

Threads of tradition

Embroidery showcases vibrant Tibetan techniques

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AI firm unveils new leads, claims progress

BUSINESS, PAGE 8



Comfort in the cold

Photographer helps Oriental white stork endure extreme Harbin winter

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CHINA DAILY

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Deadly strike



Rescuers search for survivors on Sunday in the debris of a partially collapsed residential building in Belgorod, Russia. At least 15 people were killed and many others injured when the 10-story apartment block in the border region was struck by a missile fired by Ukraine, Russian authorities said. AFP See story, page 7

Experts hail fruitful results of Xi's visit

Europe trip seen as key for constructive economic cooperation, multilateral ties

By YIFAN XU in Washington and CHEN WEIHUA in Budapest

Foreign experts have highly commended President Xi Jinping's state visits to France, Serbia and Hungary, citing the fruitful outcomes and positive impact.

They said that Xi's six-day visit to Europe, his first in five years, was pivotal for constructive economic cooperation and significant for bilateral and multilateral relations.

Inside He issued a joint statement with Comment, French President Emmanuel Macron, announced the building of a China-Serbia community with a shared future in the new era with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, and proclaimed the elevation of bilateral relations between China and Hungary to an all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership for the new era with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

"These are huge achievements for all the countries involved, including China, France, Serbia and Hungary. And they point the way toward constructive engagement for economic development and employment," Jack Midgley, principal of global consultancy Midgley & Co, told China Daily.

As China develops and has stronger economic and political influence, Europe has to decide how to engage with China, said Midgley. "We should do that outside the shadow of the US. Let's do this on the basis of mutual interest," he said.

"The China-Europe relationships are characterized in economic terms by the development of infrastructure, the development of employment, foreign investment, and so forth," said Midgley, who is also an adjunct

associate professor in the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University in Washington. "This allows a more practical discussion, and it encourages countries to view the relationship in bilateral terms."

Jelena Grubor Stefanovic, director of the representative office of the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in China, said that President Xi's historic visit is a boost to the further expansion of economic relations and trade between China and Serbia.

During his trip to Serbia last week, President Xi announced six major steps to support the building of a China-Serbia community with a shared future, including a free-trade agreement taking effect on July 1.

"Everyone is eagerly awaiting the FTA to go into force in July — as it is an opportunity for all. This FTA is one of the most important agreements Serbia has signed in the last couple of decades and is something that will create a new momentum for our economy in the future," Stefanovic said.

According to Stefanovic, the FTA can serve as an opportunity "for Serbian companies to be integrated in international supply chains of Chinese industrial conglomerates, for Western companies to have better entry to the Chinese market via Serbia, and for Chinese companies to keep finding opportunities for growth through Serbia as an intermediary market toward Western customer markets."

Ivona Ladjevac, deputy director and a senior research fellow of the Institute of International Politics and Economics in Belgrade, said that Xi's visit to Serbia holds significant implications for bilateral relations and broader geopolitical dynamics.

See Visit, page 3

WORLD WATCH

By Nalin Verma

All eyes on northern states as India votes

It's election season in India. The focus of the media and observers, however, is mostly on the central and northern Indian provinces of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, which collectively is known as the Hindi heartland, because most of the people there are Hindi language speakers.

The focus on the Hindi heartland is also because Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is contesting from a parliamentary constituency in Uttar Pradesh — Varanasi — and the four provinces account for 201 of the 543 seats in the Lower House (or Lok Sabha) of India's bicameral parliament, and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance won 165 of those 201 seats in the last general elections in 2019.

The elections this time will be held in seven phases, which began on April 19 and will end on June 1, with the results scheduled to be declared on June 4.

The poll scenario in India is a bit difficult to comprehend for people used to viewing elections based on the procedure followed by the US presidential election, or the general election in the United Kingdom or most other Western countries. The reason is the mind-boggling diversity in India in terms of languages, regional differences and local issues, and scores of regional political parties that contest the elections.

Yet the focus is on Uttar Pradesh because it sends 80 of the 543 members, or almost 15 percent of the total members, to the Lower House and used to be the traditional power base of the Indian National Congress (or simply the Congress), the oldest political party in India which has given India nine prime ministers including the first prime minister,

See Election, page 3

FUJIAN'S INNOVATIONS LEAD NATION'S QUEST FOR FOOD SECURITY

Under Xi's guidance, province is leveraging its natural advantages, advancing techniques

By LI LEI and HU MEIDONG in Fuzhou

As China broadens its food resources and explores new protein and carbohydrate sources, Fujian province has emerged as a valuable learning hub.

With limited arable land and frequent typhoons, the coastal province first learned to source food from its rugged terrain and vast waters when President Xi Jinping worked as a senior official in Fujian from 1985 to 2002.



In recent decades, Fujian has evolved into a significant supplier of seafood, vegetables and various edible fungi. The success belies its struggles with food self-sufficiency during rapid urbanization in the early 1990s.

"After China's reform and opening-up, urbanization accelerated

in Fujian and construction encroached on a lot of farmland," said Ye Xiaojian, who oversees a museum in Fuzhou, the provincial capital, which is dedicated to marking the province's gradual progress toward food self-sufficiency in the 1990s.

"The decrease (in farmland), coupled with a rise in the urban population, resulted in difficulties in ensuring the supply of groceries at the time," he said.

See Fujian, page 2

Inner Mongolia ramping up efforts against desertification

By LI LEI, YUAN HUI and HOU LIQIANG

In the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, people at the forefront of the fight against desertification have recently resorted to a new approach — combining sand control with wind and solar power projects to tame the once ever-expanding desert.

Sun Shaocheng, the region's Party chief, said that innovation is key to the success of the region's broad green development initiatives, as Inner Mongolia aims to treat nearly 800,000 hectares of desert by 2030 using the new method.

In an interview with China Daily on Monday, Sun said the new approach was listed as a crucial regional project at a local Party conference late last year, and is considered a key move in winning the region's sand control battle, which has national significance.

"The approach can achieve many benefits in one go," he said.

Constructing an ecological barrier in northern China is a major task President Xi Jinping



Sun Shaocheng

bestowed on the region since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, he said.

Inner Mongolia is a major battleground for advancing the Three-North Shelterbelt Forest Program, an ecological project proposed by the Chinese government in the 1970s to improve the ecological environment in northern China and to prevent the expansion of desertification.

Sun said the regional government has issued a plan for integrating sand control and green energy production, with the aim of completing the treating of around 767,000 hectares of desert and achieving installed capacity of 119 million kilowatts of new energy by 2030.

Sun said the region has pledged to better coordinate the development of new energy projects with sand control and speed up the construction of centralized solar power

plants and power cables in the "sand, gravel and desert" areas.

Authorities will also explore a model in which crops and animals can be raised among solar panels, which will result in a win-win situation of increasing greenery, energy and income, he said.

The target this year is to treat about 153,000 hectares of desert using this new method and increasing installed capacity of new energy by 27.27 million kilowatts.

Using all methods combined, the region aims to treat 1 million hectares of desert this year and 6.46 million hectares by 2030.

About 20 percent of the land in the region is affected by desertification and sand encroachment, though the region is considered to be among China's ecologically diverse areas, with vast swaths of forestry and grassland.

Sun said the region will be responsible for the lion's share of the construction volume of the Three-North program between 2021 and 2030.

"Inner Mongolia is the primary battleground for combating desertification and the front line defense



Rows of wind turbines stand on the Huitengxile Grassland in Chahar Youyi Zhongqi, Ulanqab, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, in August. TANG DEHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

against sandstorms," he said.

"To maximize the benefits and ensure long-term effectiveness of desert control, we need to look beyond just treating the desert and focus on holistic management," he said.

Inner Mongolia has innovated in recent years to combine sand control with food production as China

works to bolster its food security.

Official data show that the region has created 9.13 million hectares of forests and 22.4 million hectares of grassland since 2012, and has treated 9.87 million hectares of desert.

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INSIDE Hope for cooperation in new region Global Views, page 13

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PAGE TWO



From left: A fish farmer selects fish for his customers in Ningde, Fujian province; in a smart incubator in Gutian county, Fujian, silver ear fungi grow on cultivation rods made from cottonseed shells; a visitor takes photos of silver ear fungi on shelves in the incubator in Gutian. PHOTOS BY HU MEIDONG / CHINA DAILY



Farmers harvest abalone bred at a fish farm in Lianjiang county, Fujian province, in 2022. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Fujian: Province casts net wide for new foods



Workers sort kelp for processing at a factory workshop in Ningde in March. HU MEIDONG / CHINA DAILY

From page 1

A local saying inscribed on a billboard in the museum summed up Fujian's harsh farming conditions. It reads: "Eighty percent of the land mass is rolling mountains, and one major river flows across Fujian where minimum croplands can be found."

Ye added: "We often suffer from the onslaught of typhoons and floods. So, generally speaking, after floods there would always be a spike in grocery prices in the 1990s."

Place of plenty

However, the food shortages are long gone.

Official figures showed fishing industry output in Ningde alone now tops 35.5 billion yuan (\$4.9 billion) annually. The city boasts a multibillion-yuan business that caters to 80 percent of the country's demand for large yellow croakers, a common ingredient in Chinese dishes.

In Gutian, a county-level jurisdiction in Ningde known as the capital of edible fungi, 25 production bases churn out 900,000 metric tons of fresh fungi each year worth 6.2 billion yuan.

In the country's quest for food security amid global supply chain uncertainties, experts have touted the Fujian model as one to follow.

Xi's governance work in the province laid the groundwork for the flourishing macro food industries, providing valuable insights that can be emulated elsewhere, they added.

Lian Xin, a senior Party official from Ningde, where Xi served as Party chief between 1988 and 1990, said at a meeting in the city last week attended by China Daily, that while the shortage of arable land may appear to be a disadvantage from a traditional agricultural perspective, when seen through the lens of macro foods, this scarcity can actually be advantageous.

"We plant grains where they grow well, fish where it's right, and grow fruits where it works. Our main aim is to create a mix of farming that fits with Ningde's natural endowments," he said.

Macro foods

Macro foods, also called novel foods, have gained greater recognition in recent years for their potential health benefits and their sustainability. These foods, including edible insects, fungi and seaweed, have high nutritional value and a lower environmental impact than traditional food staples like meat and dairy products.

The macro food concept was embraced by authorities in Ningde more than two decades ago.

According to *Shaking Off Poverty*, a collection of President Xi's speeches during his time in office in Ningde, he said in 1990 that the concept of "grain" had broadened over time to include more than just rice, wheat and corn. "The grains that are currently being discussed are actually considered as food. The concept of macro food has replaced the old grain-centered concept," the collection said.

Gutian's thriving edible fungi sector showcases China's embracing of macro foods to bolster national food security and benefit farmers.

In a local smart incubator dedicated to cultivating silver ear fungi, nozzles have been programmed to release a fine mist of water based on the fungi's growth cycle. Real-time monitoring and adjustment of temperatures are facilitated by an advanced air conditioning system. The silver ear fungi, commonly used in soups, desserts, and sweet dishes, flourish on cultivation rods.

"Two workers previously managed around 20 such incubators. Thanks to these smart technologies, the same duo now efficiently oversees over 170 incubators," said a government official while recently briefing a group of visitors.

In the absence of the smart system, workers would have to lug around hefty water tanks on their backs, making frequent visits to the incubators to cool the cultivation rods, the official said. The rods tend to overheat as organic matter inside decomposes, which compromises the growth of the fungi.

Thanks to new technologies and other improvements, Ningde now produces 440,000 tons of silver ear fungus each year — more than 90 percent of the national yield.



A large yellow croaker cultivated in Ningde is displayed. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Local officials and experts are aiming to make mushrooms a dietary staple for the Chinese population, while emphasizing their health benefits.

Sun Shujing, a professor at Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University in Fuzhou who specializes in edible fungi, said silver ear fungi are a better calorie source than some traditional foods. "Mushrooms are rich in a type of carbohydrate known as polysaccharides, which can promote a feeling of fullness and reduce the likelihood of weight gain," she said.

Innovative farming

In recent years, Fujian has charged ahead in adopting techniques that have revolutionized conventional farming practices, further expanding its competitive edge.

To mitigate the risk of rainfall transmitting plant diseases and spoiling crops, for example, vast rain shelters have been placed over vineyards in Fu'an, a county-level jurisdiction overseen by Ningde. This innovative approach has helped the vineyards net \$207 million in annual sales.

Off Ningde's coast, workers raise

large yellow croakers in fish pens made from biodegradable plastics. Conventional aquatic farming facilities, which weaken over time and eventually break, usually cause pollution by releasing foam and plastics into the sea.

Off the coast of Lianjiang county, an hour's drive from the provincial capital Fuzhou, a \$2.5 million deep-sea fish farming platform stands three kilometers off the shore.

The fish pen measures 60 meters by 32 meters and is designed to withstand powerful typhoons.

An octagonal cylinder at the structure's core is partially submerged and enveloped by nets. It is rotated regularly to prevent algae and barnacles from obstructing the nets and endangering the fish.

The process also makes net repairs easier.

"More than 200,000 large yellow croakers are cultivated inside," said Lu Tongfeng, the general manager of Fujian Xinmao Fishery Development Co, the platform's owner.

Ten other similar platforms sit in the waters nearby, churning out a total of 2,000 tons of seafood each year.

As coastal waters become dotted with fish farms, fishing companies like Fujian Xinmao are turning their focus to areas farther offshore.

Lu, a former shipbuilder, attributes the move to deeper waters to engineering advances that have enabled the creation of controlled environments for fish cultivation in the open ocean. "Building the platform is much more complex than building a ship. As a fixed structure out in the open, the pen must be engineered to be strong enough to withstand extreme weather," he said.

Lu quit shipbuilding to develop the platform in 2003. Despite reaching out to several design teams, success eluded them until they collaborated with scientists from Wuhan University of Technology in Hubei province. A design that passed hydrodynamic testing was finalized in 2020, leading to the platform's debut in July 2021.

'Blue grain barn'

The platform was put into use amid China's "blue grain barn" campaign to meet the nation's growing food requirements.

These platforms are now favored by authorities seeking to phase out nearshore aquaculture, which obstructs shipping lanes and harms the ecological balance of mangroves.

China outlined its ambition to build "modern sea farms" like those in Lianjiang, in the No 1 Central Document last year, an important annual policy statement.

In June, six government departments, led by the agriculture ministry, issued guidelines to accelerate deep-sea farm construction and enhance research on cages and the smart equipment necessary for their operation.

The latest No 1 Central Document, released in February, reiterated support for deep-sea aquaculture, urging local officials to maintain a "macro food perspective".

Lin Yinghui, an official with the Ocean and Fishery Bureau in Lianjiang, said traditional aquaculture, where fish are raised in smaller cages nearer to the shore, creates problems such as feed pollution and eutrophication, a process in which surplus nutrients cause dense plant growth, and is not sustainable.

Environmental degradation has affected the quality of aquatic products and even caused red tides that can wipe out yields.

Lin said in recent years Lianjiang county has promoted ecological aquaculture platforms, so fish farming operations can be gradually shifted farther from shore.

The strong ocean currents support a rich variety of algae and plankton, providing an ideal environment for fish to grow.

The deployment of smart monitoring systems on these platforms enables real-time image transmission to mobile devices, streamlining operations and reducing labor costs.

"The campaign reduces farming density close to the shore, allowing aquatic products such as croakers to grow in a purely natural seawater environment, a practice that improves meat quality and taste," he said.

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A national fishing industry base is seen in Lianjiang. Officials are now looking at locating fish farms farther off shore to keep shipping lanes clear and protect the environment. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

Trade barriers in NEV sector trigger anger

China shows openness and treats domestic, foreign carmakers as equals, expert says

By MA SI and LI JIAYING

Trade protectionism should never be the main theme of the new energy vehicle sector, an industry so globalized that it requires global vision and openness for its healthy development, said a renowned expert in China's automobile industry.

The United States' ploy to overhype so-called "overcapacity" in China's NEV sector and its alleged national security concerns over Chinese electric vehicles are typical examples of trade protectionism, said Fu Bingfeng, executive vice-president and secretary-general of the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers, in an exclusive interview with China Daily.

"It is palpably irrational to see Chinese NEVs, hailed as a collective creation for the common welfare of humanity, being restricted in the US market," Fu said.

The remarks came amid the news of Washington's possible tariff hike and restrictions on Chinese NEVs.

The Wall Street Journal quoted anonymous sources as saying that the US government is preparing to raise the tariff rate on Chinese EVs from roughly 25 percent to 100 percent.

Last week, Reuters also reported that US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said the country could take "extreme action" and ban or impose restrictions on Chinese connected vehicles after the completion of a national security investigation.

Fu said it is very common to find differences regarding legal frameworks and consumption preferences when an industry enters different markets. "This is what makes dialogue and communication extremely important."

He said that when smart vehicles enter the global market, they should integrate with local laws and consumer habits, and they also require certain levels of redevelopment to better suit local preferences such as privacy protection. "However, these issues cannot be resolved through trade barriers or protectionism."

Fu said the association has noticed that many countries hope that China's automobile supply chain can extend overseas, including to Europe and Southeast Asia, in order to help develop local automotive industries, drive local employment and form

new patterns of common growth.

Experts noted that in contrast to the US' hostile attitude toward Chinese NEV makers, including the possibility of banning them without any factual evidence to prove their risks, China has always shown openness toward foreign EV companies.

US carmaker Tesla, along with five Chinese carmakers, cleared a key data security test in China conducted by the association and a national computer network center in April, which proves how communication can help dismiss data security concerns regarding EVs, they said.

Fu emphasized that China treats domestic and foreign carmakers as equals. "Ensuring automotive data security through tests is a new starting point in promoting the healthy development of intelligent vehicles," he added.

Tao Lin, vice-president of Tesla, said the company's rapid growth in China over the past decade cannot be separated from the country's policy support and favorable business environment.

With unmatched advantages and vast prospects, China is a "must-have" market for the US company, Tao said.

China has been the world's largest NEV market for nine consecutive years. Latest data show that in April, the production of NEVs reached 870,000 and sales touched 850,000, up 35.9 percent and 33.5 percent year-on-year, respectively, indicating vigorous growth potential in the domestic market.

On the so-called "overcapacity" issue hyped by some Western politicians and media, Fu called for a more objective and open-minded view.

"A global perspective is a must to understand and support changes and development in a highly globalized industry like automaking, rather than viewing a specific market's production capacity in isolation," he said.

According to the International Energy Agency, annual EV sales are projected to reach 45 million units by 2030, more than four times the demand in 2022.

"Given the development pattern of the automotive industry, maintaining the production capacity utilization rate at a relatively moderate level, typically between 70 percent and 90 percent, is considered a reasonable range," Fu said.

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Fittest finger first

A contestant dressed in traditional attire tries to pull his opponent over a marked line on the table during a finger wrestling championship on Sunday in Bernbeuren, Germany. MATTHIAS SCHRAEDER / AP

New milestone set in cultural heritage conservation

By YANG FEIYUE

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The Palace Museum in Beijing has been designated as the official address of the secretariat for a new international technical committee focused on standardizing cultural heritage conservation.

It is a significant milestone as this is the first committee of its kind within the International Organization for Standardization dedicated to cultural heritage protection.

Established in March and currently comprising 31 participating member countries and 13 observing member countries, the Technical Committee for Cultural Heritage Conservation aims to consolidate the global consensus on safeguarding cultural heritage through international standardization efforts.

The initiative encompasses the development of standards for terminology, techniques, materials and equipment used in various aspects of cultural heritage conservation, including monitoring, assessment, protection and restoration.

The committee's work will also

facilitate the exchange of best practices and advanced technologies among member countries, promoting the sustainable development of global cultural heritage conservation and fostering cross-cultural learning and collaboration.

"Cultural heritage is the witness of human civilization, containing valuable historical, artistic and scientific values. Standardization is an important way to enhance the level of cultural heritage protection," said Qu Liang, director of the Palace Museum's institute of standardization research for cultural relics protection, who has been appointed as the manager of the new ISO committee.

ISO President Sung Hwan Cho said the establishment of the committee and the formulation and implementation of international standards will consolidate the global consensus on cultural heritage conservation and enhance the level of protection.

He said the endeavors will establish a platform for cultural heritage protection exchanges and promote research on the origin of standardization thoughts.

Cho added that he hopes the new committee will strengthen cooperation with international organizations related to standardization of cultural heritage conservation, and jointly promote the development of international standardization in this regard.

Li Qun, director of the National Cultural Heritage Administration, proposed that the committee adhere to a global perspective, follow the ISO's work requirements, and promote the global governance process in the field of cultural heritage protection standardization.

It should emphasize innovation-driven development, using technological progress to promote high-quality development in the field of cultural heritage protection, he said.

Li emphasized that efforts should be made to comprehensively enhance the performance of the committee's secretariat, thereby contributing wisdom and strength to the development of international standardization in cultural heritage protection.

Qu, the research institute director, said the committee plans to carry out the standardization of terms related to cultural heritage protec-

tion, and the conservation and restoration of inorganic porous cultural relics such as stone artifacts, murals and earthen sites.

Li, the heritage administration director, said the Chinese government has always attached great importance to the protection of cultural heritage, actively promoting the research and application of modern technology and applying scientific principles, methods and approaches to traditional crafts.

Li added that the new ISO committee's secretariat in China will provide valuable opportunities and a broad stage for the advancement of cultural heritage conservation.

The Palace Museum, also known as the Forbidden City, was China's imperial palace from 1420 to 1911. As the world's largest surviving wooden architectural complex, the UNESCO World Heritage Site is home to over 1.86 million cultural relics.

Wang Xudong, director of the Palace Museum, said the museum will give due importance to standardization work and conscientiously fulfill its responsibilities as an ISO technical body.

Election: Ruling party in India facing public criticism

From page 1

Jawaharlal Nehru, his daughter Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv Gandhi, with two of them being elected twice.

But the ruling NDA, which Modi represents, won 64 of the 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh and 39 of the 40 in Bihar in the 2019 elections. This time, though, the opposition parties have aligned under the common umbrella of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) to bolster their combined strength, especially in the four critical states.

The other provinces in which the BJP outperformed its opponents in the 2019 general elections include Delhi, Haryana and Jharkhand in northern India, Maharashtra and Gujarat in western India, and Karnataka in southern India.

The BJP won all the seven parliamentary seats in Delhi in 2019. But, this time, to give a tough fight to the BJP in Delhi, the Congress has stitched an alliance with the Aam Aadmi Party (Common Man's Party), the ruling party in Delhi province.

In South India, the Congress wrested power from the BJP in Karnataka province in the 2023 assembly election, strengthening its clout

in the province which is home to the Indian "Silicon Valley" of Bangalore. Thus the poll battle in Karnataka, where the BJP was in power and had won 25 of the 29 Lower House seats in 2019, promises to be fierce this time.

The BJP, despite being in power at the center, has little presence in the other southern Indian provinces: Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. While the Left parties and the Congress hold sway in Kerala, regional parties largely rooted in the anti-Brahmin movement, dominate the politics in Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have largely kept the BJP at bay perhaps because people there perceive it to be a party of north and central India.

In the eastern Indian province of West Bengal, the BJP had sprung a big surprise in the last elections by winning 18 of the 42 Lower House seats, with the provincial ruling party, the All India Trinamul Congress, bagging 22 seats. Hence, the poll battle in West Bengal should be intense this time.

The Modi-led BJP came to power in 2014 by promising to end corruption, check price rise, create millions of jobs, fight terrorism and, most of all, to boost economic growth. It retained power in 2019 by promising to maintain the

growth momentum (which critics say never existed) and claiming it had taught Pakistan a "valuable lesson" for the terrorist attack in Pulwama, Jammu and Kashmir, in which 40 security personnel were killed in February 2019. India alleges Pakistan orchestrated the Pulwama attack.

However, the BJP this time faces public criticism for being corrupt after India's Supreme Court ruled that the electoral bond program, which the Modi government introduced in 2017 and benefited the most from, was "illegal" and "unconstitutional". The program allowed donors to political parties to buy bonds from any State Bank of India (India's biggest bank) branch which could be converted by the targeted political party into cash, and was designed to keep the names of donors and the amount they donated secret.

But some civil society members and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) petitioned the Supreme Court, alleging that the donors, mostly big business houses, had been donating huge amounts to the ruling party to "extract profit" (or get favors) in lieu of the donations. Having heard the arguments of both sides, the Supreme Court ruled the bond program

illegal, fueling a raging debate in India on the issue of corruption.

Making aggressive Hinduism, which glorifies the past, its main poll plank, the BJP is seeking votes for building a temple to the Hindu deity Rama at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh and for "handing out 5 kilograms of free food grains to 800 million families" and periodically transferring small amounts of money to their bank accounts.

On the other hand, the opposition INDIA bloc parties say that in the 10 years of the Modi government, unemployment has increased drastically, inflation has spiraled out of control, farmers have become poorer instead of earning twice as much as they used to, as Modi had promised, wealth/income disparity has worsened and many minority community members, especially Muslims, have been attacked, killed and humiliated. To change all this, the opposition is asking the people to vote for the INDIA bloc parties.

Only the June 4 results can tell us which party or coalition of parties has the ears of the people.

The author is a veteran, independent journalist, author and media educator based in India. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Visit: President's advocacy of peace talks 'highly valued'

From page 1

Serbia is the first country in Europe to embrace the global initiatives that China has proposed to advocate for principles such as peace in the world, common security and the development of differ-

ent regions on the planet, Ladjvac said.

Gyula Thurmer, president of the Hungarian Workers' Party, said that China today offers cooperation to the world as a solid and strong partner. "It eliminated mass poverty and became the sec-

ond-largest economy in the world. The Chinese economy grew by 5 percent last year, and its development is backed by innovation and modern industrialization."

What's more important is that China does not impose its solu-

tions on anyone, he said. "It does not prescribe prescriptions for Hungary, nor does it even give advice on what the Hungarian state should be like."

"The development of Hungarian-Chinese financial relations, as the Hungarian Finance Minister

(Mihaly Varga) said, can further strengthen the security of Hungarian debt management," Thurmer added.

Andrey Karneev, head of the School of Oriental Studies at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow, said that Russia highly valued the results of Xi's efforts as he advocated holding a proper time an international peace con-

ference that is recognized by both Russia and Ukraine and ensures the equal participation of all parties and fair discussions on all peace plans.

Ren Qi in Moscow, Zheng Wanyin in London and Yang Ran in Beijing contributed to this story.

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CHINA

Here to serve

Olympic champion Zhang Yining plays table tennis with a Shanghai resident on Sunday. Olympic champions including Wang Liqin, Yan Sen and Zhang served as instructors at a series of competitions in the city that brought together more than 200 table tennis enthusiasts. LI MINGSHEN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Briefly

Former university VP faces graft charges

Zhang Guang, former vice-president of Beihang University, has been charged with taking bribes, the Supreme People's Procuratorate said on Monday. Following an investigation by the National Commission of Supervision, the procuratorate in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, filed Zhang's case with the city's intermediate people's court, the top procuratorate said. Prosecutors accused Zhang of taking advantage of his various positions at Beihang University to seek undue profits for others and accepting an especially large amount of money and valuables in return.

Community jobs for 34,400 graduates

China will support the recruitment of 34,400 college graduates this year to work in different fields such as education, agriculture, medical care and rural revitalization at the community level. The service period for the posts will be two years, according to a plan issued by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security on Monday. The ministry has jointly issued a circular with the Ministry of Finance that requires localities to guarantee funding for the posts and ensure the allocation of payments for work and living, settling-in, social insurance premiums and allowances. The circular also urged efforts to strengthen the education and training of those employed, and the provision of employment services when they complete their terms.

Ex-deputy head of panda center probed

Zhang Haiqing, former deputy director of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration's China Conservation and Research Center for Giant Pandas, is under disciplinary and supervisory investigation, according to an official statement issued on Monday. Zhang is being investigated by personnel from the Communist Party of China Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and the National Commission of Supervision at the administration and the supervisory commission of the Aba Tibetan and Qiang autonomous prefecture, in Sichuan province, for suspected serious violations of Party discipline and laws.

XINHUA

Guangdong helps to connect Bay Area rules

Province promotes judicial collaboration, integrated development with HK, Macao

By ZHENG CAIXIONG in Guangzhou
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Guangdong province is accelerating the connection of rules, regulations and mechanisms with the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions to further promote the deep and integrated development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Zhu Wei, deputy director of the Guangdong Provincial Development and Reform Commission, told a news conference in Guangzhou, the provincial capital, on Monday that promoting the integration of rules and regulations in the Bay Area is a key but difficult step in deepening all-around connectivity.

Describing it as a long-term systematic project, he said progress has been made on the integration of rules and mechanisms with the two SARs in recent years.

She Qionsheng, chief judge of the Fourth Civil Division of the Guangdong High People's Court, said the first judicial guidance on

commercial disputes involving Hong Kong and Macao issued by the court promoted respect for the autonomy of the parties involved and expanded the range of legal solutions that could be chosen.

As long as they do not violate the basic principles of national laws, enterprises with funding from Hong Kong or Macao that are registered in the Hengqin, Qianhai and Nansha pilot free trade zones can negotiate and choose extraterritorial laws to resolve their contract disputes, She said.

Chinese mainland courts can also confirm the evidentiary validity of official documents produced by Hong Kong and Macao courts, arbitration institutions and government agencies, he said.

When handling commercial cases involving Hong Kong and Macao, they may submit litigation documents to Hong Kong and Macao parties in a manner that complies with Hong Kong or Macao laws or practices, he said.

"We will continue to introduce guidelines for the connection of

judicial rules between Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, and continuously promote the connection mechanism of judicial rules and mechanism in the three regions," She said.

Sun Zutong, commissar of the traffic management bureau at the Guangdong Provincial Department of Public Security, said the bureau has worked with related departments to enable drivers and car owners from Hong Kong and Macao to use both mainland and SAR cards and payment apps to pay highway and bridge tolls in Guangdong.

Efforts are also underway to upgrade parking facilities in Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Zhuhai to recognize license plates from Hong Kong and Macao.

Over 320,000 drivers from the SARs have obtained their mainland driver's licenses without needing to take a test.

Wei Wentao, a spokesman for the Guangdong provincial government service data management bureau, said the bureau has launched the construction of a "Digital GBA" to promote the effective connection of rules and mechanisms through digitization.

Gene editing improves soybean yield

By LI WENFANG in Guangzhou
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Chinese researchers have developed new soybean breeding lines using gene editing, potentially boosting the yield and protein content of the critical crop.

Soybeans are the world's leading source of plant protein for food and animal feed, and the second-largest source of vegetable oil. However, China, a major consumer, relies heavily on imports due to its own relatively low soybean yield.

The research, details of which were published in *Nature Plants* on Thursday, addressed that challenge. Scientists used gene editing to create soybean mutants with improved "nodulation ability", a

key factor in nitrogen fixation from the air. This allows the plants to capture more nitrogen, a vital nutrient for growth and protein production.

One promising mutant, ric1a/2a, demonstrated balanced carbon allocation and enhanced carbon and nitrogen acquisition.

Field trials over three years showed that ric1a/2a lines produced 10 to 20 percent higher yields and slightly more protein compared to a leading Chinese variety, Hua Chun-6, all while maintaining oil content.

"This demonstrates that gene editing toward optimal nodulation improves soybean yield and quality," said Guan Yuefeng, one of the study's authors and a professor

at Guangzhou University.

However, larger-scale testing is needed, with trials to date conducted on plots no larger than 100 square meters.

The research adheres to China's 2022 guidelines for assessing the safety of gene-edited crops, which require the use of experimental sites and the acquisition of safety certificates before wider cultivation.

The team aims to apply the technology to other soybean varieties domestically and, in the long run, to crops like peanuts and alfalfa.

The development offers a potential solution for increasing domestic soybean production and protein availability in China, which would reduce reliance on imports and contribute to global food security.

Tech breakthrough makes litchi available year-round

By ZHENG CAIXIONG in Guangzhou
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Thanks to breakthroughs in litchi preservation technology in South China's Guangdong province, more than 200 metric tons of fruit preserved in June gradually entered the market earlier this year.

Liang Qinru, deputy director of the Guangdong Provincial Department of Science and Technology, said the special freezing technique involves immediate pre-cooling, protective coloration and freezing, preserving the freshness of just-picked litchis.

"The core point is to quickly freeze and hibernate the flesh cells of litchi below minus 35 C, without damaging the original structure of the flesh, just like animals' hibernation," he said.

After thawing, the "frozen dormant litchi" has the same bright red color as the fresh fruit and the flesh remains crystal clear, Liang said, adding that the color and aroma can be maintained at about 80 to 90 percent of the original level.

Liang detailed the process while answering residents' questions about litchi production and storage on a livelihood hotline late last week.

He said his department had given strong support to scientists tackling the problem of litchi preservation in the past year, and the Guangdong Academy of Agricultural Sciences had now mastered the ultra-low temperature litchi preservation technology.

"This year ... we will strive to expand production capacity and use new technologies to preserve more than 2,000 tons of litchis, allowing consumers to enjoy fresh litchis all year round," Liang said.

"Meanwhile, the new litchi preservation technology will help solve the problem of litchi growers' income being affected by low pri-

The core point is to quickly freeze and hibernate the flesh cells of litchi below minus 35 C, without damaging the original structure of the flesh."

Liang Qinru, deputy director of the Guangdong Provincial Department of Science and Technology

ces during good harvest years."

Hu Shengchun, director of the department's agriculture and rural affairs division, said the researchers' technological breakthroughs allowed litchis to be preserved for a long time at low cost.

The frozen litchis preserved last year have been selling well on major e-commerce platforms, including Freshippo and JD.

Hu said that in the next few months the department will step up the promotion and application of the preservation technology to help promote the high-quality development of the litchi industry.

Guangdong's delicious litchis are loved by many people, but the preservation of the fruit has long troubled farmers and vendors. When refrigerated, the fruit can be stored for a maximum of 7 to 10 days, Hu said.

Ding Meihua, a white-collar worker from Guangzhou's Tianhe district, said she would buy frozen litchi if the fruit's taste remained unchanged.

Subtropical Guangdong is the largest litchi base in China, producing 1.3 million tons of litchi a year — more than 50 percent of the country's output.



Workers look after a dog at the pet lounge at Shenzhen Bao'an International Airport in Guangdong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

First pet lounge launched at Shenzhen airport

By ZHOU MO in Shenzhen
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Shenzhen Bao'an International Airport has opened China's first special lounge for pets, as their growing number in the city has created a large demand for related travel accommodations.

The 210-square-meter lounge is equipped with a comprehensive system that can provide 24-hour monitoring of temperature, humidity, PM2.5 and PM10 levels, and ammonia, and is able to provide early warnings.

Each pet is provided with a separate space, and services like security checks and boarding, regular inspection, feeding and free foster care due to flight delays are offered.

A pet entertainment space has also been set up.

"Pets are often treated as 'live cargo' in air transport, but the 'furry children' have already become members of many families," said Zhou Jie, general manager of Shenzhen Airport Domestic Cargo Terminal.

"The establishment of the pet lounge has changed the mode of mixed transport of pets and air cargo in the past. Based on the digital platform and internet of things technology, a remote medical diagnosis system and epidemic prevention measures have been introduced to provide pets with foster care, nursing and oth-

er services to ensure their safety and comfort."

The size of the Chinese pet economy hit 592 billion yuan (\$81.9 billion) last year, increasing 20.1 percent year-on-year, data from market intelligence firm iiMedia Research showed. The market is expected to expand to 811 billion yuan by 2025.

In Shenzhen, the number of pet dogs and cats exceeds 500,000, with people in their early 40s and younger the main group of pet owners, according to the China Development Institute, a Shenzhen-based think tank.

As the pet economy continues to grow, Shenzhen has unveiled measures to build itself into a pet-friendly city.

Last month, it opened a special bus route, enabling pets to take the bus with their owners for the first time.

More than 50 shopping malls and over 1,000 restaurants in Shenzhen welcome pets, while more than 10 parks tailored for pets have been opened.

"I have to highly praise the pet-friendly move by the Shenzhen airport," said a woman surnamed Liu, who was one of the first people to use the new service. "The pet lounge makes me feel reassured about my pet traveling."

"Through the services, I feel that Shenzhen is a city filled with humane care."

Expansion of individual travel scheme welcomed in HK

By WU MENGLEI in Hong Kong
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Allowing more mainland cities to issue individual travel endorsements will boost Hong Kong's tourism sector and contribute to its continued growth and development, tourism and retail industry insiders said.

Residents of eight more cities on the Chinese mainland will be allowed to visit Hong Kong and Macao independently from May 27, according to the National Immigration Administration. They could

previously only visit on group tours. Fifty-nine cities are now part of such schemes.

The new cities include Lhasa in the Xizang autonomous region, Lanzhou in Gansu province, Xining in Qinghai province, and Urumqi in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

From March 6, the administration allowed Xi'an in Shaanxi province and Qingdao in Shandong to issue individual travel endorsements for trips to Hong Kong and Macao.

News of the expansion of eligibility saw the share prices of tourism

and gaming companies listed in Hong Kong rise on Monday.

Pang Yiu-kai, chairman of the Hong Kong Tourism Board, welcomed the expansion of the Individual Visit Scheme.

"The central government's inclusion of new cities in the IVS twice in three months reflects its full support and confidence in Hong Kong," he said. "It is also a gift for Hong Kong's tourism industry."

Liza Ng, CEO of Greater Bay Airlines, said she is confident the initiative will boost the development of various industries and Hong Kong's

overall economic development.

The Hong Kong Retail Management Association said retailers in the city are determined to seize business opportunities by taking advantage of the central government's expansion of the scheme.

At the annual general meeting of the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce on Friday, a chamber spokeswoman said, "Hong Kong's tourism industry can look toward more supportive measures from the central government to overcome the difficulties we are facing now."

CHINA

Cross-talk performer provides humor while lending a hand in Tianjin

By YANG CHENG in Tianjin
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Liu Chunhui, a cross-talk performer from Tianjin, has devoted her spare time to preparing for charity shows, distributing aid to migrant workers and creating online videos with contemporary themes this spring.

Charity shows and volunteer work have been an important part of her life since the 1990s, and her dedication to helping others has distinguished her in the world of performing arts in China.

"Cross-talk aims to bring joy to its audiences, but for me, it's more than just a profession," she said.

Cross-talk, also known as *xiangsheng*, is a captivating traditional art deeply rooted in Chinese culture. It involves two or more performers engaging in comedic dialogues, often delivered in a rapid-fire, improvisational style to delight spectators.

The art form thrives in Tianjin and has become a defining aspect of the city's culture, entertaining local audiences while imparting an optimistic philosophy of life.

Recognizing that enthusiasts of traditional arts often struggle to attend live performances due to time and financial constraints, Liu conceived the idea of volunteering for performances three decades ago.

She has organized more than 300 charity performances and 200 philanthropic events, and has collaborated with artists, calligraphers and painters to raise funds and collect materials totaling 700,000 yuan (\$96,768) to support over 150 underprivileged children and people living in poverty and disaster-stricken areas. "The happiness derived from each charitable performance and volunteer activity not only impacts others but also continually motivates and influences me, fueling my dedication to volunteer services for three decades," she said.

Liu said she was inspired to help others because when she was a child, relatives and friends offered her parents financial support when they needed it.

In the 1990s, Liu established the Chunhui Art Volunteer Team in Tianjin's Hebei district, attracting various artistic talent, including calligraphers, painters and actors.

In recent years, the team has embraced the surge in short video and social media platforms

such as WeChat and Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, to expand its online presence.

The team's cross-talk topics now reflect current social issues, promoting a positive narrative on building a civilized society, waste classification, responsible travel and anti-fraud measures.

Its audience continues to grow both online and offline, garnering attention everywhere from nursing homes to firefighting stations.

Even during the COVID-19 epidemic, Liu ventured to the impoverished county of Qingshui in northwestern Gansu province, putting on livestreaming performances to help residents sell local products.

Her selfless act helped raise 700,000 yuan for the county during the epidemic.

Liu's efforts have inspired a growing number of individuals from various circles in Tianjin to join her cause.

"Over the past three decades, our team has experienced remarkable growth in terms of size and the scale of our charitable performances," she said.

The team's enthusiasm and selfless spirit have also inspired others, leading to the establishment of an alliance of volunteers in Hebei district aptly named "the Association of Good Peoples", last year.

Pang Li'ai, a member of the alliance and head of a beauty and hairdressing company in the district, said, "Inspired by the role models around us, we leverage our professional strengths and actively participate in volunteer services."

Liu shared an inspiring anecdote about Pang Jun, her 68-year-old cross-talk partner and fellow member of the volunteer team.

On one particular rainy day, the team had a performance scheduled in Hebei district. Despite the downpour, Pang Jun rushed to get to the venue from Tanggu district, located in the eastern coastal areas of Tianjin.

Completely drenched by the rain, he made it to the venue, but his efforts caused an old back injury to flare up. Nevertheless, he persevered through the pain and successfully completed the performance.

Pang Jun also consistently engaged in volunteer activities during the pandemic.

"He often said that as an artist, it was his duty to be at the forefront, which deeply moved me," Liu said.



Cross-talk artist Liu Chunhui (left) and her partner, Pang Jun (second from left), perform for senior residents at a nursing home in Hebei district, Tianjin. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Yang Wei operates a drone to observe two Oriental white storks along the Songhua River in Harbin, Heilongjiang province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Cold brings photographer, feathered friends together

Yang Wei helps critically endangered birds survive harsh winter in Harbin

By ZHOU HUIYING and TIAN XUEFEI in Harbin

Despite being reluctant to see them go, Yang Wei still felt quite happy watching the two young birds she had cared for soar into the sky with their migratory flock that had returned for spring.

Yang, a 51-year-old photographer, had helped an injured Oriental white stork and its companion safely endure the extremely cold winter in Harbin, Northeast China's Heilongjiang province.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature has classified the Oriental white stork as critically endangered, with only about 9,000 remaining.

On Dec 2, Yang was taking photos of the sunrise near the Binbei Bridge of the Songhua River.

"There is a wastewater discharge outlet near this water area, and the treated wastewater maintains a relatively high temperature, so it does not freeze in winter," she said. "Wild ducks and other birds are always found on the unfrozen water surface, so I went there twice a week to capture photos of the birds."

As she was shooting, Yang saw a large bird fly out of the mist and land on the riverbank. Another bird arrived a moment later.

"I failed to take clear photos of them before they flew away," she said. "From that day on, I went to the area every day to search for them, but I only found some bird footprints on the shore."

It wasn't until Dec 10 that Yang and her photography friends finally got a clear view of the birds using a drone. "I determined that they were Oriental white storks because I had photographed some that were migrating before," she said. "Then I asked experts for further confirmation, and they agreed with me, which made us very excited. We had never seen Oriental white storks

that should have migrated south wintering in Harbin."

Yang soon discovered that the smaller of the two storks had a gash on its right wing, and she reasoned that the injury, coupled with exhaustion, were why the birds were stranded in Harbin. Experts told Yang that the two birds were probably born only several months before and had likely just learned to fly.

As temperatures continued to drop, the water surface grew increasingly smaller, with no fish visible. "I thought it must be very difficult for the storks to survive the cold winter, so we decided to help them," Yang said.

Feeding troubles

After doing research on the internet and consulting with experts, she learned a lot about the birds.

"Each stork needs about 2 to 4 kilograms of fish every day, and for young storks, the length of fish should be shorter than 10 centimeters," she said. "They don't eat sea fish, so we chose crucian carp to feed them."

However, during winter in Harbin, it's not easy to buy a large quantity of specific types of fish with the right length. Yang and her friends had to visit different markets across the city. "We would scatter the fish at the edge of the flowing water, but I fell into the icy water three times because the thin ice suddenly broke," she said. "Furthermore, when the area with flowing water grew too large, we couldn't get close to the storks."

Yang used devices to help her throw the fish near the storks, and on the occasions when they were further away, she used a drone to carry fish to them.

Because the drone could only carry 0.4 kg of fish at a time, Yang had to repeat the process more than 10 times to feed the birds. The task was especially difficult because of the frigid cold. "Temperatures could



The two storks feed on fish in the Songhua River in Harbin.

returned from the south.

After disappearing for nearly two weeks, the two birds returned to the river area on March 15, accompanied by an even larger Oriental white stork. On the afternoon of March 19, Yang was astonished to find around 50 Oriental white storks soaring and circling above the river.

Two hours later, the flock departed, along with the two birds. "I was crying and searching for them among the stork flock, forgetting even to take photos," she said. "Despite coming there every day the following week, I haven't seen them again."

On March 23, China News Service reported that the first group of Oriental white storks of the year had arrived at the Honghe National Nature Reserve in Heilongjiang.

"I believe that they must be there," Yang said. "After spending 109 days together, I felt very reluctant to part ways, but more than that, I am happy. This has been a remarkable encounter in my life."

Wu Bingyi, an expert from the city's forestry and grassland bureau, said Yang's experience marked the first time Oriental white storks were found to have successfully wintered in Harbin. "The city experienced a week of extreme cold, with temperatures continuously dropping to -31 C," Wu said.

"During the coldest days when their activities decreased, we also considered intervening, but we found that there was abundant food, and the citizens protected them very well," he said. "In recent years, the water area has continuously seen teal, pochard and mandarin ducks spending the winter there due to the suitable environment."

With the arrival of spring, Yang also has new hopes. "I want to hold a photo exhibition to tell the story between me and the two birds," she said. "I also want to tell everyone that Harbin is not only blessed with natural beauty, but also with sincere and kind-hearted people."

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Designer turns hobby into horse-face skirt business

HANGZHOU — Standing in front of a horse-face skirt on display in a garment factory, Liu Wenyue, 24, meticulously elaborated on the inspiration she drew from while designing it.

"I drew inspiration from the shell carving process used to create mother-of-pearl lacquer, an intangible cultural heritage in China. I chose the chromatic silver thread and images from traditional Chinese paintings — birds, flowers, hills and rocks — as the motifs. I also added window-frame patterns on the edge to give the entire piece the appearance of lacquerware," she said.

"It is the best-selling piece in our store, with 20,000 pieces sold so far," added Liu, a young *hanfu* designer who majored in pre-school education and switched to a new profession, riding the boom in popularity

of traditional Chinese culture.

Having designed nearly 500 sets of *hanfu* in just four years, Liu has managed to turn what was once a hobby into a stable source of income. She now runs a studio located in Xucun township in Haining, Zhejiang province, and focuses on designing horse-face skirts.

The horse-face skirt is a type of *hanfu* that features a high, flat front and pleated sides. It originated during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and maintained its popularity during the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911).

The more wearable traditional clothes are, the likelier they are to become popular and be passed down to future generations, Liu said.

"I hope that the *hanfu* pieces I designed can easily blend into peo-

ple's everyday lives. This is why I have prioritized horse-face skirts as my flagship product," she said, adding that the skirt is very versatile, as it can be matched with tops and fits all age groups.

Liu's passion for *hanfu* started during her college years, when she was enthralled by the traditional attire but could barely afford it. After seeing *hanfu* design blueprints shared on the internet, she felt confident in her ability to design the outfits and attempted to create her first design blueprint.

To her astonishment, a *hanfu* merchant bought her design for 300 yuan (\$42). Even though the design had not yet been produced, the buyer provided her with valuable professional guidance, recommending that she learn computer-aided design, which ultimately led to her

entry into the industry.

She opened her own *hanfu* studio in 2019 with a partner who is also a *hanfu* enthusiast. However, her parents, belonging to a generation to which *hanfu* remains a novelty, were skeptical about her career choice.

Their skepticism faded as her business prospered. In July, she relocated her studio to the current site in Xucun, which is closer to her textile source.

In her new studio, horse-face skirts featuring a variety of patterns are prominently displayed. They include patterns of fireworks, herbal medicines, blue and white porcelain, and Year of the Dragon images.

"I draw inspiration mostly from traditional Chinese cultural elements while designing the skirts, and at the same time I integrate



Liu Wenyue (right) checks production of horse-face skirts she designed at a factory in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on March 7. KONG LINGHANG / XINHUA

modern aesthetics into the design to highlight the younger generation's understanding of *hanfu*," Liu said.

She has not only built a fan base domestically, but has also received orders for her skirts from overseas

Chinese and international students. Orders have also been placed by foreigners who are interested in *hanfu* culture.

XINHUA

WORLD

Novel event

Chinese novelist Yu Hua (left) speaks during a book-signing event at the 36th Turin International Book Fair in Italy on Sunday. Under the theme of "Imaginary Life", the five-day fair, which runs through Monday, has attracted more than 4,000 publishing professionals from 43 countries and regions. Hundreds of Chinese books have been displayed at the fair, drawing the attention of numerous foreign readers.

REN YAOTING / XINHUA



FM: Attempt to play 'Taiwan card' doomed to fail

By ZHOU JIN
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The Foreign Ministry said on Monday that China's decision of not letting its Taiwan region participate in the World Health Assembly has received wide support and understanding from the international community and any attempt to challenge the one-China principle will not succeed.

Registration for the 77th WHA will close on Monday and Taiwan has not received an invitation. The Democratic Progressive Party authorities said its absence from the assembly will cause a gap in international epidemic prevention.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin blasted the claim as a political lie, saying any attempt to play the "Taiwan card" and use Taiwan to con-

tain China will only be met with firm opposition from the international community and is doomed to fail.

Taiwan's participation in the activities of international organizations, including the World Health Organization, must be handled under the one-China principle, a basic principle enshrined in the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758 and WHA Resolution 25.1, Wang told a daily news briefing in Beijing.

Unless it is given approval by the central government, Taiwan has no basis, reason or right to participate in the WHA, Wang said.

The DPP authorities have refused to recognize the 1992 Consensus and stubbornly stuck to the separatist position of "Taiwan independence", which eroded the political foundation for the region's

participation in the WHA, he said.

In light of this, China has decided not to agree to let Taiwan participate in this year's WHA, Wang said.

The decision has sufficient reason and solid legal basis, which is not only to uphold the one-China principle, but also to safeguard the sanctity and authority of relevant UNGA and WHA resolutions, he said.

Under the one-China principle, Taiwan's participation in global health affairs has been properly arranged, he said.

Over the past year, a total of 21 batches of 24 people from Taiwan applied to participate in technical WHO activities, all of which were approved by the central government.

There is a contact point for international health regulations in Taiwan, enabling the region to obtain

timely information on health emergencies and report to the WHO.

"Facts have fully demonstrated that the Chinese central government has every sincerity and has taken credible and active measures to address the health issues that our compatriots in Taiwan care about, and that their rights to health are duly protected," Wang said.

Recently, the DPP authorities and certain countries have been deliberately distorting and challenging Resolution 2758, expressing support for Taiwan's participation in multilateral forums of the UN system and challenging the global consensus on the one-China principle, Wang said. Such practices that violate international law and basic norms governing international relations and turn back the wheel of history will never succeed.

Flash floods kill 44 in Indonesia with more still missing

PADANG, Indonesia — Rescuers recovered more bodies on Monday after monsoon rains triggered flash floods on Indonesia's Sumatra Island, bringing down torrents of cold lava and mud, leaving at least 44 people dead and another 15 missing.

The heavy rains, along with a landslide of mud and cold lava from Mount Marapi, caused a river to breach its banks.

The deluge tore through mountainside villages along four districts in West Sumatra Province just before midnight on Saturday. The floods swept away people and submerged nearly 200 houses and buildings, some severely damaged, said National Disaster Management Agency spokesperson Abdul Muhari.

Cold lava, also known as lahar, is a mixture of volcanic material and pebbles that flow down a volcano's slopes in the rain.

"We have found several bodies, bringing the total death toll to 44," said Fajar Sukma, head of the emergency unit of disaster management and mitigation agency of West



Rescuers work in a damaged area after a cold lava flood in West Sumatra, Indonesia, on Sunday. ANDRI MARDIANSYAH / XINHUA

Sumatra Province. "Big stones and the waste have hampered the searching, but we continue to look for the 15 people reported missing."

At least 19 people were injured in the flash floods, Muhari said.

Flash floods on Saturday night

also caused main roads around the Anai Valley Waterfall area in Tanah Datar district to be blocked by mud, cutting off access to other cities, Padang Panjang Police Chief Kartiyana Putra said on Sunday.

Videos released by the National

Search and Rescue Agency showed roads were transformed into murky brown rivers and villages covered by thick mud, rocks and uprooted trees.

Heavy rains cause frequent landslides and flash floods in Indonesia, an archipelago nation of more than 17,000 islands where millions of people live in mountainous areas or near flood plains.

The disaster came just two months after heavy rains triggered flash floods and a landslide in West Sumatra, killing at least 26 people and leaving 11 others missing.

A surprise eruption of Mount Marapi late last year killed 23 climbers.

Marapi is known for sudden eruptions that are difficult to predict because the source is shallow and near the peak, and its eruptions are not caused by a deep movement of magma, which sets off tremors that register on seismic monitors, according to Indonesia's Center for Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Climate imperils wonders that gave US parks their names

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK, Montana — Glacier National Park's ice fortress is crumbling, and the giant trees of Sequoia National Park are ablaze. Even the tenacious cacti of Saguaro National Park are struggling to endure a decadeslong drought.

Since their creation, national parks have embodied the pioneering spirit of the United States in their vast expanses and breathtaking landscapes. But today, the climate crisis imperils the very symbols of many parks, leaving them facing a future where their names could be cruel ironies.

Deep within Montana's Glacier National Park, the once majestic Grinnell Glacier is now greatly diminished. After a grueling trek, visitors are met with a stunning sight: a serene lake of pale blue water, nestled among towering peaks.

But as beautiful as it is, the very presence of this lake is testament to the ravages of a fast-warming planet.

Just a few decades ago, this landscape was entirely frozen. Now the glacier itself is relegated to a small hollow, sheltered from the sun, at the edge of the lake created through its own melting.

The park has lost 60 percent of its namesake glaciers since the 1850s,

and scientists predict their complete disappearance by the century's end.

Conserving the 63 national parks is a rare point of political convergence in a sharply divided country. With tens of millions of people visiting these sites every year, it is also an economic imperative.

President Joe Biden's government recently announced nearly \$200 million to help them adapt — funding made available through his signature climate law.

Yet, despite these efforts, the reality is that not everything can be saved.

This sobering truth has sparked an identity crisis for the National Park Service.

But it is now "pretty clear that it's not achievable in many places," says John Gross, an ecologist with the NPS' climate change response program.

"It's certainly possible that the parks could lose the iconic feature for which they've been named."

At Indiana Dunes National Park, beaches are submerged and the eponymous dunes are collapsing.

This time, park workers are fighting back. Every year, they fill in a damaged site along the southern shore of Lake Michigan, where the park's unique biodiversity thrives

amid surrounding steel mills and a coal-fired power station.

The proximity to Michigan City's industrial port is the main culprit for erosion because the pier blocks the flow of sand along the coast.

While the situation was once manageable, climate change "is changing the game completely," NPS geologist Erin Argyilan says.

The ice shelf that forms in winter "has been our first line of defense to protect the dunes from the high waves that naturally come with fall and winter storms," Argyilan explains.

But with climate change, the ice is not coming until at least December if not January, while the storms begin in late October.

At Saguaro National Park in Arizona, home to the largest concentration of iconic saguaro cacti in the US, about 2 million of the towering desert plants cluster together like a forest, their arms outstretched to the sky.

Hidden threats

To the untrained eye, they appear to be thriving. But these resilient cacti that evolved to cope with ultra-arid environments are facing hidden threats as a result of a drought that began about 30 years ago.

In 2020 and again last year, the

region experienced unusually meager rainfall in the summer, typically a time of monsoon rains.

During this period, a nonnative plant, buffelgrass, began to colonize the park. This invasive weed, introduced from Africa as livestock fodder, fuels fires that have ravaged saguaros in the past.

Beyond the ecological devastation, the loss of saguaros and glaciers has far-reaching cultural consequences.

For Native American tribes, these natural wonders hold deep spiritual significance.

The Tohono O'odham people consider saguaros their ancestors, and rely on their fruit to make ceremonial syrup. Similarly, the Blackfeet Nation reveres glaciers as sacred, recognizing their crucial role in sustaining life.

Wylie Carr, a climate planning specialist for the NPS, says national parks are "natural classrooms" for young and old alike to "really see and experience how climate change is impacting natural and cultural resources."

To this end, Glacier National Park's winding trails are dotted with signs that pose poignant questions.

"How many glaciers will be left for the next generation?" one pleads.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Flying Tigers' legacy shows deep bonds

War-time friendship, mutual respect should be inherited, descendants say

By RENA LI in Los Angeles
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To commemorate the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and the United States, Catharine Kerr joined other descendants of World War II heroes to share their stories.

"The cooperation between Chinese and Americans during the difficult war-time is strongly remembered in my family," said the granddaughter of Flying Tigers lieutenant Donald Kerr at a recent commemoration hosted by the American Flying Tigers Communication Association. "I hope that the friendships (that started) 80 years ago continue forever."

On Feb. 11, 1944, Flying Tigers pilot Donald Kerr was part of a mission to bomb Kai Tak airport in Hong Kong.

He downed a Japanese aircraft before finding himself being pursued by three Japanese fighter planes. His aircraft was hit and caught fire. He then parachuted and landed in Sha Tin Au in the New Territories of Hong Kong.

Facing the imminent danger of the Japanese military's extensive manhunt, Kerr was saved through the efforts of the Dongjiang (East River) Column and the Hong Kong-Kowloon Independence Brigade.

After enduring 48 days of uncertainty, Kerr was safely escorted back to the Guilin base in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. His rescuers gave him a map and ensured that he would get home safe and sound.

This experience left Kerr with a profound appreciation for the friendliness and courage of the Chinese people. "Never be enemies of the Chinese," he once said to his eldest son Andy.

In 2008, when Kerr's wife neared the end of her life, she entrusted Kerr's relics to their two sons and told them: "In the future, you must help the Chinese just like the Chinese aided your father."

Kerr's rescue was later compiled into an escape manual by the Flying Tigers and was highly praised by general Claire Lee Chennault, a pivotal figure in the group's history.

Extensive coverage

The America Magazine extensively covered Kerr's rescue in 1944, publishing the story worldwide. Consequently, the US military headquarters in China established intelligence collaboration with the Dongjiang Column, solidifying its role as a vital component in the global anti-fascist struggle.

Kerr was not the only pilot rescued from Hong Kong during the Japanese occupation. In April 1984, US president Ronald Reagan said at Fudan University in Shanghai: "According to incomplete statistics, in 1944, in addition to Kerr, the Dongjiang Column also rescued seven Flying Tigers pilots."

Catharine's father David Kerr and uncle Andy Kerr embarked on a profound journey to China since 2007 to fulfill their parents' wishes and express gratitude to those involved in Kerr's rescue.



Catharine Kerr shares the story of her grandfather Donald Kerr at a recent commemoration in Los Angeles. RENA LI / CHINA DAILY

They have gone on more than 10 trips to Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Dongguan and Hong Kong, tracing Kerr's escape route and seeking out the guerrilla fighters who took part in the rescue. Along the way, they have connected with veteran soldiers and their descendants. Today, Kerr's family are friends with the third generation of Dongjiang Column veterans.

"I (once) went with my father to China in 2008 and met many of the villagers and soldiers who had rescued my grandfather," Catharine said. "We were able to thank the people for the many risks they took to help my grandfather."

Nell Calloway, granddaughter of Chennault, emphasized the importance of coexistence between China and the US. She stressed the need to go back into history and "remember what brought us to the point of reunification."

Importance of history

"We cannot celebrate one anniversary without understanding the importance of history," Calloway said in a video to the event. "This history eventually leads us to becoming (great) powers. It is now our responsibility to maintain that."

Calloway said her grandfather's Flying Tigers story illustrates two great people working toward a common goal to bring the world peace. "Let us all continue to work hard toward friendship, understanding the most important peaceful world."

Mel McMullen, one of the few surviving members of the Flying Tigers, recounted the bravery of the Chinese people who risked severe punishment by the Japanese invaders to save the lives of hundreds of downed US pilots in the 1940s.

While governments and politics may have shifted, he said the fundamental desire for peace remains unchanged among people.

"We were friends, comrades and partners in war. Why can't we be partners in peace?" the 99-year-old said at the event.

The Flying Tigers witnessed a remarkable chapter in history when China and the US stood shoulder to shoulder against Japanese aggression.

"When American pilots found themselves in dire straits, they were rescued by Chinese troops who risked their own lives to ensure local stability," Wang Qi, a Chinese consul in Los Angeles, said.

"The story of the Flying Tigers is the glorious history of mutual respect, and joint defense for justice and peace by the Chinese and American people."

"We will always remember those who have made huge sacrifices and contributions. The deep friendship between China and the US established in the war should be inherited."

US Congresswoman Judy Chu said cooperation between the two countries has been crucial throughout history, and the story of the Flying Tigers exemplifies this partnership.

"Let us celebrate this deep friendship and ensure we keep the memory of the Flying Tigers alive."

WORLD

China, France applauded for Gaza stance

Both nations assume responsibility in seeking way out of conflict, experts say

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
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China and France have assumed their responsibility as major countries and United Nations Security Council members by reiterating their commitment to a lasting two-state solution to the Middle East crisis instead of fueling its escalation, according to analysts.

They say Chinese President Xi Jinping and French President Emmanuel Macron displayed "moral clarity" on the Gaza conflict during their recent meeting.

Both leaders called for an irreversible relaunch of a political process to implement a two-state solution and sustainable delivery of humanitarian aid.

In a joint statement made during the Chinese president's state visit to France, Xi and Macron reiterated their call for Israel and Palestine "to live side by side in peace and security".

The two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the two-state solution, which "is the only way to meet the legitimate aspirations of the Israeli and Palestinian people for lasting peace and security".

"President Xi Jinping's meeting with the French leader last week signaled alignment as both nations sought a cessation of hostilities," Belal Alakhras, a political analyst and Palestinian researcher at the University of Malaya in Malaysia, told China Daily.

"External crises have often been exploited to drive rifts but the moral clarity of the situation in Gaza prompted unity in demanding an end to the bloodshed," Alakhras said.

"This approach highlights a stark contrast to the US, which enabled the genocide in Gaza by providing billions in military aid (to Israel), intelligence support, vetoing cease-fire resolutions, and even suppressing student activists protesting these atrocities on American campuses," he added.

He said China's active diplomacy indicated a more principled foreign policy, rather than "perpetuating unilateral agendas to assert spheres of influence at all costs, like some traditional powers".

The Gaza conflict, he added, provided an opportunity for China to find common ground with other



Children play in a charred van in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Sunday amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Hamas militant group. AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

countries appalled by the escalating atrocities.

Long before tensions escalated in the region on Oct 7, China had called for lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Most notably, it announced a plan to invite Israelis and Palestinians for talks in Beijing in 2021. China has also provided humanitarian assistance to help ease the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Last month, China invited representatives of the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah) and the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) to Beijing for in-depth and candid talks on promoting intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

On Friday, China expressed support for the UNSC to reconsider Pal-

estine's application to join the world body. A resolution calling for the reevaluation of Palestine's UN membership bid and upgrading its rights passed with overwhelming support, with 143 member states — including China and France — voting in favor, nine against, including the US, and 25 abstentions.

"China always stands, stood, is still standing, and will stand with Palestine in the United Nations," said Ayman Talal Yousef, a professor of international relations at the Arab American University in Jenin.

Yousef noted that historically, culturally, and politically, China has had "very good relations" with all Arab countries, particularly Egypt and Algeria. Now there are "growing

economic relations with Gulf countries," he told China Daily.

At the same time, China has had smooth relations with Israel since both countries established diplomatic ties in 1992, Yousef added.

These unprecedented times call for unprecedented change, according to Alakhras, as the world has witnessed how the self-serving interests of an unchecked superpower can jeopardize global security.

"China's resolute stance in defusing this conflict has elevated its stature but it may need to capitalize on this momentum. Further investing in principled multilateralism will continue garnering goodwill and buttressing China's role as a stabilizing force for the collective good," he said.

Israeli forces move deeper into Rafah

RAFAH/JERUSALEM — The exodus of Palestinians from Gaza's last refuge accelerated on Sunday as Israeli forces pushed deeper into the southern city of Rafah. Israel also pounded the territory's devastated north, where some Hamas militants have regrouped in areas the military said it had cleared months ago.

Palestinians reported heavy Israeli bombardment overnight in the urban Jabaliya refugee camp and other areas in northern Gaza, which has been largely isolated by Israeli forces for months. United Nations officials said there is a "full-blown famine" there.

Residents said Israeli warplanes and artillery also struck the Zeitoun area east of Gaza City, where troops have battled militants for over a week. They have called on tens of thousands of people to relocate to nearby areas.

"It was a very difficult night," Abdel-Kareem Radwan, a 48-year-old from Jabaliya, said. He said they could hear intense and constant bombing since midday on Saturday. "This is madness."

First responders with the Palestinian Civil Defense said they were unable to respond to multiple calls for help from both areas, as well as from Rafah.

Daniel Hagari, Israel's top military spokesman, said forces were also operating in the northern towns of Beit Lahiya and Beit Hanoun, which were heavily bombed in the opening days.

Hamas' military wing said it shelled Israeli special forces east of Jabaliya and fired mortar shells at troops and vehicles entering the Rafah border crossing area.

Since Sunday morning, the Israeli strikes have prompted a large number of Palestinian families to flee westward, carrying belongings on foot or crammed in vehicles.

"The bombing is everywhere," said

resident Hajja Zuhriya Salman. "We are escaping from death to death, and there is no safe place in Gaza."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken reiterated opposition to a major military assault on Rafah, and said that Israel would "be left holding the bag on an enduring insurgency" without an exit from Gaza and a post-conflict governance plan.

In two TV interviews, Blinken underscored that the United States believes Israeli forces should "get out of Gaza", but is also waiting to see credible plans from Israel for security and governance in the territory after the conflict.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Sunday said the US and European countries were not doing enough to pressure Israel to agree to

a cease-fire in Gaza after Hamas accepted a truce proposal.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed in a Memorial Day speech to continue fighting until victory in memory of those killed in the conflict.

In Tel Aviv, hundreds of protesters stood outside military headquarters and lit candles, demanding an immediate cease-fire deal to return the hostages.

Israel's offensive has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

In Hamas' Oct 7 surprise attack in Israel, about 1,200 people were killed and more than 200 were taken hostage.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Briefly

SWITZERLAND China, US to hold 1st AI governance meet

China and the US agreed to hold the first meeting of their intergovernmental dialogue on artificial intelligence in Geneva on Tuesday, in the latest move to implement the consensus reached by the two heads of state in San Francisco in November. During the meeting, the two sides will exchange views on the technological risks of AI, global governance and other issues of their respective concern.

CHINA Bruneian foreign minister pays visit

Bruneian Foreign Minister II Dato Erywan Pehin Yusof started a three-day official visit to China on Monday, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin has announced. Bilateral cooperation in various fields has yielded fruitful results. Chinese enterprises have become major investors in Brunei and have made contributions in promoting the country's industrial development, improving infrastructure, enhancing connectivity and boosting economic diversification, Chinese Ambassador to Brunei Xiao Jianguo said in a signed article in April.

KUWAIT Decree announces new govt formation

A Kuwaiti Emiri decree was issued on Sunday evening, announcing the forming of a new cabinet headed by Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Sabah. Emad Al-Atiqi, Anwar Ali Al-Mudhaf and Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya retained their posts as oil, finance and foreign ministers respectively, according to the decree from the Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The new government comes after the emir dissolved the parliament on Friday.

UNITED STATES Man who had first pig kidney transplant dies

A man with end-stage renal disease, who earlier this year became the first human to receive a new kidney from a genetically modified pig, has died, Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston said. Rick Slayman, 62, received the transplant in March in a four-hour surgery.

CHINA DAILY—AGENCIES—XINHUA

Smoky inferno



A fire burns out of a vast shopping complex in Warsaw, Poland, on Sunday. The fire broke out on Sunday morning in the complex that housed some 1,400 shops and service outlets.

NOBERT OFMANSKI / ASSOCIATED PRESS

15 killed in Ukrainian missile strike in Russia's Belgorod

By REN QI in Moscow
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At least 15 people were killed and scores injured on Sunday when a section of a Russian apartment block collapsed after being struck by fragments of a Soviet-era missile, launched by Ukraine and shot down by Russia, Russian officials said.

In one of the deadliest attacks to date in the Belgorod region, Ukraine launched what Russian officials said was a massive missile attack, involving Tochka ballistic missiles and Adler and RM-70 Vampire multiple-launcher rocket systems. The Kremlin said Russian President Vladimir Putin had been briefed about the attack, which it said was "barbaric".

Footage from the scene showed at least 10 stories of the building collapsing.

Later, as emergency services scoured the rubble for survivors, the roof collapsed and people ran for

their lives, dust and rubble falling behind them.

Russia's emergency ministry said on Monday that 15 people were killed when the building collapsed. Vyacheslav Gladkov, governor of the region, said that four more people died on Sunday in separate attacks by Kyiv.

Russia's Defense Ministry said at least 12 missiles were involved in the Belgorod strikes, which it called a "terrorist attack on residential areas".

It came as Putin on Sunday proposed former first deputy prime minister Andrey Belousov as the new defense chief, succeeding Sergey Shoigu, who moves to the role as secretary of Russia's National Security Council.

The 65-year-old Belousov has held various positions, including assistant to the President on economic issues, minister of economic development, director of the department of economics and finance in the government apparatus, and general director of the Center for Mac-

roeconomic Analysis and Short-term Forecasting.

In a separate decree, Putin appointed Shoigu, the defense minister since 2012, as the secretary of the National Security Council, replacing Nikolai Patrushev. The Kremlin said it will soon announce the new appointment for Patrushev.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Shoigu will also become deputy president of the Military-Industrial Commission.

Significant changes

The changes are the most significant Putin has made to the military command since Russia's special military operation in Ukraine began in February 2022.

Peskov said the change made sense because Russia was approaching a situation like the Soviet Union in the mid-1980s when the military and law enforcement authorities accounted for 7.4 percent of its GDP.

That, said Peskov, meant it was vital to ensure such spending aligned with and was better integrated into the country's overall economy, which was why Putin now wanted a civilian economist in the defense ministry.

"The one who is more open to innovations is the one who will be victorious on the battlefield," Peskov said.

Belousov shares the Russian leader's vision of rebuilding a strong state. He has also worked with Putin's top technocrats who want greater innovation and are open to new ideas.

Putin's move preserves balance at the top of the system of personal loyalties that make up the current political system, Russian experts said.

Still, Putin left Alexander Bortnikov and Sergey Naryshkin, the chiefs of the Federal Security Service and the Foreign Intelligence Service, in their posts. Sergey Lavrov, the veteran foreign minister, will also stay in his job, the Kremlin added.

UK facing its 'most dangerous' time, Sunak says

By EARLE GALE in London
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The United Kingdom's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak warned voters on Monday about the growing dangers facing the country as he tried to persuade them to support him and his ruling Conservative Party at the next general election.

Sunak, who pollsters predict faces a heavy defeat in the election that must be held before Jan 28, attempted to convince people he would cope better than his rival, Keir Starmer, during the troubled years to come.

In a speech aimed at taking back

momentum after the Conservative Party was trounced in local government elections earlier this month by Starmer's Labour Party, Sunak said the UK "stands at a crossroads," with "some of the most dangerous years" it has ever faced laying ahead.

"I feel a profound sense of urgency because more will change in the next five years than in the last 30," he said. "I'm convinced that the next few years will be some of the most dangerous, yet most transformational, our country has ever known."

Pointing to threats from terrorism, irregular immigration, artificial intelligence, and what he sees as rival

states, Sunak said he can best navigate the difficult decisions ahead.

Sunak added that "over the next few years" the UK's democracy, its economy, and its society will face "the hardest questions of war and peace".

"Almost every aspect of our lives is going to change," he said. "How we act in the face of these changes, not only to keep people safe and secure but to realize the opportunities too, will determine whether or not Britain will succeed in the years to come."

With the party as far as 30 points behind the Labour Party in opinion polls and with at least 64 Conservative Party lawmakers choosing to

stand down, rather than contest the next election, the party faces an uphill battle to secure reelection.

Foreign Secretary David Cameron has also been on the offensive, telling Sky News on Sunday the party has delivered on one of its key promises, by taking the economy out of recession during the first quarter, when it expanded by 0.6 percent.

But with two of Sunak's lawmakers having defected to the Labour Party in recent weeks, Starmer seems to be firmly on the front foot and he responded by saying: "Be in no doubt that this is the key choice at the next election."

Talking toys



Puppeteers attend the May Fayre Puppet Service at St Paul's Church in Covent Garden, London, on Sunday. It is a traditional puppet show in the country. HENRY NICHOLLS / AGENCY FRANCE-PRESSE

BUSINESS

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China, other countries to spur trade

Nation to help grow rules-based, open trading system for global recovery

By WANG KEJU
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China, along with other countries, will work toward the common goal of advancing trade and investment liberalization and facilitation, officials and executives said on Monday.

In tandem with other countries, the country will harness opportunities presented by the ongoing technological revolution, and maintain an open and rules-based trading system, to inject much-needed momentum into global economic recovery, they said.

As nations grapple with the complexities of a rapidly changing global landscape, it has become evident that overcoming obstacles and achieving global economic recovery and stability requires mutual trust and collaboration across borders, said Chinese Vice-President Han Zheng at the Global Trade and Investment Promotion Summit 2024 in Beijing.

It is of vital importance to push forward the liberation and facilitation of global trade and investment at a pivotal moment in shaping the future trajectory of the global economy, Han said, stressing that China continues to uphold its stance on opening-up and ensuring a level playing field for all enterprises, offering them vast opportunities for expansion and growth.

China is determined to capitalize on the opportunities presented by the new wave of technological and industrial revolutions. By collaborating with international partners, China aims to explore new frontiers, create innovative models, cultivate new sources of growth, and inject a greater sense of certainty into the global economy, Han said.

That said, the rise in protectionism in some parts of the world is exacerbating the already fraught global economic and geopolitical situation, amplifying all methods and tactics of beggar-thy-neighbor policies, including decoupling and de-risking strategies, said Dilma Rousseff, president of the New Development Bank.

As the world's second-largest economy, China's economic performance brings much-needed stability to the world's economy. China's commitment to an open world economy is clear, Rousseff said.

The Belt and Road Initiative, for instance, is one of the most important platforms for investment in infrastructure projects across the world, Rousseff said, adding that the initiative accounted for more than \$1 trillion in investments in 10 years. Trade between the countries partici-

pating in the initiative grew by 6.4 percent annually between 2013 and 2022 to reach \$19.1 trillion.

"China's role in global supply chains is of particular importance, and we acknowledge the innovative approaches and regulatory enhancements it has embraced. Technologies such as AI (artificial intelligence), blockchain and IoT (internet of things) have revolutionized operations, ensuring transparency, efficiency and sustainability," said Remi Paul, president of the French Chamber of Commerce and Industry in China.

"However, many challenges remain. We must keep global industrial and supply chains open and stable, ensuring smooth flow of

goods and services in a mutually beneficial way, and equal opportunities of investments across borders."

Going forward, maintaining a steadfast commitment to the multilateral trade system and enhancing global economic governance have become imperative. By doing so, nations aim to restore global economic vitality, bolster the resilience of the world economy and inject a powerful driving force for sustained development, said Ren Hongbin, chairman of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade.

Meanwhile, the stability and efficiency of industrial and supply chains have become crucial for global economic development. Countries should be actively working together to build a global industrial and supply chain system that is secure, stable, efficient, open, inclusive and mutually beneficial, Ren said.

Interest rates and RRR may see cuts

By ZHOU LANXU
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China may need additional monetary easing measures such as cutting interest rates or the reserve requirement ratio soon to facilitate the upcoming issuance of special treasury bonds, experts said on Monday.

Other factors to be taken into consideration include lukewarm financing demand in April and persistent low price growth — situations that have attracted close attention from policymakers, they said.

"If interest rates or the RRR are not cut this week amid the weak inflationary environment, then (I think) interest rates will be cut in June. That is, a cut in interest rates is on its way, sooner or later," said Hong Hao, chief economist at GROW Investment Group. The RRR refers to the proportion of deposits that banks must keep in cash as a reserve.

The People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, is due to unveil the medium-term lending facility rate — the policy benchmark for interest rates — on Wednesday, after the Ministry of Finance released on Monday the issuance schedule of ultra-long-term special treasury bonds worth 1 trillion yuan (\$138 billion).

The issuance schedule spans from this month to November and begins with the issuance of 30-year bonds on Friday. Bonds with 20-year and 50-year tenors will be offered from May 24 and June 14, respectively, the ministry said.

Hong said the ultra-long-term special treasury bond issuance represents a meaningful expansion in the fiscal deficit that the market is looking for, which will help rejuvenate the



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

0.3 percent

growth of China's consumer price index in April

credit cycle and help achieve the annual economic growth objective of around 5 percent.

Shao Yu, a board member of the Shanghai Institute for Finance & Development, a think tank, said policy coordination from the PBOC is needed to ensure the efficacy of the bonds in bolstering the economy.

With the issuance of ultra-long-term government bonds to generate more demand for liquidity, the PBOC needs to take more easing measures to maintain low financing costs for the government bonds and the real economy, Shao said.

The PBOC said on Friday in its first-quarter monetary policy report that it will "strengthen policy coordination and cooperation to keep prices at an appropriate level", citing insufficient demand as the fundamental reason for current low price levels.

Official data showed the country's consumer price index, a key indicator of inflation, rose 0.3 percent year-on-year in April after a 0.1 percent gain in March.

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

In April, the increment in aggregate social financing even turned

negative, falling by 198.7 billion yuan, the first negative reading since October 2005, according to market watcher Wind Info.

Jacqueline Rong, chief China economist at BNP Paribas, said the PBOC is likely to implement additional 25-basis-point cuts in both the MLF rate and the RRR this year, which could take place as early as this month or in June.

Rong said that the PBOC often takes immediate action following meetings of the country's top leadership that call for easing funding costs, while the issuance of both treasury bonds and local government bonds is set to speed up and necessitates an accommodative monetary environment.

Liu Zhilua contributed to this story.

Artificial intelligence firm claims advances in sight

By CHENG YU
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Serial technology entrepreneur Kai-Fu Lee said on Monday that the next generation of large models from his artificial intelligence startup 01.AI is expected to challenge the performance of GPT-5 of the US-based, Microsoft-backed OpenAI.

Lee also expressed hopes 01.AI's more affordable products can "bring China its own GPT moment".

Lee, founder and CEO of 01.AI and former president of Google China, said that though 01.AI's next-generation large language model or LLM called Yi-XLarge MoE is under training, it already showed some "competitive performance" against some latest flagship models from international vendors. The startup aims to challenge the performance and innovation of GPT-5, he said.

He made the remarks as his startup unveiled several leads in developing large model products that cost less but perform better on Monday, amid chip shortage challenges faced by domestic companies engaged in training large models.

"While the number of GPUs (graphics processing units) of US AI giants is far more than that of any company in China, one opportunity left for Chinese unicorns (startups valued at \$1 billion or more) is to use the fewest chips and the lowest cost to train the best model we can," Lee said, adding that not every listed company is capable of pouring in countless resources into their ventures and projects like OpenAI have been able to do so far.

Lee said the overseas version of 01.AI's free productivity assistant Wanzhi, one of its latest AI products that helps users create documents and read presentations, is expected to generate a revenue of 100 million yuan (\$13.8 million) in revenue this

year. Within nine months, the application has attracted nearly 10 million users and the return on investment is approaching 1, meaning that it is close to making a profit, he said.

"One thing is for sure ... what's more relevant to us is the widespread application and use of AI. I hope that my company can create an AI-first application, like AI Tik-Tok, AI WeChat or AI Taobao."

To pilot such ideas, the startup developed a more affordable LLM targeted at enterprise users dubbed Yi-Large, which costs 20 yuan for 1 million tokens, which is about one-third of OpenAI's GPT-4 Turbo.

Lan Yuchuan, head of API platform of the company, said the current Yi-Large model has surpassed GPT-4 in several benchmarks and hopes it can bring China its own GPT moment.

"More importantly, we have a sufficiently strong ability in inference optimization, which can greatly reduce the cost of models, and further help enterprises to make more money."

As of October, China had developed 254 AI large models with a parameter of at least a billion tokens each, according to a report released by the Beijing Municipal Science & Technology Commission.

Chinese tech companies such as iFlytek, Alibaba Group, Tencent Holdings, Baidu Inc, ByteDance and Huawei Technologies, as well as thousands of startups, are scrambling to develop AI large models. Many of their projects have gathered momentum over the past year.

"The Chinese market is still evolving and growing; it is different from its US counterpart. Chinese companies are seeking alternative solutions to develop AI models that are more suitable in size and capable of widespread application. Never underestimate the vitality of Chinese entrepreneurship," he said.

Officials urge more trade cooperation and partnerships

By ZHONG NAN
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The China "overcapacity" narrative pushed by some Western politicians and news outlets is based on fear, said foreign officials, emphasizing that China will continue to play a key role in ensuring the long-term stability of the global supply chain.

Dismissing these claims, Edward Kieswetter, council chairperson of the Brussels-based World Customs Organization, said China has become a global leader in investment, renewable technologies and related manufacturing projects.

"I understand that this may present a concern in certain parts of the world, but I don't agree with some Western countries' fear-based responses," said Kieswetter, who is also commissioner of the South African Revenue Service.

"We need to adopt an open mind and a more inclusive orientation, seeing ourselves as partners. We certainly encourage more partnerships to be built with China within the WCO," he added.

Speaking on the sidelines of the WCO Global AEO Conference 2024, held in Shenzhen, Guangdong province last week, Kieswetter reiterated the importance of China's significant role in global trade, noting that 25 percent of global trade involves China in some capacity.

"For most countries, China is a crucial trading partner," he said. "In my experience, China recognizes its significant role both as a global trade market and as a key supplier to the world."

Supported by its companies' green transformation and industrial upgrade, China's foreign trade expanded 5.7 percent year-on-year to 13.81 trillion yuan (\$1.91 trillion) in the first four months, while its exports rose 4.9 percent to 7.81 trillion yuan, said the General Administration of Customs.

"We find that mutual capacity-building initiatives, administrative agreements and information exchanges are all key mechanisms for strengthening trade relations," said Kieswetter.

Sharing similar views, Snorri Olsen, commissioner of Iceland Revenue and Customs, said that the

"China overcapacity" narrative is wrong and trade between China and Iceland will continue to grow after they signed an Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) mutual recognition agreement in Shenzhen last week.

AEO mutual recognition deals allow Customs authorities to recognize certified AEO companies for streamlined Customs clearance, aiming to enhance cooperation between Customs authorities, businesses and other government departments.

As of Monday, China had signed AEO mutual recognition agreements with 28 economies, covering 54 countries and regions.

Currently, the trade environment between China and other economies participating in the Belt and Road Initiative remains relatively stable, said Xu Hongcai, deputy director of the China Association of Policy Science's Economic Policy Committee.

Notably, China's exports to regions such as Southeast Asia, Latin America and Central Asia have maintained rapid growth since the beginning of the year, effectively



A view of a wind farm in Taizhou, Zhejiang province.

WANG HUABIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

offsetting the slower export growth to certain developed economies, said Xu.

For instance, China's trade with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations rose 8.5 percent year-on-year to 2.18 trillion yuan in the first four months, accounting for 15.8 percent of its total trade value.

Liang Ming, director of the Institute of International Trade, which is part of the Chinese Acad-

emy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said efforts should be accelerated to sign free trade agreements with emerging markets or actively advance the upgrading negotiations of existing agreements.

This aims to be proactive in stabilizing or improving the policy and regulatory environment faced by exporters in both China and abroad, he said.

Briefly

PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 2 billion yuan (\$281.57 million) in seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.8 percent on Monday. The move aims to keep liquidity reasonable and ample in the banking system, the People's Bank of China said in a statement. A reverse repo is a process by which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

China's bicycle exports expand in Q1

China's bicycle exports expanded in the first quarter, continuing the recovery momentum since the second half of 2023, said the China Bicycle Association. In the first quarter, the country's bicycle exports reached nearly 11 million units, an increase of 13.7 percent compared to the fourth quarter of last year.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS



Visitors check out Canon products while performers wearing traditional Chinese apparel stage a performance during a camera expo in Beijing on Friday. DU JIANPO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Canon to expand footprint in China with stronger local ties

Japanese tech firm eyes more sales in nation; bullish on growth prospects

By FAN FEIFEI
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Japanese tech company Canon Inc will intensify efforts to deepen cooperation with its Chinese partners and further tap the immense potential of China's consumer market, given that new business opportunities brought by technological innovation are arising in the world's second-largest economy, said a senior company executive.

"China serves as one of the most important markets in Canon's global business layout, and we have set the goal of making Canon China No 1 in terms of sales within the whole group by 2035," said Howard Ozawa, executive vice-president of Canon, and president and CEO of Canon China.

Ozawa said that despite pressures and challenges, the long-term fundamentals of China's economy remain intact and he is upbeat about the country's economic growth prospects.

The Chinese authorities have rolled out a series of measures to spur consumption in electronics, tourism and other sectors since the beginning of this year, leading to a strong rebound in domestic cultural and travel business and a sustained recovery in consumer spending, he said.

“China serves as one of the most important markets in Canon's global business layout, and we have set the goal of making Canon China No 1 in terms of sales within the whole group by 2035.”

Howard Ozawa, executive vice-president of Canon, president and CEO of Canon China

"Canon is confident in the continuous improvement of China's business environment and huge development potential of the Chinese market," Ozawa said, adding that the company will continue to collaborate with local partners to develop, produce and offer products and services that are tailor-made for the Chinese market in response to consumers' evolving needs.

As one of the first batch of foreign

companies that entered China, Canon intends to introduce its mature products and services from the Chinese market to other countries around the world.

As for the United States and some European countries recently claiming China's "overcapacity" in the new energy sector, Ozawa said he did not agree with the allegation as different countries are at various stages of development, and some Western countries might be jealous of China's meteoric rise in some emerging industries.

He said the rapid development of China's new energy industry has made significant contributions to the global low-carbon and green transformation.

Ozawa said Canon continuously strives to expand its scope of opening-up to the outside world while promoting high-quality economic development and formulating policies to attract investment. "These efforts ensure that both foreign and domestic enterprises benefit from a fair, just, open and convenient business environment in the country," he added.

In addition, this year's Government Work Report underlined that China will strive to modernize its industrial system and develop new quality productive forces at a faster pace.

Ozawa said the new quality productive forces are mainly led by scientific and technological innovation, and Canon aims to bolster innovation and seek diverse

collaboration methods with leading Chinese firms.

"China will continue to play a crucial role in driving global economic growth and safeguarding the security and stability of global industrial and supply chains," said Zhang Jianping, director of the China Center for Regional Economic Cooperation, which is part of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

He said that China will hold a greater appeal for foreign companies, especially those in the manufacturing sector, given the nation's unwavering efforts to expand high-standard opening-up by removing all restrictions on foreign investment access in the manufacturing sector and continuously optimizing its business environment.

The Ministry of Commerce said actual foreign direct investment in China came in at 301.67 billion yuan (\$41.7 billion) in the first quarter, remaining at a high level.

The country's high-tech manufacturing sector attracted 12.5 percent of the FDI inflows in the first quarter, up 2.2 percentage points year-on-year.

"A series of supportive policies aimed at drawing more foreign investment, such as a shortened negative list for market entry, pilot free trade zones and implementation of the Foreign Investment Law, have all created favorable conditions for more foreign businesses to invest in the country," Zhang added.

Saudi Aramco swears by long-term potential in Chinese market

By ZHENG XIN
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Saudi Aramco, the world's largest oil exporter, said it is fairly optimistic about China's long-term growth potential and the abundant opportunities arising from the country's focus on high-quality development.

The company will continue supporting China's long-term energy security and economic growth, eyeing greater investment and cooperation opportunities, said Mohammed Y. Al Qahtani, Aramco's downstream president.

"At Aramco, we seek to expand our integrated operations in downstream in high-growth economies like China, which, undoubtedly, holds strategic importance for the growth of Aramco's businesses in Asia and worldwide," he said.

"Over the years, the company has intensified its efforts in order to meet China's energy needs. We have supplied nearly 1.8 million barrels per day of crude oil to China, in addition to new low-carbon products, chemicals and other materials.

"Aramco is one of the most prominent direct investors in China and our role goes beyond investment. We aspire to be a key partner in China's economic development journey, leveraging new opportunities on the horizon," he said.

The multinational corporation's continuous expansion of its presence in China is a clear rebuttal of the "overcapacity" narrative that some Western countries are trying to propagate, said an analyst.

Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute, said MNCs' expansion in China, especially in the energy sector, is proof that China's development is an opportunity, not a risk, for foreign companies.

MNCs in the chemicals industry such as Aramco have been continuing to prioritize downstream assets in the country, with chemical product demand on course to grow along with economic recovery, he said.

Upbeat about the Chinese market, more than 12,000 foreign-invested companies started operations in China in the first quarter, up 20.7 percent year-on-year, with their actual investment amounting to 301.67 billion yuan (\$41.8 billion), up 41.7 percent compared to the fourth quarter of 2023,

statistics from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

According to Al Qahtani, China remains central to Aramco's strategy to diversify its portfolio into more specialized and high-value chemical products.

Aramco's investment projects in China have made significant progress in recent years. The recent acquisition of a 10 percent stake in Rongsheng Petrochemicals last year is worth \$3.4 billion, and the 30 percent stake in its joint venture Huajin Aramco Petrochemicals Co — an integrated refinery and petrochemical complex in Panjin, Liaoning province — is valued at \$11.8 billion.

China is currently a powerhouse representing 40 percent of global chemical product sales. Eyeing potential opportunities, Sabic, one of the world's leading chemical players in which Aramco is a major shareholder, announced its decision to invest \$6.4 billion in the Sabic Fujian Petrochemicals Complex project, making it the largest foreign investment in Fujian province.

"These strategic partnerships will significantly strengthen our presence in the downstream sector in China and support our goal of locating new avenues for growth," said Al Qahtani.

"Collaboration with Chinese partners provides win-win opportunities for multinational corporations like Aramco."

Saudi Arabia's energy minister said during the Boao Forum for Asia conference in Riyadh that the country is willing to further cooperate with China to promote global energy transition.

Amid China's sharpening focus on developing new quality productive forces and promoting high-quality development, Aramco is looking at other key areas where win-win investment and cooperation opportunities are expected to be enormous, including chemicals, advanced composites and non-metals, said Al Qahtani.

"In line with Saudi Vision 2030 as well as the Belt and Road Initiative, we expect additional investments and an enhanced presence to meet the demand for refined products, chemicals and lubricants. This also includes entering into new partnerships in logistics, procurement and supply chain, among other areas of investment," he said.



Visitors gather at Saudi Aramco's booth during an expo in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates. CHRISTOPHER PIKE / BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES

Lancang-Mekong agro cooperation yields fruitful results

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou
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Upon their arrival at Nansha Port in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province, in mid-April, the first batch of 195 metric tons of durians from Thailand in 2024 was quickly transported to various local large wholesale fruit markets.

Under the Lancang-Mekong agricultural cooperation platform, durians and other fruits such as dragon fruit, bananas and mangos will be shipped to Guangdong, said Luo Yixin, a second-level inspector at the Guangdong Provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

"Lancang-Mekong has built up a large market for characteristic agricultural products amid agricultural cooperation, an important part of

the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism, and has effectively promoted economic development of rural industries and increased incomes of farmers in these areas," said Luo.

The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism has yielded fruitful results, especially in the agricultural sector, since it was established in 2016, said Guo Libin, Party chief of the Foreign Economic Cooperation Center at the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

The Mekong River, known as the Lancang River in China, is a vital waterway that also stretches across Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. The six countries are often referred to as Lancang-Mekong countries.

China's total fruit imports amounted to \$18.34 billion in 2023,

\$18.34 billion

value of China's fruit imports in 2023

of which \$10.68 billion were shipped from countries along the Mekong River, accounting for nearly 60 percent of the total, said Guo.

Since the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement officially came into effect, China's economic and trade cooperation with Mekong River countries has been steadily deepening, and the trade of agricultural products, fruits and vegetables has been continuously developing, Guo added.

"Especially after the opening of the China-Laos Railway, fruits of countries along the Mekong River

are able to enter China quicker, providing a broader platform for bilateral agricultural cooperation," said Guo.

Guo made the remarks during the Lancang-Mekong Fruit Industry Development Workshop, which was held on Friday in Nansha district, Guangzhou.

At the event, bananas from Cambodia, durians and mangosteens from Thailand and Vietnam, together with blueberries, guava, pineapples and other fruits from China were displayed for domestic and overseas visitors.

Through the agricultural cooperation between Lancang-Mekong countries, China's typical fruits such as jujubes, persimmons, pears, pomegranates and cantaloupes have also entered the Southeast Asian market quickly, at

competitive prices and with good taste, Guo said.

A five-year action plan (2023-27) for agricultural cooperation between Lancang-Mekong countries, which was issued to further promote agricultural products, will help boost fruit trade among involved countries, Guo added.

The Lancang-Mekong Fruit Industry Development Workshop was seen as a practical action to effectively implement the consensus reached by leaders of the Lancang-Mekong countries, said Vanhpheng Saisomphou, consul-general at the consulate of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in Guangzhou.

"The seminar provides a good opportunity and platform for the exhibition and marketing of agricultural products with their own characteristics, and for the exchange and

coordination of fruit industry enterprises in the Lancang-Mekong countries," said Saisomphou.

To promote the fruit trade, China's first direct transport system has been opened in the district of Nansha, under which fruits imported can be sold immediately upon their arrival at the port.

Special routes for imported durians and cherries have also been established in Nansha Port, according to the district government.

Chinese agricultural companies are also looking forward to expanding their exports to the Southeast Asian market as procedures for exporting vegetables and fruits have been made increasingly simple.

"We have connected multiple sales channels and look forward to selling locally grown tomatoes in Nansha to Southeast Asian countries," said Tian Huiyao, deputy general manager of Guangzhou Liheng Tomato Technology Industry Development Co Ltd.

BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

AI, biotech seen transforming healthcare

Nvidia CEO expects 'amazing revolution' in digital biology

By ZHENG YIRAN
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New quality productive forces, represented by artificial intelligence and other digital technologies, are shaping China's healthcare sector, likely cultivating the next paradigm shift, industry experts said.

Jensen Huang, co-founder, president and CEO of Nvidia, said that with the empowerment of digital technologies in the healthcare market, AI-accelerated pharmaceutical science may become the next big thing, and that the expected "amazing revolution" is going to take place in digital biology.

Huang said at an earlier news conference that over the past decade, biology has increasingly become an information science, with biological data expanding exponentially.

"Our ability to read, write and edit DNA is accelerating. Technologies like machine learning and cloud computing are unlocking new insights from mountains of biological data. As a result, the bio revolution is underway."

The latest report from research consultancy Global Market Insights showed that by 2032, the global AI-empowered healthcare sector will reach \$70 billion, with a compound annual growth rate of over 29 percent between 2024 and 2032, while that in China is expected to be 30 percent.

China Merchants Securities said that this year, the global AI-empowered healthcare market is expected to top \$5 billion, and remain at a high growth rate in the coming years. In terms of subcategories, drug discovery and medical imaging are the two areas taking up the most market share, adding up to over 50 percent.

Specifically, with the development of the pharmaceutical industry and the iteration of AI technology, the market size of AI-enabled drug research and development is expected to exceed \$20.5 billion by 2032, said CMS.

Enterprises both at home and abroad are already taking action.

For example, in October, pharmaceutical giant Takeda collaborated with Fudan University in Shanghai to establish its Digital Innovation Academy in China. The academy aims to utilize the advantages of both Takeda and the university to facilitate development of patient-centric digital therapies and commercial transformation, gain research insights into the development of digital healthcare products and solutions, cultivate talent for China's digital healthcare industry and benefit the overall industry.

The academy also aims to combine efforts to develop innovative topic studies and conceptual models ranging from screening and diagnosis to treatment. AI solutions are



An artificial intelligence-aided diagnostic system is displayed during the 2024 China International Medical Equipment Fair in Shanghai in April. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Sean Shan, senior vice-president of Takeda, introduces the company's digital transformation over the past years at the 2023 China International Import Expo in Shanghai in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

also involved in the studies, said the company.

"New technologies, including AI, as well as other technologies, are completely transforming our industry as the way we do research and development, manufacturing, and the way we interact with a doctor and a patient," said Christophe Weber, CEO of Takeda.

"New technology will help build more efficient healthcare systems ... the way we do things will completely be transforming in the next three years, offering a huge opportunity with significant transformation," he added.

Wang Hongwei, a professor at the School of Life Sciences and vice-president of Tsinghua University, said: "New quality productive forces, represented by AI and other digital technologies, are empowering China's healthcare sector. For example, AI helps accelerate the R&D process of new drugs, bringing big advancements, or even paradigm shifts, to the overall healthcare system."

Zhongtai Securities said that AI has wide applications in the medical imaging category, application scenarios are diversified and future development space is huge. By 2025, the global AI-enabled medical imaging

sector is expected to reach 44.2 billion yuan (\$6.1 billion), with a CAGR of 135 percent between 2023 and 2025.

"Judging from the demand side, China's medical resources are unevenly distributed. High-quality medical resources are excessively concentrated, and there is a supply-demand gap in senior physician talent. AI technology can help quickly identify problems, improve the efficiency and accuracy of diagnosis and treatment, and make up for the gap," said Zhang Xu, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and also a member of the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences.

"At the same time, through assisted diagnosis and treatment, grassroots medical institutions can be empowered to promote the allocation of high-quality medical resources from first-tier cities to smaller cities and grassroots-level regions," Zhang said.

AI is empowering not only screening and diagnosis, but also payment processes. In the past, when encountered with major illnesses, after spending a lot of money, patients usually needed to go to the healthcare insurer's counter and submit a series of materials to get reimbursement.

With the help of AI, patients can process claims and insurance paperwork much more smoothly. For example, when AI-enabled technology platforms are docked with *huiminbao* — a commercial health insurance that supplements public healthcare insurance —

patients no longer need to jump through hoops to process claims.

All things can be done online. AI-enabled optical character recognition realizes image sorting and recognition, guiding patients to upload materials needed for claims so as to avoid incorrect or repetitive submissions.

"AI's language and image processing capabilities can effectively increase work efficiency by as much as 50 percent. By matching claim rules under different scenarios, different policies and different customer groups, AI is able to process six claims per second, and issue claim reports within 8 seconds, with an accuracy of 99.8 percent. Moreover, AI helps to infer the risks of claim cases and gives corresponding suggestions, greatly cutting enterprises' operating costs," said the spokesperson of Shanghai-based MediTrust Health, a company that offered AI technology support to *huiminbao*.

With enterprises stepping up efforts to promote the application of advanced technologies in every facet of healthcare, there is still a huge gap between laboratory discovery and real-time applications.

"Speaking of AI, we physicians from the imaging department may be the ones that benefit the most. AI is able to replace our preliminary work, such as reading images in the first place and making primary assessments. However, we still need to read images and make diagnoses by ourselves," said a physician surnamed Qin, who works at

Beijing Chaoyang Hospital, Capital Medical University.

Zheng Shanjie, head of the National Development and Reform Commission, the country's top economic regulator, said that China will take solid steps to accelerate the development of new quality productive forces, boost industrial innovation via technological innovation, speed up the upgrading of traditional industries and foster emerging industries.

Zheng said the NDRC will constantly carry out practical measures, especially in the sectors of life sciences, high-end manufacturing and digital technologies, to facilitate companies doing business in China.

"China has now entered a high-quality development stage, which requires us to upgrade production quality. On the one hand, we should constantly promote the development of new technologies, such as AI, by further enhancing our independent R&D capabilities, innovative capabilities as well as scientific discovery abilities. The quicker we act, the more opportunities we will have," Wang from Tsinghua University said.

"On the other hand, we should think carefully about how we can better apply new technologies to all walks of life so as to make good use of them to serve us humans better. For example, it is important to think about what changes will take place and how we should react when we apply AI to diagnosis and other medical services."

Smart solutions playing doctor in medical advances

By ZHENG YIRAN

With the advancement of artificial intelligence, medical devices are increasingly able to provide more accurate and personalized services to patients, further enhancing their overall healthcare experience.

On a typical morning in May, in the health management center at Xiaotangshan Hospital in Changping district, Beijing, people line up to experience the latest AI-empowered physical examinations.

With AI-assisted diagnostic technology, using a low-dose computerized tomography scan, physicians are able to assess patients' risks of contracting coronary heart disease and lung tumors. The whole examination process is efficient and smooth.

Xiaotangshan Hospital is among the eight hospitals in Changping that have adopted the AI-empowered assisted diagnosis system — "Digital Body".

According to Shukun Technology — the system's provider — AI facilitates the early screening of asymptomatic

populations and intervention of potential risks. In this way, doctors may have better knowledge about patients and offer more accurate and personalized treatment solutions.

From self-developed surgical robots to intelligent ultrasound systems, the company has gradually shifted from a single software platform to a comprehensive intelligent solutions provider combining hardware and software.

Currently, Shukun's Digital Body covers full patient services from disease screening, to diagnosis and treatment planning processes, and has been applied in smart imaging, smart surgery and smart health management fields.

In January 2023, Shukun signed a strategic partnership with Wuzhong district in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, using Digital Body in 13 medical institutions in the district. Currently, the local government and Shukun are joining hands to offer tests of 10,000 person-times in the district annually.

Data from Shukun showed that

by the end of 2023, compared to levels before application, the system had quadrupled CT test volumes in the 13 medical institutions in Wuzhong to 190,000 person-times. With the normalized application of the system, it is expected to save over 11 million yuan (\$1.5 million) in screening costs for the district every year.

Featuring assisted diagnosis, precise medicine, intelligent pharmacy and surgical robots, AI is penetrating various subcategories in the medical devices sector.

During the 2024 China International Medical Equipment Fair held in Shanghai in April, nearly 5,000 enterprises from over 30 countries and regions participated, bringing tens of thousands of high-end medical devices, among which many are empowered by AI.

Among the subcategories boosted by AI, Zhongtai Securities estimates the application of AI in medical imaging will be the fastest-growing sector, with vast development opportunities and numerous application scenarios.

By 2025, China's AI-enabled medical imaging sector is expected to reach 44.2 billion yuan, growing 135 percent year-on-year, said Zhongtai Securities.

In March, the State Council — China's Cabinet — issued an action plan promoting the upgrade of large-scale equipment, and emphasized enhanced construction of high-quality and highly efficient healthcare service systems.

Within such a context, the predicting and reasoning functions of AI will further enable the intelligent upgrade of the hospital system.

Zhan Junhao, founder of Fujian Huace Brand Positioning Consulting, said: "Development of the AI-enabled medical devices sector requires joint efforts from the government, industry-university-research institutions, and enterprises from home and abroad. Through supportive policies and funding, the government may guide and promote the development of the sector."

"Industry-university-research institutions are encouraged to



A visitor (right) checks out Shukun Technology's artificial intelligence assisted diagnostic system at the 2024 China International Medical Equipment Fair in Shanghai in April. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

enhance research and development and innovative capabilities, in order to provide technical support and talent cultivation for the sector. Meanwhile, enterprises may give full play to their flexibility and creativity to offer diversified products and services to the market."

Speaking on future development trends, Mao Xinsong, founder and president of Shukun, said, "The integration of software and hardware is the key to AI's continuous breakthrough of technological boundaries, and it also promotes the reconstruction of user experience."

COMMENT

Editorials

US faces an uphill task persuading allies to join its attack on Chinese green products

According to US media reports citing sources familiar with the matter, the Joe Biden administration is expected to raise tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles from 25 percent to 100 percent this week, and increase the tariffs on other clean energy goods from China, citing data security, state subsidies and China's "overcapacity".

Such a move, if taken, will not help spur the competitiveness of these industries in the United States, nor will it prove conducive to advancing the cooperation on addressing climate issues between the two countries, arguably one of the few fields where the two sides are still working together.

As no Chinese EVs have been exported to the US market, the to-be-raised tariffs on them will only serve as a preemptive protection for US domestic EV makers. Yet while ring-fencing them from the market-leading competition that would stimulate innovations and technological progress, as long as the US government does not close the US market to other foreign EV makers apart from those of China, the US EV industry will still lose out in the competition with EV makers in Europe, Japan and the Republic of Korea. These EV makers are being tested in their competition with each other and their Chinese counterparts.

That's exactly why Tesla values its factories and business in China. Tesla is not content with napping in the cradle of its home market. Its CEO, Elon Musk, is well aware how US companies at home become lame ducks the moment such protectionist measures are lifted. He wisely chose to build one of the company's largest factories in arguably the most competitive EV market in the world, long before the US government realized the US was lagging behind in the EV race. Competition is good for business as long as it is fair. Chinese EV makers have taken the lead by winning out in the fierce competition at home, which has fostered a complete range of supporting industries and constant innovation to meet the demands of the mega-size market. These are China's comparative advantages in the global competition.

As it did with its sanctions against Chinese telecom giants Huawei and ZTE, the Joe Biden administration is again trying to cajole the European Union, as well as other allies, to form a united front against Chinese EVs and other green products. That will be a key part of the agenda US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen is bringing to the meeting of G7 finance ministers and central bank governors next week in Italy.

But Yellen might find her Italian job a mission impossible, despite the great lengths she is going to in trying to hype up the topic before the meeting. Not only because the members of the group have different views on economic and trade ties with China, but also EU consumers and many local EV makers welcome Chinese EVs and other green products that they recognize help promote the EU's green transition and local companies' innovation. They, along with most EU policymakers and leaders, think it is the US' actions that are a problem.

The call of the US financial chief for the other G7 countries to ban Chinese EVs and green products is part of the US' public opinion offensive against China's green products under the pretext of "overcapacity" and "government subsidies". It is a call that is likely to fall on deaf ears as these countries are unwilling to sacrifice their own green development prospects and industrial competitiveness to support a move that is primarily intended to win the administration votes in the upcoming US presidential election.

As a veteran economist who has just wrapped up her second trip to China in two years last month, which must have provided her with a first-hand experience of China's commitment to realizing the green transition, Yellen should be in a better position than those armchair strategists in Washington to know that although charging infrastructure, range anxiety and EV affordability seem to be the main barriers to the development of the US' EV industry, the real gap exists in US policymakers' long-term ignoring of the imminence of the EV era, and thereafter US EV makers' lack of input into the research and development of core technologies.

China hawks get claws into climate efforts

Despite the differences and tensions that exist between the two countries, China and the United States, which together account for nearly 40 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, have managed to make climate an area of cooperation and achieved meaningful results over the past years in the fight against global warming.

It was their joint pledge to push ahead with their national climate actions that paved the way for the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2015, which set the goal of limiting global warming to within 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels to avoid the worst ravages of climate change.

And it was also thanks to the consensus and understanding reached between China and the US on such issues as tripling renewable energy capacity globally by 2030 that set the tone for the United Nations' COP28 summit in Dubai late last year, during which countries for the first time agreed that the world needs to transition away from fossil fuels.

Thus hopes were high that new progress on climate would be made when Chinese special envoy for climate change Liu Zhenmin started his visit to the US last week. His meetings with US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Podesta on Wednesday and Thursday in Washington were their first formal bilateral meetings after the departure of their predecessors, during which they discussed how to work together ahead of the COP29 climate summit in Baku, Azerbaijan.

Their predecessors, Chinese climate envoy Xie Zhenhua and former secretary of state John Kerry, forged a remarkable level of trust during their negotiations, even at times when Sino-US relations were experiencing great difficulties. Their close personal relationship is believed to have formed the foundation for the smooth development of China-US climate diplomacy.

It was encouraging to see that the tone of the talks between the new Chinese climate envoy and his US counterpart continued to be cordial and positive, with the two delegations they lead reportedly meeting for dinner at Podesta's home on Wednesday. In a sign that China and the US will continue to lead the global fight against climate change, they promised after the latest round of talks to work together on the reduction of methane, the second most abundant greenhouse gas after carbon dioxide.

"The two sides committed to promote bilateral cooperation and conduct capacity building on deploying abatement technologies," a statement released after the meeting said. The two sides plan to co-host an event in Baku later this year on reducing methane and other non-carbon greenhouse gases.

The results that they have achieved are not easy, given that China hawks in Washington are quickening their pace to try to derail Sino-US cooperation, even on climate. There have been reports that Washington plans to impose major new tariffs on electric vehicles, semiconductors, solar equipment and medical supplies imported from China, with tariffs on EVs, in particular, due to quadruple — from the existing 25 percent to 100 percent. Which has prompted the Chinese climate envoy to warn prior to his US visit that "the counter-currents of protectionism and unilateralism have further extended the climate change governance gap".

Indeed, the new tariffs on Chinese imports, especially on green products such as solar panels and EVs, if approved, will not only further strain the already worsening Sino-US trade relations, but also increase the costs of the clean energy transition in the US, thus undermining Washington's effort to achieve the goal of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 50-52 percent below 2005 levels by 2030.

The Joe Biden administration should make every effort to ensure the climate cooperation between the two countries, which benefits the whole world, is not to be disrupted by the China hawks in Washington.

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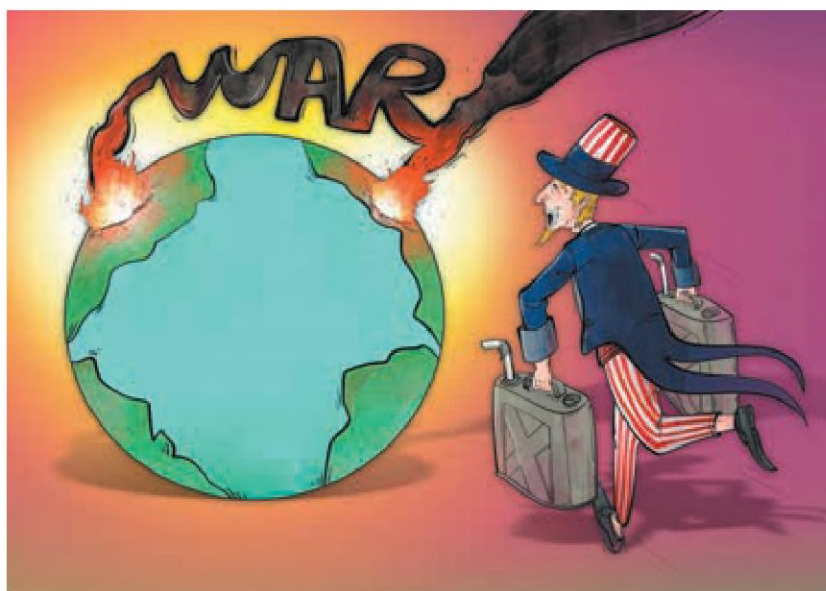
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Cao Yi



Opinion Line

Ultra-long-term government bonds expected to enhance economic vitality

At a recent news conference of the State Council Information office, a senior official from the Ministry of Finance said that China will start to issue ultra-long-term national bonds on May 17. A high-level meeting held by the authorities a few days later also pointed out that China should issue and make good use of ultra-long-term special government bonds to maintain the intensity of government spending.

This means the issuance of ultra-long-term government bonds in China may have entered its final stage. Compared with ordinary government bonds, ultra-long-term government bonds can relieve the debt repayment pressure of short- and medium-term bonds to a certain extent. China issued special national bonds respectively in 1998, 2007 and 2020 and these had a positive impact on its economic development and social stability. For example, against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, China issued special government bonds in 2020, 12.3 billion yuan (\$1.7 billion) of which was earmarked for Gansu province and played an important role in the preven-

tion and control of the pandemic and the upgrading of grassroots medical facilities.

Despite facing a series of external and internal uncertainties, China has achieved a tangible post-pandemic recovery in the past years, but this recovery still faces multiple pressures, including insufficient effective demand, overcapacity, weak social expectations, and hidden risks. To tackle these challenges, the authorities have repeatedly emphasized the use of counter-cyclical and cross-cyclical macro policy regulation. The around 5 percent economic growth set by China for 2024 also requires active fiscal support and the expansion of government debts to maintain the target.

By the end of 2023, the leverage ratio of the government sector was nearly 60 percent, and the ratio of central government debt was only 42.5 percent. Even if the leverage ratio of China's broad government sector, after taking into account local hidden debt, were close to 100 percent, it would still be far lower than that of overseas economies. It means China has room

to increase its leverage ratio, and issuing special treasury bonds can help optimize its debt structure and reduce its macro debt cost.

This year's government work report makes it clear that in order to systematically solve the funding problem for the construction of some major projects, China plans to issue ultra-long-term special government bonds for several consecutive years. This is an inevitable requirement to respond to profound changes in the international environment and a realistic need to balance development and security and promote high-quality development.

The issuance of ultra-long-term special government bonds will help the country stabilize growth, expand domestic demand and promote employment, while facilitating the development of new quality productive forces and promoting high-quality development. It is also expected to leverage private capital and promote the development of the private economy, thus enhancing China's economic vitality.

— WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

Tragedy signals traffic authorities' may be at fault

The collision between a bus carrying primary school students and teachers and a dump truck, which is not allowed to enter the downtown during the day, that left one student dead, one critically injured, and several others injured in Nantong, Jiangsu province, on Friday morning, raises questions on the responsibility of the authorities that are in charge of maintaining traffic lights. A black-out of the red traffic light that should have halted the bus driver is believed to led to the accident. Some media reports quoted local

residents as saying the traffic light had been malfunctioning for days. That begs the questions: For how long exactly and why had it not been fixed?

According to the Road Traffic Safety Law, if traffic lights, signs and road markings are damaged or missing, the department managing roads and traffic facilities is expected to set up warning signs and repair them promptly. If the traffic management department of the police discovers situations that endanger traffic safety and no warning signs have been put

up, it is expected to divert traffic and notify the responsible department. Not doing so amounts to dereliction of duty.

In an earlier case where two vehicles collided because two complementary traffic lights were green simultaneously, a court held the signal light management department liable for compensation. In the Nantong case, the probe will decide if the signal light management department should bear legal responsibility.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

'Kinmen model' can be expanded to Taiwan Strait

The frequency of China Coast Guard law enforcement patrols in the waters near Kinmen Island has increased markedly this month. In the process, the CCG is taking practical measures to maintain the order and regulations of operations in the sea area.

These moves effectively protect the lives and property of fishermen on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. They also assert the Chinese mainland's jurisdiction over the waters around Kinmen.

Whether they are Taiwan's merchant ships, or Taiwan's "military supply ships" sailing from Kinmen to other nearby islets, they will be included in the scope of law enforcement inspections carried out by the CCG. The mainland and Taiwan both belong to one China. The waters around Kinmen are China's territorial waters. The central government in Beijing is the only legal representative of the country. Thus Beijing has indisputable jurisdiction and law enforcement rights in the waters. There are signs that the coast

guard, maritime affairs, maritime surveillance, fishery and other departments of the Chinese mainland will all be involved in the governance of this sea area soon.

Fishermen of Kinmen and Xiamen have fished together for a long time in the waters. If Kinmen fishermen encounter unexpected dangers, the mainland's maritime law enforcement agencies will make rescue efforts. Therefore, Kinmen fishermen know very well that CCG's law enforcement and inspection operations can effectively protect their lives and property.

It should also be noted that Fujian province officially opened a water supply to Kinmen in 2018. By the end of 2023, the coastal city of Quanzhou, Fujian province, has supplied more than 30 million tons of water to the Kinmen area, and more than 70 percent of the daily water supply for the Kinmen water plant comes from Quanzhou.

The connection between Kinmen and the mainland is not limited to that. In 2022, a national highway construction plan issued by the central govern-

ment mentioned that two highways connecting Xiamen and Quanzhou respectively to Kinmen will be built.

Yet due to repeated obstruction by the secessionist-minded Democratic Progressive Party of Taiwan, the construction of relevant facilities on the Kinmen side has been delayed for a long time. This goes against the desire of Kinmen compatriots to deepen their ties with the mainland.

The construction of these projects are inseparable from the protection of relevant sea areas by the coast guard, maritime affairs, maritime surveillance and fishery departments. The people of Kinmen are looking forward to the early realization of the "same-city living circle" between Xiamen and Kinmen, but the DPP authorities have become the biggest obstacle to the continued integration and development of the mainland and Kinmen.

In the future, this "Kinmen model" of law enforcement inspections can also be applied to Matsu and Penghu islands, and even the entire Taiwan Strait.

— YUYUANTIAN TIAN WECHAT ACCOUNT

COMMENT

Michele Geraci

Italy should correct wrong decision on BRI

President Xi Jinping's choice to visit France, Serbia and Hungary during his just-concluded Europe trip shows China is willing to strengthen trade and economic relations with Europe, especially with the three countries which have, each in their own way, shown genuine interest in doing business with China. It also shows that those countries which, in various forms, have indicated their unwillingness to do business with China have evoked a less enthusiastic response from China.

Both Hungary and Serbia are members of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, the largest infrastructure development project which has already mobilized nearly US\$1 trillion in investment in Asia, Africa and other regions, contributing to the social and economic development of those regions. Both Serbia and Hungary have welcomed Chinese companies to invest in their country. As a matter of fact, Hungary has a large share of Chinese green-field investment in Europe. And to attract more Chinese investment, Serbia became the first European country to affirm that it would build a community with a shared future with China.

France is not part of the Belt and Road Initiative, but French President Emmanuel Macron's support for increasing trade with China, combined with the substantial investments by French companies in China, compensates for the lack of France's formal membership of the initiative. The Chinese leader's visit to France also highlights the sense of balance in Sino-French ties — Macron visiting China



That not only helped boost bilateral trade and promote investment, but also strengthened cooperation between the two sides in their efforts to promote the development of Asia and Africa.

last year and the Chinese leader repaying the visit this year.

Although the Chinese leader didn't visit Italy this time, Sino-Italian relations had been developing extremely well during the past two decades. In 2004, the two countries signed a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement, and in 2019, Italy joined the Belt and Road Initiative, elevating bilateral ties to a new level. That not only helped boost bilateral trade and promote investment, but also strengthened cooperation between the two sides in their efforts to promote the development of Asia and Africa.

Unfortunately, and without offering any sound reason, the current Italian government decided to withdraw from

the Belt and Road Initiative in December last year. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani have managed to only justify their decision with the far-from-reality logic that Italy exited the Belt and Road Initiative because it did not bring any advantages to the country and, instead, the trade deficit increased in favor of China. The Italian government also said that despite the decision to exit the initiative, the relationship between Italy and China will remain solid.

I could not disagree more with the position of the Italian government, and I have personally warned it that it was making an uninformed and wrong decision, which would cause serious damage (as seems to be the case now) to the cooperation between the two countries and cannot be repaired in the short term.

The Italian government did not want to hear it. Anyone who knows a little bit about Chinese culture and the Chinese way of doing business would realize that being the only country in the world to exit the Belt and Road Initiative on the 10th anniversary of the launch of a project dear to China and just days before the 700th death anniversary of Marco Polo, who served in the court of Emperor Kublai Khan of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) and helped establish Italy-China relations, is not the best way to keep Sino-Italian ties "solid".

And anyone who knows a bit of economics would understand that the trade deficit is not, in itself, a measure of advantage or disadvantage for a country.

In fact, the increasing imports from China into Italy have actually helped maintain the continuity of the components' supply chains for Italy's manufacturing industry and have had a positive deflationary effect on the Italian economy at a time when inflation in Europe and Italy reached 10 percent.

With regard to Italy's exports to China, perhaps unknown to Meloni and Tajani, they have actually increased by 33 percent since the country joined the Belt and Road Initiative, much more than our direct competitors, France which witnessed about 10 percent increase and Germany whose exports shrunk during the same period.

It is not entirely clear why a country would exit from a non-binding agreement that carries no obligations, even if it hadn't brought any benefits, not to mention such claims are not true. In finance, we call it "optionality value". And no smart trader would give it up.

My assessment is that, despite the customary and polite statements by Chinese officials and given the fact that it's Italy which indicated its lack of interest in cooperating with China by withdrawing from the initiative, one should not be overly optimistic about the prospects of cooperation between the two countries.

Hopefully things will change again in Italy, and it will be back in the Belt and Road Initiative.

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Kang Bing

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Every senior citizen deserves affordable eldercare services

Eldercare has become a serious challenge with the rapid aging of China's population. Statistics show that by the end of 2023, China had more than 296 million people aged 60 or above who made up 21.1 percent of the total population. The figure has been increasing at a relatively fast pace because people today have access to advanced healthcare services and nutritious food.

In fact, demographers expect China's elderly population to increase to 400 million in the next 10 years, peaking at about 520 million — more than the population of any other country except China and India — by the middle of this century.

The central authorities have left no stone unturned in taking proper care of senior citizens. The Government Work Report submitted by Premier Li Qiang to the annual session of the National People's Congress in March this year not only mentioned the phrase "eldercare" more than 10 times, implying the great importance the government attaches to the issue, but also pledged to increase the pension for retired people in both urban and rural areas, and expedite the building of a comprehensive, sustainable and fair social security system.

Moreover, in early January, the State Council published a document on the development of the "silver-haired economy" — the first use of the term in the central government document — in a bid to attract investment into the eldercare sector.

Although these are paid services, the neighborhood committees see to it that the prices are affordable for the elderly people.

Taking care of over 296 to 520 million people aged 60 or above in the next two decades or so is probably China's biggest challenge. Yet to ensure the "fruits of development" are shared by all, the central government has been increasing the pension by 4-4.5 percent a year.

Since it is not feasible to send hundreds of millions of aged people to nursing homes, China has been promoting a stay-at-home care model, under which health workers including professional nurses, cleaners and cooks can organize into companies to provide eldercare services, with neighborhood committees seeing to it that they provide quality services at reasonable prices.

Besides, China has established a call system which provides eldercare services at home. Those in need can avail of such services by just pressing a button to get a service provider to clean the house, do the laundry, cook a meal or even trim the nails or, if need be, call for an ambulance or just sit and chat with the senior citizen.

Although these are paid services, the neighborhood committees see to it that the prices are affordable for the elderly people. As for the senior citizens, they seem to like the model because they can stay at home while getting the services which are not much different from what they can get at a nursing home.

Realizing that eldercare services may eventually develop into a big business employing millions of people, the related central ministries recently released a working standard for long-term care workers, which sets the conditions for people entering the profession, and the regulations for workers' training and classification of their levels.

While it's an obligation for the government to take care of the elderly, investors see it as an opportunity to make profits. As a matter of fact, the eldercare market in China was worth 10 trillion yuan (\$1.38 trillion) in 2022 and could be worth 20 trillion yuan — almost the size of the United Kingdom's GDP — by the end of this decade.

Hundreds of high-end nursing homes have been built over the past two decades by investors. To make quick money, they may ask an applicant to pay 1-2 million yuan to get a membership before paying more than 10,000 yuan a month for the services they get. Most retirees cannot afford the high prices, leaving many beds in such nurseries vacant.

Other investors are developing robots to provide eldercare services — robots that are capable of doing not only household jobs but also chatting with the lonely souls if need be.

In such a situation, the government should coordinate different sectors and sources, so as to check investors' lust for making quick money. Making eldercare accessible and affordable to the entire elderly population should be our common goal.



LIMIN / CHINA DAILY

Shen Wei

Visit to shape direction of China-Europe future

President Xi Jinping's just-concluded visit to Europe could not have been more timely — it came at a pivotal moment and underscored the profound significance of China-Europe relations amid global uncertainties.

His first overseas visit in 2024 and third state visit to France not only emphasized the strategic importance of China's relations with Europe, the European Union in particular, but also highlights the symbolic power inherent in such diplomatic engagements. Against the backdrop of evolving global dynamics, his visit to Europe will help deepen the strategic partnership, deepen economic cooperation, and boost people-to-people exchanges between China and Europe.

His visit also underscored the strategic significance of Europe for China on multiple fronts. First, Europe remains a crucial economic partner of China, with the EU being one of China's largest trading partners and the investment flow between the two sides being substantial. Strengthening ties with key EU member states such as France and Hungary, and other European states such as Serbia, enhances mutual access to two of the world's largest markets and high-tech powerhouses, fostering mutual economic development.

Second, amid the increasing geopoliti-

cal uncertainties, China and the EU both seek to deepen mutual understanding in order to safeguard their respective interests and promote peace-building efforts. China's support for the EU's efforts to maintain its strategic autonomy shows it views the bloc as a strong upholder of multilateralism and an indispensable partner in mitigating geopolitical risks. For China, its engagement with Europe is integral to its broader foreign policy objectives, which include the Belt and Road Initiative, and the advocacy for improved connectivity and multilateralism.

Beyond its strategic implications, President Xi's visit showcased China's maturing diplomatic prowess and international standing through its unwavering commitment to constructive engagement in the post-pandemic world. The Chinese leader's well-calibrated choice of destinations — France, Serbia and Hungary — reflects China's desire to cultivate partnerships and promote cooperation with Europe as a whole.

France, under Charles de Gaulle's leadership, established diplomatic relations with China 60 years ago, much before most other Western countries. The Gaullist idea of independence, from which the concept of strategic autonomy derives its vision and ambition, has directly or indirectly guided France's approach to Sino-French relations.

The approach is underpinned by a mutual recognition of each other's status as major players in a multipolar world. This strategic consensus has steered their foreign policies and facilitated high-level dialogue, ensuring the Sino-French partnership remains resilient even during challenging times. France has constantly played a key role in shaping overall EU-China ties and partnered China in addressing global challenges, from climate change to the application of AI.

Serbia and Hungary are widely considered China's closest economic partners in Europe. They are also among the first group of countries to join the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, and they host a substantial number of Chinese-invested projects, from large-scale railway infrastructure projects to electric vehicle battery plants.

Similar to Sino-French cooperation, economic cooperation between China on the one hand and Serbia and Hungary on the other was high on the agenda of the high-level meetings, with the focus being on trade and investment, and infrastructure development. The president's state visit to Serbia also coincided with the 25th anniversary of the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in the Serbian capital of Belgrade.

As President Xi, in his op-ed in the Serbian newspaper Politika, said that the

Chinese people must not forget that 25 years ago NATO brazenly bombed the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia, and emphasized that the Chinese people cherish peace but will never allow such tragic history to repeat itself.

The promotion of people-to-people exchanges, including educational exchanges, dialogue among the youth, and cultural and tourism activities is essential to fostering understanding between Chinese and European societies. In this regard, the Chinese government's visa-free travel arrangement for citizens of a number of European countries has already increased the flow of European tourists to China.

By strengthening ties with key European countries and promoting cooperation across political, economic and social fronts, the Chinese leader's visit highlighted China's commitment to fostering mutual understanding and cooperation with Europe, the EU in particular, transcending ideological differences. The visit will shape the future direction and focus of the relations between China and Europe in the long run, as their future remains a crucial determinant of global stability, cooperation and development.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

ZHANG YUN

Hope for cooperation in new region

Japan's Global South diplomacy should not supplement the US' global strategy. Instead, Japan should explore China-Japan collaboration in Global South countries in various fields

The annual Diplomatic Bluebook that Japan's Foreign Ministry published in April points out the need for cooperation in China-Japan relations, reinstating the expression "mutually beneficial relations" for the first time in five years, which sends a positive signal.



However, the Bluebook retains the previous edition's perception of China, positioning it as the greatest strategic challenge Japan has ever faced. Japan is sending contradictory, and thus confusing signals. On the one hand it claims to promote mutually beneficial relations with China, and on the other hand, it spares no efforts to portray China in a negative light. Japan's self-contradictory China policy manifests in its "Global South" diplomacy.

Earlier this month, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited Brazil and Paraguay, while Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa embarked on a tour of Africa and South Asia. Both diplomatic tours were reportedly aimed at aligning "Global South" countries with the G7 and reducing their dependence on China. In a similar vein, Kishida paid visits to four African countries — Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, and Mozambique — ahead of the G7 summit in Hiroshima last year.

Recognizing the collective rise of developing nations and the consequential shift it has brought to the global order, Japan included the phrase "Global South" to its Diplomatic Bluebook for the first time last year. However, if Japan's Global South diplomacy revolves around



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

containing China, it will not help build mutually beneficial relations between the two neighbors, and will limit Japan's ambition to play a larger role in global affairs.

First, aligning Japan's Global South diplomacy with China-Japan cooperation in third countries will create wider strategic space for the country.

Back in 2018, the two countries reached a consensus on deepening their strategic partnership, a major component of which is cooperation in third countries. As developing countries need large amounts of capital, technology and expertise to develop their economy, cooperation between China and Japan, the world's second and fourth-largest economies, will bring immense

benefits to developing countries while improving the two countries' mutual trust.

However, developing country cooperation, which is an important platform for China and Japan to build mutually beneficial relations, is viewed in a negative light by Japan. For instance, China has helped build high-speed railways in Southeast Asian countries. Japan, which has close economic and trade ties with members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, could have contributed to boosting connectivity in the region. Regrettably, Japan regards China's efforts to bolster regional integration with skepticism, perceiving China-aided infrastructure projects as "debt traps" driven by

geopolitical motives.

That being said, Asia's progress in infrastructure integration has not halted because of Japan's negative perceptions, and countries on the Indo-China Peninsula share strong demand for cross-border railways.

The opening of the China-Laos Railway has turned Laos from a landlocked country to a land-linked one. The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway, the first of its kind in ASEAN, marks an end to the view that high-speed railways are an unaffordable luxury for the region. Japan has thus missed an opportunity to team up with China in advancing regional integration through collaboration in third countries.

Second, Japan's Global South diplomacy should be based on the recognition of developing countries' growing aspirations for strategic autonomy.

The Ukraine crisis has dramatically changed the strategic thinking of Japan. The new perception is that the world is divided into three camps — one led by the United States, Japan and Europe, another led by China and Russia, and the third one comprising a number of emerging countries. Japan views major power competition as the principal feature of international relations, and the protracted China-US rivalry as giving rise to a fault line along a "democracy versus authoritarianism" divide.

To make up the leadership deficit of the US-led international order, Japan has proactively taken the job of drawing Global South countries over to the Western bloc.

This binary worldview divides the globe into two opposing blocs — the Western alliance and the China-Russia partnership, with the Global South being a wrestling ring for geopolitical competition between the two blocs. This worldview hinders Japan from seeing the aspirations among developing countries for strategic autonomy. Take Brazil as an example. As the largest country in South America and a representative of the Global South, Brazil is committed to maintaining strategic independence and thus shows little interest in bloc politics.

During his visit to China in April last year, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva met leaders of major Chinese enterprises, including Huawei, BYD, and China Communications Construction. Brazil did not exclude Huawei from its 5G networks despite Western countries' crackdown on the Chinese

telecommunications giant on the pretext of so-called national security concerns. Neither did Brazil reject China Communications Construction because of the so-called debt trap accusations leveled against it.

Underpinning the enhanced cooperation between Global South countries has solid socioeconomic foundations. During his China visit, Lula proposed creating a peace club comprising major developing countries to broker a cease-fire between Kyiv and Moscow, and called for the US to stop fanning the flames of the conflict. In the face of US' criticism, Lula did not waver, and insisted it was Europe and the US that were prolonging the conflict.

Japan's Global South diplomacy should not serve as a supplement for the US' global strategy. Instead, Japan should explore China-Japan collaboration in Global South countries in economic, political and diplomatic fields. As a major importer of energy from the Middle East, Japan can also join China in mediating the conflicts in the region.

In a word, "building mutually beneficial relations between China and Japan" should not be merely a slogan, but a concrete goal to strive for. Cooperation in the Global South is an important area for the two countries to forge stronger relations.

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ZHAO KEJIN

In solidarity with a rising Global South

China, which is committed to building a community with a shared future for mankind, stands firmly alongside other developing countries to increase their representation and influence in global governance

The Global South, which refers to countries that are not fully industrialized and uphold the principles of independence, is playing an increasingly important role in major-country relations, regional conflicts and global governance.



Major-country competition has provided the Global South more room for choice. Another reason is the Ukraine crisis.

The United States has been imposing sanctions against Russia since 2014. The European Union has imposed 11 rounds of sanctions against Russia since the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis. As of April 2023, the US-led West had imposed over 8,000 sanctions against Russia. However, many Global South countries continue to develop cooperative relations with Russia, upsetting the US and the EU's project of isolating and blocking Russia.

Not taking sides between Russia and the US-led West is clear evidence of the Global South emerging as a strategic force.

In addition, Global South countries have chosen not to take sides in the major-country competition between the US and China. For instance, in a number of regional and multilateral cooperation frameworks such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit and APEC Summit, countries have demonstrated their reluctance to choose sides between China and the US. Instead, they have adopted a hedging strategy by trying to strike a balance.

Since the end of the Cold War, global problems — such as international terrorism, the global financial crisis, global climate change,

global energy landscape adjustments, the rise of artificial intelligence, the global COVID-19 pandemic and global supply chain adjustments — have presented common challenges to the entire world. No single country can solve these problems by itself. All countries, including the Global South and the Global North, should vigorously participate in the reform and construction of the global governance system and work together to tackle those challenges.

To start with, the strategic influence of the Global South comes from their participation in the reform and construction of the global governance system.

The common interest of the Global South lies in promoting its modernization and maintaining its political independence, neither being dependent on a major power nor becoming part of major-country rivalry. They seek to pursue a unique and successful path of modernization in line with their own national conditions.

After World War II, led by the US, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France and other victorious countries, an international political security order centered on the United Nations system and an international economic and financial order centered on the Bretton Woods system were established. However, the system and order mainly reflected the interests and demands of those developed countries, while a vast number of Global South countries had not yet gained independence from the system of imperialism and colonialism.

Thus, there exist unjust and unreasonable aspects in the global governance system. The say and representation of the Global South have been greatly restricted. After more than 70 years of development, the global govern-

ance system is facing many difficulties, and reform is a major trend.

Second, as the biggest victim of global problems, the Global South is a firm practitioner in promoting reform and construction of the global governance system.

At present, economic globalization is facing headwinds, global climate change is intensifying, the energy landscape is undergoing a profound transformation, infectious diseases are ravaging the world, global supply and industry chains are being profoundly restructured, and AI technology is progressing with each passing day. Problems caused by these ongoing global changes have exerted enormous pressure on Global South countries.

Peace, stability and sustained development have always been the core demands of countries in the Global South. Thus, they have been actively seeking the reform and construction of the global governance system. The international community should listen carefully to the voice of the Global South, actively adopt their proposals, and support them to become important participants in the reform and construction of the global governance system.

Third, the reform and construction of the global governance system is a systematic project, a unity of reform and creation.

On the one hand, active participation in the reform of the global governance system is imperative for Global South countries.

They can play a constructive role in the reform of the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, strengthen solidarity and cooperation among Global South countries, advance the development of cooperative partners for global governance, strive to expand consensus as much

as possible, and enhance the representation and voice of developing countries in the reform of the global governance system.

On the other hand, Global South countries can play a pivotal role in the process of creating new international mechanisms for global climate change, digital transformation and supply chain adjustment, among others, by contributing their wisdom and strength.

Fourth, in order to promote the reform and construction of the global governance system, the Global South should focus on strengthening capacity-building. Global South countries started the modernization process later than Global North countries. They thus have structural shortcomings, particularly in terms of experience, knowledge and talent in global governance.

Consequently, it will be beneficial for countries in the Global South to focus on the topic of reform and construction of the global governance system, foster global governance talents, strengthen the construction of the subject system, academic system and discourse system of global governance, and cultivate a large number of high-caliber global governance talents who know the South, know the world, know the rules and are good at negotiations.

The countries of the Global South could consider not only stepping out the training of globally competent talents, but also actively provide international organizations, transnational corporations and NGOs with excellent talents in global governance, so as to enable them to represent the Global South in the reform and construction of the global governance system at all levels and in all areas of the international community.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Looking ahead, the Global South is making robust progress, with huge potential waiting to be tapped. They are an important force for promoting global development, maintaining global security, and deepening the reform of global governance.

China is a natural member of the Global South. China and other Global South countries share a similar history, a common position as developing countries, and common interests in pursuing development, which make them natural allies in promoting the reform and construction of the global governance system.

China is committed to building a community with a shared future for mankind, and promoting the com-

mon values of mankind — peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy and freedom, standing firmly on the side of Global South countries, speaking out for Global South countries, actively participating in the reform and construction of the global governance system, and continuously increasing the representation, voice and influence of Global South countries.

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LIFE



Left: Tibetan embroiderer Lhamo Yudron checks a traditional embroidered hair braid accessory for Tibetan women at her workshop in Shagou township, Hainan Tibetan autonomous prefecture, Qinghai province. **Right:** She sorts out a finished Tibetan embroidery painting on the wall. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Lhamo Yudron's Tibetan embroidery workshop looks as if it is wrapped by a tapestry of polychromatic paintings. Items are neatly arranged on the walls and feature elements like Tibetan mastiffs, antelopes, girls carrying water on their backs, as well as the eight auspicious symbols of Tibetan Buddhism, including the conch shell, the treasure vase and the golden fish.

Their special technique of Tibetan embroidery renders them a three-dimensional effect, as if they are about to jump out of the cloth.

"If you look closely, you can see the vivid facial expressions of the historical figures, which is a result of repeated exploration and experimentation, embroidered layer upon layer to follow the contours of the facial muscles," says Lhamo Yudron, who comes from Shagou township in the Hainan Tibetan autonomous prefecture, Qinghai province.

Tibetan embroidery originated in the 9th century and is regarded as one of the three major arts of Tibetan Buddhism, alongside *thangka* painting and pile needlework (fabrics being trimmed, pasted and sewn back together to deliver a deep visual impact).

Tibetan embroidery is also one of the most distinctive traditional embroidery styles among China's ethnic cultures, known for its vibrant colors, smooth lines, lifelike characters and exquisite craftsmanship.

It features *dieceng* stitching, the layered technique that involves patterns upon patterns to create a three-dimensional effect. The stitching gives the embroidery depth and texture.

Lhamo Yudron was born into a family of embroiderers, and from a young age, she was exposed to Tibetan artistic techniques simply by being around her elders.

"Almost all Tibetan women know how to embroider, and the tradition is mainly passed down within families," she says. "In the past, Tibetan embroidery only appeared on the clothes and braided hairbands worn by women."

Her childhood pursuit turned into a passion after she saw embroidery from across the country at the Sichuan Museum in Chengdu, the provincial capital of Sichuan province.

"It blew my mind and led me to realize that embroidery can be really exquisite," she says, adding that the experience inspired her to carry on the heritage of Tibetan embroidery in her hometown on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

In 2006, Lhamo Yudron started working at a Tibetan embroidery company her father had founded, and began to research ways of innovating traditional techniques to appeal to more people outside the plateau.

"Good Tibetan embroidery should not only meet the aesthetic preferences of modern people, but also integrate our traditional skills and ethnic culture in a way that delivers better expression," she says.

However, she found that most local crafts were passed down by the older generation. Driven by an ambition to carve out a new path for the art, she woke up at 4 am every day to study embroidery theory, and spent a great deal of time digging into books at libraries. With the help of the local government and senior embroiderers, she participated in training and cultural exchange activities and in the process, her mindset gradually opened up.

"After learning about sewing techniques and color matching elsewhere, I increasingly understood what the outside world wants," she says.

She came to better appreciate the characteristics of Tibetan embroidery and techniques after looking into the four famous Chinese

Embroidery shows vibrant Tibetan techniques

The ancient craft deeply rooted in culture is now being given modern appeal, **Yang Feiyue** reports.



Top: Lhamo Yudron offers guidance to local villagers on how to make Tibetan embroidery at her workshop. **Above:** A 20-meter-long embroidered scroll painting featuring stories around the legendary ancient hero, King Gesar, is among the highlights at her workshop. **Bottom:** Lhamo Yudron explains to guests the 260-meter-long King Gesar work that is about to finish this year.

embroidery styles, namely Su embroidery (with *su* as abbreviation for Jiangsu province, and Suzhou specifically), Xiang embroidery (Hunan province), Yue embroidery (Guangdong province), and Shu embroidery (Sichuan province).

"To put it simply, we needed to add some dimension to it, and vivid colors, and to highlight the layered stitching," she says. "When innovating, we must follow our own feelings and tell our own cultural stories."

In 2009, Lhamo Yudron set up an embroidery company in her hometown and transferred the patterns from Tibetan costumes onto canvas, showcasing natural landscapes and wildlife through the art, enriching its forms of expression.

At the beginning, she struggled to portray her subjects in a vivid manner. "When I wanted to embroider a



Tibetan embroidery.

"I consider turning Tibetan embroidery into a more popular handicraft, as it enables more people to understand and appreciate it," she says.

She still keeps two embroidered Tibetan mastiffs on display in her workshop.

One looks a bit pale in juxtaposition with the other one, which stands out for its glossy, lifelike fur. "They illustrate the progress made in Tibetan embroidery craftsmanship in recent years," she explains.

In 2011, some of her works were added to the collection of the Hainan prefecture museum.

Born of the belief that she needed to produce something that would create a brand for Tibetan embroidery, Lhamo Yudron has been working with her father since 2018 on a massive piece that is a meter wide and approximately 260 meters in length featuring the legendary ancient hero, King Gesar.

To guarantee the quality of the artwork, she and her father hired domestic experts and scholars to offer guidance to the painters, helping them draw over 200 sketches, before contracting 50 embroiderers to participate in the project.

The piece's dimensions make it a challenge and so Lhamo Yudron and her team developed a seamless embedding technique and came up with a way to upgrade the embroidery racks.

"We have already embroidered more than 200 meters, and hopefully we can finish it by the end of this year," she says.

Today, her products have made their way to Beijing, and Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, and products such as embroidered Tibetan sachets and pendants have become popular at local tourism markets.

Booming market demand has enabled her to entice more villagers to join her trade and make a career out of Tibetan embroidery and to date, her company has given training and employment opportunities to more than 1,000 people.

Wen Changji from Shagou township has followed Lhamo Yudron for five years.

"Before I met her, I used to struggle with poverty as a result of an illness, but now I can make 40,000 yuan (\$5,540) to 50,000 yuan a year," Wen says, adding that she is proud that her efforts have helped her family move into a new house with better living conditions.

Shi Yuxiu from Qiabuqia town, about a three-hour drive from Shagou township, has also had her life improved. Her family of six used to live off just 0.4 hectares of land. "We could barely keep our heads above water," Shi says.

Following a friend's recommendation, she began to make Tibetan embroidery with Lhamo Yudron in 2009 and has worked her way up to become a key employee at the company. Now, Shi earns at least 4,000 yuan a month.

"When I look back, it is still like a dream that I have been able to give my family a better life through my handicraft," Shi says.

Lhamo Yudron says she takes pride in helping women make a career out of Tibetan embroidery.

Last year, her company paid about 4 million yuan in salaries. "It makes me feel I'm doing something meaningful," she says.

She recently received a May 1st Labor Medal, the nation's highest honor for workers. She says it has charged her with a stronger sense of responsibility and has encouraged her to keep expanding the influence of her craft so that more people can come to appreciate China's traditional ethnic cultures.

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Farmers print a brighter future

CHONGQING — When Li Chengzhi, a 59-year-old woodcut print artist, recalls the olden days, the way the art form has transformed her life, taking her from toiling on the land to being an artist at the Chongqing Qijiang Farmers' Print Fine Art Academy, still feels surreal.

In the 1980s, Qijiang district in Chongqing began to offer woodcut-print training courses for local farmers.

Amazingly, their fertile imaginations and strong rural style gave the prints, now known as Qijiang woodcut prints, appeal both at home and abroad.

Not only has their work been exhibited in more than 30 countries and regions, but the prints also led to Qijiang being designated the home of modern Chinese folk painting by national cultural authorities in 1988.

When the local culture center began encouraging farmers to learn the technique, however, Li's parents were strongly opposed and forbade her from attending the workshop.



I am glad that I held out to the end. I am not the best artist among those who were trained, but I am the one who didn't give up."

Li Chengzhi, 59, woodcut print artist

"They thought that painting was some useless form of leisure and there was also a load of farm work for me to do," Li says.

While seeing her neighbors making progress in woodcut prints from scratch, she was unable to contain her eagerness and attended the workshop without telling her family.

Never having learned to paint, she was embarrassed to show her work to the teacher at first.

However, her teacher was appreciative and encouraging and told Li that boldness, casualness and a carefree style were exactly what they wanted.

Since then, she has been devoted to the art even during times of difficulty.

"While I was working as a temp at the culture center from 1986 to 1992, I endured a lot of pressure from my family because of my meager income," Li says.

"Also, seeing other people earning money working in big cities, I sometimes pitied myself," she adds.

Despite this, she persisted until the academy was set up in 2006, when she finally felt reassured and buried herself in making and teaching woodcut printing.

Li remembers once hearing that a print had been sold for 400 yuan (\$55). At the time, she felt that this was a peak she would never reach.

Now, her work is in the collections of many museums, and the most expensive print is valued at 35,000 yuan.

Huang Yuanyuan, deputy director of the academy, says that groups from more than 40 countries and regions have visited Qijiang to see the prints.

To date, more than 2,000 works of prints have been collected by the National Museum of China, Chinese embassies, foreign museums and collectors abroad.

"I am glad that I held out to the end," Li says. "I am not the best artist among those who were trained, but I am the one who didn't give up."

XINHUA

LIFE



From left: The illustrated book *We Are Artists* is on display on a corner table in La Otra, a bookstore in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Images of remarkable women, who have defied social expectations and made extraordinary contributions, adorn the bookstore wall. WANG QIAN / CHINA DAILY At the entrance of the bookstore is an image of a working woman and an inspirational quote, "women can do anything", on the window. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Cui Qichao says that when he opened the women-themed bookstore La Otra in Beijing, he started to better understand what women have actually gone through — their struggles and challenges — in the workplace and society. *La otra* is Spanish phrase meaning "the other".

"As a feminist man — still a minority in society — I have faced different voices from both males and females, which, I believe, are similar to most women who have tried to defy society's norms," the 32-year-old bookstore owner says.

Some people view his business as something like a gimmick, cashing in on feminism amid the trend in China to strive for gender equality. Some radical feminists, who believe that society prioritizes the male experience, express fury over Cui's male identity.

At first, crying was his way to deal with his emotions. Ultimately, he decided to keep the store open, although he didn't know what experiences — painful or joyful — it would bring him.

Carrying more than 2,000 titles, most of which are by female authors, the bookstore, which is smaller than 40 square meters, has been established as a learning hub and community for people interested in women studies. You can even find the out-of-print book series by Li Xiaojiang, who is often credited as the founder of women's studies in contemporary China.

At the entrance of the bookstore is a poster of a working woman, and the windows feature the inspirational quote, "Women can do anything." A blackboard by the door reads: "Menstruation products, hot water and pain relievers are offered

for free at the bookstore." Inside the store, there is a wall presenting a selection of images of remarkable women who have defied gender expectations and made extraordinary contributions.

"In addition to selling books, the bookstore is an inviting and safe public space to communicate, discuss and provide support among people concerned, under the basic rule: let women talk," Cui says.

Over the past year, Cui has held dozens of salons, film screenings and book clubs involving various topics and formats, ranging from women's health, sexual harassment, intimate relationships and domestic violence.

Last month, about 40 people, mostly women, gathered at a salon in a meeting room near the bookstore, The Other Green, to talk about gender inequality in soccer. Amid the heated discussion about women's roles on the soccer field, amateur players from Beijing-based WM women's soccer club shared their experiences on how they have been excluded from the game because of their gender and hoped that every woman could enjoy the sport without fear.

WM is short for the club's slogan: "We women, the mighty Metaxu." Metaxu is a Greek term for "in-between" employed by French philosopher Simone Weil for her concept of intermediaries.

Xiao Da was a formidable player since primary school but was the only girl on the soccer pitch until junior middle school and was excluded from training at school because it didn't have a girls' team.

"Soccer is like a mirror of society,

“They are obedient, silent and frugal, and try their best to be good mothers, good wives, good daughters ... but always forgetting to be themselves.”

Cui Qichao, bookstore owner



New goal for gender equality

A bookstore in Beijing seeks to engage in deeper discussions about women's issues, Wang Qian reports.



Above: Two women embrace following a talk event in the bookstore. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Left: Book titles on display in La Otra. WANG QIAN / CHINA DAILY

where numerous gender barriers need to be broken down," the 29-year-old says.

"The good news is that we are seeing increasing participation by women and girls in the male-dominated game."

The Chinese women's soccer team has been performing well in global grounds and earned respect nationwide.

During the heated discussion, Cui takes a back seat in a corner and listens to women's concerns, as he always does in these activities.

"As a man, my thoughts don't matter," he says, adding that it is important to let the women's voices be heard, and in the meantime he'd reflect on his male privilege.

A reader named Sha on the social media platform Xiaohongshu posts that she feels really touched to see a so-called "male feminist" and hopes there will be more.

"On our journey toward gender equality, men should not be excluded. And achieving the goal needs men as our powerful ally," she writes.

Cui was born in Yichun, Northeast China's Heilongjiang province, and felt the gender inequality at home, with all household chores performed by his mother and grandmother, while men held higher status in the family.

"I was raised by my mother and grandmother, who are kind and resilient, while my stepfather, in my mind, is a negative character, a role I always wanted to fight against," he says, adding that his childhood experience makes him feel more secure around women.

Observing his female friends, he finds that these women do the laundry, cook and take care of the children at home every day, taking on even more work without getting paid or sufficient respect from their husbands.

"They are obedient, silent and frugal, and try their best to be good mothers, good wives, good daughters and good daughters-in-law but always forgetting to be themselves," Cui says.

This led him to the question that has troubled him for a long time: "Why they are so great but have such low self-esteem? Meanwhile, many men are ordinary but confident."

Cui graduated from Renmin University of China in Beijing with a degree in psychology in 2015. He became a movie critic for three years, and then a scriptwriter and theater marketer.

When he heard about Fembooks in Taiwan, which claims to be one of the first bookstores focusing on feminism in China, the idea hit him to likewise open such a bookstore to help people better access, understand and maybe embrace the concept. In late 2022, he quit his job at a State-run theater and prepared to open the bookstore.

Thanks to his friends' help and a space offered for free for one year, his bookstore opened in Longtang Space in downtown Beijing in April last year. It sold over 600 books the first month but only around 200 a month on average afterward.

To make ends meet, Cui moved the bookstore to its current location in the Banbidian No 1 Culture Industrial Park, which offers low rent and a free meeting room.

"My readers helped me a lot to decorate the new store. The manager of the park, who's a woman, supports my idea by offering me a good rental price for the place," Cui says, adding that women have always offered to help manage the bookstore.

Readers sent flowers and cakes to celebrate the bookstore's reopening on March 8, International Women's Day, which made Cui break into tears.

"I hope one day, the bookstore can become a place where people can engage in different discussions in different thinking modes. It is where everyone can express their own voice," Cui says.

The manager, Sun Meng, has offered Cui two months of rent and the salon space for free.

"As a woman, I know how hard it is to balance work and life, and when Cui told me about the bookstore, the idea really caught me. It is not easy for a man to really try to understand women and their concerns," says Sun, who's also a mother.

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Soccer is no longer a man's game

When the four universal questions of life — Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? and Where am I going? — pop into my head, I am standing on a small soccer field at Chaoyang Park in Beijing on a chilly night last month.

It is my first time playing the game, which I know nothing about. I am not a soccer fan, and every time I watch a match, I fall asleep within 10 minutes, without exception.

Before I went to The Other Green's salon held by La Otra — a women-themed bookstore in Beijing — last month, playing soccer never would have appeared on my bucket list. I regularly do yoga and I cycle and swim, which, in my eyes, are good exercises for women, while soccer, definitely, is for men.

Soccer is by far the most popular



Wang Qian Reporter's Log

sport in the world. It's estimated to have more than 4 billion fans across the world and 240 million registered players, including 16.6 million females, according to the *Women's Football: Member Associations Survey Report 2023* published by FIFA, the world governing body of association soccer.

How can soccer become a feminist topic? What hinders women from participating in the game? Or is it really a game only for men?

Keeping these questions in mind, I step into the salon and meet five members from the Beijing-based WM female soccer club. They look terrific, with sunny

smiles and athletic physiques. And their passion and confidence impress me when they talk about how soccer has changed their lives.

In addition to the physical health benefits, they all mention the empowerment and the sense of sisterhood that soccer brings, which is not that easy to find in other forms of physical activity.

What's more, they all faced societal prejudices about women playing soccer and want to break gender norms. A tough player since primary school, Xiao Da used to be the only girl on the pitch and was excluded from school training because there was no girls' team at her school.

Not only at schools — it was also not easy for women to find a training club to play soccer several years ago in Beijing, as most of them were only open to boys and men. However, things are getting much better now.

Coincidentally, I get an invitation from my colleague, saying that her son's club is offering women's soccer training courses. And that was definitely a yes for me.

Being a working mother for seven years, my life has been limited to the office and home, and when I heard about the physical and mental benefits that it brings, I hoped soccer can make a difference in my tedious life.

This is where the story starts. After an hour of warm-up exercises and practicing kicking a ball around, here comes the match time. Without understanding the fundamental rules of the game, including offside, fouls, throw-ins and corner kicks, there I am, trying to figure out which is my team's goal.

I try to shoot twice, miss both times and I hurt my right thigh for perhaps the following two weeks. I still feel the pain.

But I also feel that, for me, happiness is real on the pitch. Soccer is more than just a game.

Chinese culture shines at Morocco book fair

RABAT — At the ongoing 29th Rabat International Book and Publishing Fair, Chinese books and cultural products on display have charmed many local visitors.

The Chinese delegation brought around 600 books, covering such areas as politics, children's literature and Chinese language learning, in addition to a wide range of cultural and creative products.

A visitor named Yacout says the book fair provides a chance to learn more about Chinese culture, expressing hope of pursuing education in China in the future.

During the book fair, the Chinese publishers will discuss cooperation with their African and Arab partners, promote the 30th Beijing International Book Fair

and push forward the Chinese-Moroccan classics translation project, Gong Xun, the general manager of People & Tangel Publishing House (Beijing), says.

Addressing the opening of the fair on Thursday, Moroccan Minister of Youth, Culture and Communication Mohamed Mehdi Bensaid welcomed the Chinese delegation, expressing his hope that exchanges between Morocco and China in the publishing and cultural industries would be further enhanced.

The fair held in Morocco's capital will continue until Sunday and is expected to host more than 700 publishing houses and institutions from around 50 countries and regions.

XINHUA

LIFE

Veronique Gallo took out her phone and scanned a QR code in front of the entrance of the Summer Palace last Friday.

The French tourist from Grasse kicked off her three-week trip to China with two of her friends in the capital city.

She adroitly filled in the names and passport numbers of her friends on her WeChat account before hitting the payment button.

The whole process took less than two minutes to get an access code for all three to enter the imperial park, where they were impressed by the vast lake, large islands, traditional halls and pavilions studding the imperial park.

"We are here to explore the changes to the city," says Gallo, who used to work for a French company in Beijing between 2006 and 2010.

"The streets are cleaner and wider, but people are still very friendly," she adds.

Gallo says she was encouraged to visit by the positive signals from a series of favorable tourism policies that have been rolled out by the Chinese government.

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

In March, China announced it would grant visa-free entry on a trial basis to visitors from Switzerland, Ireland, Hungary, Austria, Belgium and Luxembourg.

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

Right after the May Day holiday, the government decided to extend the visa-free policy for short-term visits for the 12 abovementioned countries until the end of 2025.

"It's clear that we are being welcomed to visit," Gallo says.

After Beijing, she and her friends will go on to explore Zhangjiajie in Hunan province, Yangshuo county in Guilin in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, and Shanghai.

"We'd love to see the country's varied landscapes while taking in its metropolitan vibe," she says.

Gallo is among the rising number of inbound travelers to China, as the country welcomes visitors with open arms.

In addition to more convenient customs policies, tourism officials have been working on the launch of targeted measures to remedy existing problems in the market to sustain the growth of international travelers.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism



Clockwise from top left: Veronique Gallo, a French tourist, uses her phone to scan a QR code to buy tickets to enter the Summer Palace in Beijing on Friday. YANG FEIYUE / CHINA DAILY Foreign tourists at the Forbidden City in Beijing on May 2. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Tourists pose for photos at the No. 1 Terracotta Warriors pit at the Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum in Xi'an, Shaanxi province. The museum entrance provides a perfect photo opportunity for tourists. PHOTOS BY ZHANG TIANZHU / FOR CHINA DAILY



A destination to remember

Enhanced services and visa policies see an increasing number of international tourists, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

ism in March said it will make it easier for payments at places such as tourist attractions, cultural and performance venues and star-rated hotels. This includes promoting the creation of software and hardware facilities for accepting mobile payments, bank cards, and cash at all national 5A and 4A tourist attractions, national and provincial tourist resorts, and national-level tourist leisure districts.

The ministry said it will cooperate with the relevant departments to promote the creation of foreign-currency exchange service points, and make sure all tourist attractions retain staffed windows offering ticket services for inbound travelers, while English-language online reservations will also be available.

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

The release of these policies led to

an upsurge in foreign tourist arrivals.

The National Immigration Administration tracked a three-fold increase in the number of international arrivals in the first quarter of the year, as compared with the same period last year.

The total number of visas issued to foreigners reached 466,000, an increase of 118.8 percent year-on-year, while the number of visa-free foreign visitors entering the country reached 1.99 million, a year-on-year increase of 266.1 percent, the administration reports.

International visitors have been primarily coming to China for tourism and sightseeing purposes, accounting for more than 30 percent of arrivals, followed by those coming for business, to visit relatives, and for other purposes, according to the online travel company Trip.com Group.

The agency said its inbound tourism orders have more than tripled compared to the same

period last year.

Many foreign tourists have said that they are experiencing changes during travel in the country, with more convenient entry procedures and services, such as payment, ticket booking, and transportation, the travel operator says.

The company's data revealed that the main origins of inbound travelers over the first three months were Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, Thailand, Vietnam, Canada and Russia.

The effect of the visa-free policy on inbound tourism is evident, says Wang Yalei, an analyst from the research center at Trip.com.

As China has officially implemented unilateral visa-free trials for France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and Malaysia, the number of tourists from these six countries visiting China increased by about six-fold year-on-year, the agency reports.

Compared to the first quarter of 2019, there has been almost no change in the top 20 source countries for inbound tourism to China, Wang observes.

However, countries with a higher rate of international flight resumption or which enjoy visa-free policies have shown higher growth rates.

For example, Malaysia has risen from the 8th place in 2019 to 2nd place this year, and Russia has risen from 16th to 10th place, he says.

In terms of growth rate, compared to the first quarter of 2019, visitors from neighboring countries, such as Malaysia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia, are prominent, according to the travel agency.

Top city destinations among inbound travelers this year are Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province, and Chengdu in Sichuan province, the agency reveals.

Theme parks and major scenic

spots with distinctive offerings, such as the Palace Museum and the Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum, are among international travelers' favorites, it adds.

Additionally, cultural programs, including traditional Chinese medicine massage, wearing ethnic costumes and village soccer games, have all seen a rising number of international visitors.

Ning Guoxin, a senior officer with Beijing-based tourism service provider Utour Group, says the company has started to receive a rising number of inbound visitors for business exchange since the end of last year.

"They have been mainly from Central Asia and Middle East, and the inflow of inbound travelers has been consistent," Ning says.

In mid-May, the company expects to receive more than 200 travelers from Asia, Europe, the US, Japan and South Korea.

"Inbound travelers actually will be more sensitive to positive inbound tourism policies, as they tend to have shorter time for travel planning and arrangements," Ning says, adding that convenient travel procedure will make things much easier for them.

"They will feel the welcoming attitude of our country, which is surely good news in the long run," he says.

The company has been developing themed travel offerings for inbound customers.

"They tend to stay longer, mostly for more than eight days, so they will cover more destinations," Ning says.

"So we need to make the arrangements more relevant, like making destinations connected to themes like the Yellow River, the Great Wall and the Yangtze River, for them to feel better related to their experiences and appreciate our culture," Ning explains.

Simone Zhao from China Horizon Travel, which specializes in arranging tours for individual travelers from Europe, says she has seen continuous growth in orders.

"They say they have felt the efforts we have been making to make travel more comfortable," Zhao says.

Having been engaged in the inbound tourism business for more than three decades in China, Zhao says she can personally see things have positively changed for international travelers since late last month.

Although some things are still to be desired, like more foreign language services for taxi hailing or payment methods, Zhao believes they will be addressed soon, as policies have already been put in place.

"I'm looking forward to seeing more positive feedback from our guests in the future," she says.

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Audio 'trailer' gives readers a new chapter in books to enjoy

NANJING — Every weekend, Zhao Jian meticulously arranges his phone and adjusts the room lighting before he begins to passionately read from books in front of the camera, and when emotions run deep, he even recites verses of poetry.

This is all part of Zhao's routine as an online storyteller living in Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu province. He has nearly 1.4 million followers on Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, and his videos have received almost 18 million likes.

"The joy of my work lies in nurturing a love for reading among more people," Zhao says, adding that he sees his role as a bridge connecting listeners with authors through his narratives.

"It's sort of like doing trailers, to spark people's interest in buying tickets to watch movies," he adds.

From Zhao's perspective, a burgeoning cohort of young people is now drawn to books through short videos. "Through artificial intelligence algorithms, books are recommended to targeted listeners who might have an interest, thereby boosting sales of numerous classic books, including many audiobooks."

Data from Douyin's e-commerce platform show that in the first quarter of this year, views of book livestreams surpassed 3.9 billion, generating average daily sales of over 2 million books.

Listening gets trendy

Feng Xiaohui, a manager at the Beijing OpenBook Co, says that new technologies have fostered a change in the way many Chinese read.

"We can see that the mode of

reading is more and more diversified, with the popularity of e-books and audiobooks increasingly on the rise," Feng says.

"Nowadays, it's about catering to both the visual and auditory needs of the learners," echoes Zhao Chen, director of digital publishing department at the People's Literature Publishing House, saying that audio elements are increasingly included in the publishing of new books, with many featuring QR codes for audiobook enthusiasts.

Thanks to the fast pace of urban life and the proliferation of diverse media platforms, the reading habits of many people are transitioning from reading to listening, turning audiobooks into a social trend. Statistics show that the user base for audiobooks in China reached 420 million in 2022.

"Amid all the work and family pressures, it's not easy to find a dedicated time and place to read. So, audiobooks are a great choice for me to enrich my fragmented leisure time, allowing me some inner peace just through my phone," says Wang Chun, an IT worker in Suzhou, a city in Jiangsu.

Due to the companionable nature and adaptability of audio recordings, people can enjoy audiobooks while driving, studying, exercising, or doing household chores, making fragmented time more meaningful.

Liu Fang, a visually impaired teacher from Guiyang, capital of Guizhou province, devotes her spare time to making audiobooks on short video platforms, kindling the hearts of numerous readers, including those who are visually impaired.



Zhao Jian, an online storyteller based in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, interacts with followers during livestreaming. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"Sharing beautiful stories brings me great happiness. Through producing audiobooks, I meet the needs of more young people while offering reading services to the visually impaired and elderly," Liu says.

Traditional libraries are also undergoing digital transformation. The provincial library of Guizhou has established a facility that houses 550,000 titles and more than 100,000 hours of listening resources spanning classics, philosophy, history and children's literature.

"It is very popular, especially among the elderly. They put on headphones, select their favorite books, and relish listening in quiet, gaining knowledge while immersed in a different reading

ambience," says Luo Jing, a librarian at the facility.

According to Zhao Chen, audiobooks adapted from online literature are highly story-driven while also captivating to young people. "But when it comes to audiobooks of classics, it is advised that the original work be kept intact to preserve the beauty of the language."

AI amplifies engagement

With the advent of 5G and AI, text-to-speech technology has been widely used in audiobook production. AI-generated audible novels are emerging in Chinese audio-based media and reading applications.

"TTS technology significantly enhances our efficiency in audiobook content production. Current

AI-generated content is almost indistinguishable from human voices," says Lu Heng, head of the AI voice laboratory at Ximalaya, China's online audio-sharing platform, which boasted an average monthly active user base of 303 million last year.

With the help of AI, the company has expedited the entire audiobook production process more than 50-fold compared to working manually.

Book listeners can now not only acquire information and knowledge but also immerse themselves in emotional genres such as suspense, humor, and sadness, augmenting their reading experiences.

At a recent exhibition in Italy, Ximalaya unveiled its latest product tailored for children, which enables parents to record their voices for a vast story library, allowing children to listen to their parents narrate stories at any time, with just five one-minute recordings.

Lu says that Ximalaya's voice generation model can swiftly replicate voices with 90 percent similarity within five seconds and generate customized audio within 10 seconds.

After gaining copyright, some domestic audiobook platforms replicate the voices of celebrities using AI anchors, enriching the expressiveness and appeal of storylines.

Douyin's novel reading platform boasts AI voices in over 40 styles, catering to various age groups. These AI voices can eloquently convey profound human emotions and each voice can be seamlessly switched to provide varied story-

telling experiences.

Chinese content creators are also harnessing AI technology to produce radio dramas that combine human voices, music and sound effects. For instance, the radio-drama adaptation of the Chinese science fiction novel *The Three-Body Problem* on Ximalaya has accumulated over 750 million clicks.

"We believe that AI technology catalyzes the industry's growth by enhancing content production efficiency, reducing production costs, and providing users with better listening experiences," Lu says.

According to Liu Xiaochun, an associate professor at the University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, AI's technological progress has injected vitality into the growth of book sales and the popularization of reading among the masses.

She says that AI is lowering the barriers to reading and enabling more obscure books to reach interested readers.

"Technological advancements in livestreaming, short videos, and podcasts can help precisely match users' listening preferences and create personalized experiences," Liu Xiaochun adds.

Zhang Qinghua, a professor at Beijing Normal University, has been impressed with the transformative impact of AI on people's reading habits.

"The prospects of AI in reading are promising, but there are also concerns. Hopefully, AI can embody the human spirit, inspiring more young people to engage with classic literature," he says.

XINHUA