinks we could soon see Chinese cavers being trained in France, particularly in specialized techniques, such as rescue and diving.

"I enjoy complete freedom to explore caves in China, guided solely by my instincts, curiosity, rhythm and passion," he says. "There are no objectives imposed upon me. ... My experience is perhaps not transferable."

"My passion sparks interest and cultivates new friendships; all of this opens doors and takes me to places I hadn't considered visiting, and motivates me to do things I wouldn't have imagined doing. For instance, I was completely unable to make a speech to an audience before my trips to China."

Reflecting on his years in China, he says he appreciates "the freedom in my work, the trust, as well as the honesty, friendship and goodwill of the people I've encountered, and the respect that people always show me."

Bottazzi is also complimentary of Guizhou's high safety standards and the quality of transportation, accommodation, food, and healthcare he has encountered there.

"I even encourage families, including children, to visit Guizhou for their first trip," he says, noting that, this year, China has introduced a 15-day visa-free policy for travelers from 11 European countries that include France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland. The scheme will last until the end of 2025.

Guizhou also offers other adventure sports and Bottazzi has Chinese friends who enjoy base jumping, canyoning, canoeing, camping, climbing, cycling, diving, paragliding, paramotoring, rafting, and more.

"The secrets of China's heart await you in Guizhou," Bottazzi says of the province that has become his beloved home.



Above: Jean Bottazzi and fellow cavers inspect geological theories in the Shuanghe Cave National Geological Park in Zunyi city, Guizhou province in 2008.

Below: Jean Bottazzi and fellow cavers conduct karst science research in the Shuanghe Cave in 2017.

“It's very difficult not to be enchanted by these mountains, the beauty of the local voices, and the joy of the dances.”

Jean Bottazzi,
French cave explorer

