

Caught in the middle

Fast-fashion company faces US scrutiny amid political tension

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Risk appetite strengthens upbeat mood

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Legacy of wool

Ancient town threads history to weave new trends among talented designers

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# CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 TUESDAY, MAY 21, 2024

## Xi sends condolences over Raisi's death

Iran's president, FM among those killed in crash

By MO JINGXI in Beijing and JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong

President Xi Jinping expressed deep condolences on Monday over the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash, saying that the Chinese people have lost a good friend who made positive efforts for consolidating and developing ties between Beijing and Teheran.

Raisi and others were confirmed dead early Monday after a challenging overnight search amid bad weather in northwestern Iran's East Azerbaijan province, according to Iran's Islamic Republic News Agency. Supreme Leader of Iran's Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei appointed First Vice-President Mohammad Mokhber as acting president, in line with Article 131 of the Iranian Constitution.

In a message sent to Mokhber on behalf of the Chinese government and Chinese people, Xi expressed deep sorrow over the passing of Raisi and extended sympathies to Mokhber, Raisi's family and the Iranian government and people.

Xi said that since Raisi took office as president, he had made important contributions to maintaining Iran's security and stability and promoting national development and prosperity. Raisi's unfortunate demise is a great loss for the Iranian people, the Chinese president said, adding that the Chinese people have lost a good friend.

Xi also said the Chinese government and Chinese people highly value the country's traditional friendship with Iran, while expressing hope that the China-Iran comprehensive strategic partnership will continue to be consolidated and developed with joint efforts from both sides.



Rescuers recover bodies on Monday from a mountainous area in northwestern Iran where a helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and others, crashed on Sunday, killing all on board. AZIN HAGHIGHI / MOJ NEWS AGENCY / AFP

The Chinese side also expressed deep condolences over the death of Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, who also was killed in the crash. Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani was appointed head of the international committee of Iran's Foreign Ministry, the Islamic Republic News Agency reported, citing an announcement by Iranian government spokesman Ali Bahadori Jahromi.

Raisi's helicopter crashed on Sunday in the Varzaqan region of Iran as he was returning from a ceremony to inaugurate a dam on Iran's border with Azerbaijan, Iran's Mehr News Agency reported. The bodies of those who had been aboard the helicopter were first

transported to Tabriz in northwestern Iran before other arrangements were made, according to Pir Hossein Kolivand, head of the Red Crescent Society of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who oversaw the search.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told reporters on Monday that after the crash, China provided active assistance with the search and rescue work.

"We are willing to continue to provide all necessary support to the Iranian side and believe that the Iranian government and people have the capability to overcome this difficult time," he said.

With condolences of other state leaders and heads of international organizations pouring into Teheran,

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## Report: China among nations with lowest crime rate

By CAO YIN caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

China has registered a significant drop in the number of serious violent crimes over the past few years, making it one of the countries with the lowest crime rate and the strongest sense of security, according to a report.

The Annual Report on Rule of Law in China, which was released on Monday by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Law, said the number of felonies including intentional homicide and gun violence continued to decline last year, while other crimes related to national security or involving drugs were effectively controlled.

The number of people charged with serious violent crimes plummeted to 61,000 in 2023 from 162,000 in 1999, the report said, noting that 9,171 people were prosecuted for offenses related to guns or explosions last year, down 11.09 percent compared with 2022.

At the same time, the percentage of offenders sentenced to three years or less in prison for minor crimes among the total number of offenders rose from 54.4 percent in 1999 to 82.3 percent in 2023, the report said. In China, a prison term of three years or less, is generally considered misdemeanor.

"These figures demonstrate that China is one of the countries with the lowest crime rate and the strongest sense of security in the world," said Zhang Zhigang, an associate research fellow at the institute.

"They also mean that China's crime structure is facing a shift toward misdemeanor and its social governance is entering a new stage," he added.

Zhang said the steady drop in the number of serious violent crimes should be attributed to the country's long-term, high-pressure stand on safeguarding national security, with great efforts made to nip all problems in the bud.

For example, Chinese police have been cracking down on public security violations and minor offenses for four consecutive years, in order to prevent misconduct from snowballing into something more serious and to help build a safer environment for the people, he said.

In addition, China intensified its fight against crime in the fields of finance, intellectual property and internet last year, endeavoring to maintain financial stability, optimize the business environment and purge the cyberspace of malpractices.

According to the report, more than 185,000 people were prosecuted for financial crimes in the past five years, up 28.2 percent compared with the previous five years. The number of intellectual property cases concluded by Chinese courts in 2023 was about 490,000, up 1.8 percent year-on-year, it said.

As incidents of cyberbullying, which include abuse, insult, slander and damage to privacy or reputation, have been rampant in recent years, Chinese police, prosecutors and judges have taken actions to maintain social order and offer the public a sense of security, the report said.

Last year, the police solved 110 cases of cyberbullying, it revealed, adding that the number of online defamation cases handled in prosecution procedures increased 10.3 percent year-on-year, while the number of convictions surged 102.4 percent compared with 2022.

## Sharing of tea a symbol of exchanges between civilizations

On April 7 2023, whilst in Guangzhou in Guangdong province during his visit to China, French President Emmanuel Macron shared tea with his host, Chinese President Xi Jinping. The sharing of tea between the two world leaders was a symbol of the exchanges between civilizations and the values of harmony, respect and friendship that this social ritual implies. This seemingly simple act of sharing tea is something that takes place millions of times every day throughout the world. Tea, after all, is the world's most popular beverage after water. Tea

### WORLD WATCH

By Gary Sigley

also originated in China and is one of its most significant contributions to human civilization. The tea and context of the setting where the two leaders took their refreshment also celebrated Chinese civilization through music, art and aesthetics. Thus rather than a "clash of civilizations," the act of sharing tea can pave the way for a "confluence of civilizations."

It doesn't matter if we are state leaders or ordinary folk, when we share tea we are opening ourselves up to the possibility of meaningful dialogue and exchange. This "civility" is indeed one of the hallmarks of "civilization".

The Global Civilization Initiative was proposed by President Xi in March 2023. Through this initiative, and the related Global Development Initiative and Global Security Initiative, China is outlining a plan for harmony and cooperation between civilizations. The Global Civilization Initiative advocates respect for the diversity of

civilizations, the common values of humanity, the importance of inheritance and innovation of civilizations, and robust international people-to-people exchanges and cooperation.

Tea is a part of the story of exchanges between civilizations. May 21 is marked by the United Nations as International Tea Day. This is a day set aside to celebrate the tea plant — *Camellia sinensis* — and the people whose livelihoods depend upon it and for everyone else who enjoys this most intoxicating elixir. It is, therefore, very appropriate that we take some

time to consider the relationship between tea and civilization.

With regards to art, literature and philosophy, tea has been a major inspiration for many artists in China and beyond. Lu Yu, a Chinese writer and tea master, completed the Classic of Tea during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Lu Yu's work is considered one of the earliest guides to tea cultivation, preparation and appreciation in Chinese history. The Classic of Tea is the beginning of what we might call a specific "tea civilization".

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## COUNTY TRAVEL CRAZE SPARKS TOURISM MARKET POTENTIAL

More people seeking holidays at quieter, low-key destinations, experts say

By YANG FEIYUE yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

Domestic travelers' growing preference for niche destinations and experiences has ignited the huge tourism potential of many of the country's lesser-known travel spots.

From last year's barbecue craze in Zibo, Shandong province, to this year's obsession with

### In-depth

malatang, a spicy hot pot of boiled meat and vegetables on offer, in Tianshui, Gansu province, travelers are sending clear signals that a major shift in the domestic tourism market is underway.

Both of the prefecture-level cities attracted millions of travelers who were willing to wait in line for hours to taste these local specialties.

On social media, travel products are increasingly emphasizing their "uniqueness" as a way for people to showcase their individuality and lifestyle choices.

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## Boosting ties



Visitors interact with a robot dog on Saturday during the ongoing 8th China-Russia Expo in Harbin, Heilongjiang province. The six-day event, which aims to enhance bilateral trade ties, kicked off on Thursday. XIE JIANFEI / XINHUA

INSIDE US strategy in South China Sea makes rogue wave Global Views, page 13

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## Travel: Great potential to be released

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Since 2021, when the country was in the grip of the COVID-19 pandemic, Wen Yuxiang from Chengdu, Sichuan province, has discovered his passion for visiting small cities and county-level destinations off the beaten track. "I didn't fancy the popular tourist sites in downtown city areas and I couldn't travel long distances," said Wen, aged in his 30s.

That was when he started to explore counties on the edges of Chengdu.

"Travel information about those small destinations was mostly fragmented, so I just pieced together the details and came up with my own itinerary," he said.

He soon realized that there were so many options that he could satisfy his wanderlust in relative peace and quiet.

"I have been stunned by a lot of historical architecture and the breathtaking natural landscapes in those small cities and counties," he said.

Although sometimes he encounters discrepancies between online accounts of the destinations and what they are like in reality, in most instances his trips have not been disappointing. He has visited lesser-known destinations in many provinces including Sichuan, Gansu, Guizhou, Shanxi and Guangdong.

"They are small, but they all offer the necessary facilities, such as transportation, accommodation and dining," he said. "Most importantly, these places have kept alive the identity of the local people and the communities. This is more appealing to me than crowded big cities," Wen said.

As he shared his travel experiences on the social media platform Xiaohongshu, the number of his followers grew from fewer than 200 in 2022 to more than 72,000 today.

"My fans come from different regions around the country, and most of them have given me very positive feedback, even calling me their guide to treasured getaways," he said.

Wen is proud that many of his followers share photos of their trip to a destination he has recommended, often saying they felt the same way he did about their experience.

### Glowing attractions

During the May Day holiday, a wooden pagoda in Yingxian county, Shanxi province, with a history dating back almost 1,000 years attract



Left: Visitors walk in the ancient town in Tianshui, Gansu province, on May 1. WANG ZIXUAN / XINHUA



Right: People visit Putuo Zongcheng Temple in Chengde, Hebei province, on May 2. DU LIANYI / CHINA DAILY

ed droves of travelers. The county saw local homestay bookings surge by 180 percent year-on-year during the holiday, the online service platform Meituan reported.

In Pingtan county, Fujian province, the stunning natural phenomenon known as "blue tears" drew big crowds of tourists and photographers over the holiday. The luminous blue waters are caused by the chemical reaction called bioluminescence.

More than 310,000 tickets for the coastal scenic spot were sold on the Meituan platform during the vacation.

"Walk-in guests who didn't make reservations were still coming in and asking if we had spare rooms," said Gao Huan, who runs a hotel near the blue tear site in Pingtan.

The hotel's 88 rooms were booked out for the holiday.

The visitors to Pingtan were mainly young people who had come from other provinces, especially self-driving tourists from Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, Gao said.

Li Jian, general manager of China National Travel Service (HK) Group Corp's Anji Tourism Development Co, said the company has seen Anji's

charm embraced by many visitors from big cities who enjoy the county's slower pace.

The company signed a tourism agreement with the Anji county government more than a decade ago, and has since worked to build up tourism facilities there.

"The county enjoys a great geographical position, about a two-hour drive from Shanghai and Hangzhou, and has done a good job in upgrading the rural environment," Li said.

"It was already attracting urban travelers to take a walk around, so we decided to invest in it," he added.

Over the years, hotels, camping sites and recreational programs have been created to spice up travelers' experiences. "They can drink coffee while taking in the rapeseed flowers, as well as appreciating art exhibitions and taking pictures against interesting backgrounds we prepare for them," Li said.

The Anji operation opened in 2018, and received a surge of travelers during COVID-19, as more tourists from big cities

opted for short-distance travel due to health safety concerns, Li said.

The company added a commercial street and an animal farm last year to better cater to travelers' demands.

Last year, the company raked in more than 100 million yuan (\$13.85 million) in tourism revenue.

"City travelers love their stay here, because the experience is different and it is relatively cheaper," Li said, adding that the county is close to nature and offers easy access to outdoor activities, such as rafting in the summer and skiing in the winter.

Most of the travelers are families interested in the parent-child activities arranged by Li's company.

The Anji site received about 5,000 visitors a day during the May Day holiday. "Although our rooms were fully booked, the travel flow remained the right amount, with no traffic jams," Li said.

### Untapped potential

The country boasts more than 2,800 county-level administration zones, according to a 2023 national research report on the high-quality development of such

tourism. The research was conducted by the National County-Level Tourism Research Project Team in Beijing.

The study noted that only 79 counties reported tourism revenue exceeding 10 billion yuan and total tourist arrivals of over 10 million. Counties with tourism revenue below 3 billion yuan accounted for 65.86 percent of the total.

The statistics indicate the huge untapped potential of tourism in counties and other lower-tier markets, experts said.

Wang Yalei, an analyst from Trip.com Group's research center, said the potential for tourism growth in those lower-tier markets is yet to be released, as more travelers start to seek out less crowded sites and better affordability.

"Compared with the high accommodation and dining expenses in first and second-tier cities during holidays, those (lower-tier) markets also offer better value for money," Wang said.

Data from Trip.com Group showed that during the May Day holiday, the average daily hotel price in county-level markets was only half of that in popular first and second-tier cities.

The May Day holiday saw strong public demand for niche experiences, particularly in the countryside, instead of for crowded attractions, the travel agency said.

Zhejiang province's Anji and Tonglu, and Sichuan province's Dujiangyan were among the 10 most popular county-level destinations, with tourism orders increasing by 36 percent on average during the May Day holiday, Trip.com said.

"From the demand side, travelers' tendency to avoid crowds is becoming increasingly more apparent, leading to a growing number of them shifting from first and second-tier central cities toward third and fourth-tier cities, and even counties. This trend is expected to become more common in the future," Wang said.

The improvement of high-speed rail transportation infrastructure has increased accessibility to third and fourth-tier cities as well as county-level markets, Wang said.

At the same time, tour offerings in lower-tier markets keep improving. Since the beginning of this year, nearly 1,000 county-level tourist attractions have been added to Trip.com's platform, according to the agency.

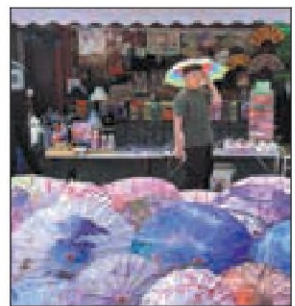
Since December last year, more than 120 new 4A-level tourist attractions have emerged across 10 provincial-level administrative regions, with 65 percent of them located in county and county-level cities, the agency reported.

The prosperity of county-level tourism markets means an expansion of the tourist population and a greater diversification of travel destinations, making the foundation of the Chinese tourism market even stronger, Wang said.

In addition, rural residents' travel numbers now account for 16.9 percent of the total number of domestic holiday travelers, according to a recent report from the China Tourism Academy.

This structural shift in the demand side of the tourism market will make cost-effectiveness a more crucial aspect of market competition, which promises more opportunities for lower-tier cities, according to the report.

Dai Bin, president of the academy, said tourism stakeholders and authorities should all be aware that a new era of mass tourism characterized by rising demand for lower-tier destinations has arrived.



From left: A boy walks past oil-paper umbrellas in Chengde, Hebei province, on May 3. DU LIANYI / CHINA DAILY

Tourists visit the Wooden Tower in Yingxian county, Shanxi province, on May 4. CHEN YAN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Tourists take a selfie at a temple dedicated to Fuxi — the legendary ancestor of the Chinese nation in Tianshui, Gansu province, in April. HOU CHONGHUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## A journey of friendship, discovery and tranquility in Wen'an

By WANG XIN in Shanghai  
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Fed up with the large crowds and overcast weather in Shanghai, and liberated from the stress of intense travel itineraries, I discovered a sense of peace during the recent May Day holiday while enjoying a slow-paced vacation in an unfamiliar county.

Located in Langfang in North China's Hebei province, Wen'an county is probably a new name for many. I first learned about it from a friend, who surprised me by telling me this unknown county is actually home to China's largest trading market for secondhand machine tools. It is also one of the nation's biggest production hubs for recycled plastic, man-made panels and other goods.

It sparked my curiosity further when I found that there is no passenger station in the county. This was another surprise given the rapid development of China's railway networks and large-scale industrial clusters. However, what intrigued me the most was the prospect of escaping tourist crowds and immersing myself in an authentic and tranquil local experience.

Without much hesitation, I made Wen'an county my destination.

Although Wen'an has no passenger terminals, it is easily accessible from both Beijing and Tianjin — about one to two hours' drive from either city. This is a little bit time-consuming, but the journey is not too difficult.

Unlike traveling to big cities or popular tourist spots, I started to feel a strong connection with the local people when I started making preparations for the trip.

Instead of relying on mobile apps or online platforms for local information, for the first time I found out that the "old-fashioned" way of using a local travel agency worked much better in this small county.

A travel agency owner, surnamed Wang, was quite surprised to learn that I would be traveling to Wen'an — and not for business. Rather than treat me as a client, he approached me more as a new friend visiting his hometown.

He kindly offered me information on safety, transportation, dining and entertainment, and even guided me around the trading markets and production bases. All this was for free.

Upon my arrival, Huang, a local



Left: People relax at the Tree Coffee in Wen'an, Hebei province. Right: Customers enjoy their drinks at a music bar in Wen'an.



PHOTOS BY WANG XIN / CHINA DAILY

bar owner, gave me another warm surprise.

I'd contacted Huang before I left Shanghai in the hope he could source a whisky I liked. The Wen'an bars usually don't serve whisky as drinkers prefer beer, yet, without fanfare Huang scoured the county and got my order for me, without overcharging.

After a long day on the high-speed train and then a taxi, it was near midnight when I reached Wen'an. However, I was not the slightest bit exhausted and headed

to Huang's bar for a nightcap.

I felt a sense of security when I was greeted by Huang, especially as he'd kept the bar open for me. I had been worried about keeping him waiting, since I knew local customers usually left early and he had a regular day job.

But he assured me that his bar was more than just a business — it was also a place for friends to gather. I'd traveled over 1,100 kilometers, but was already being treated like an old friend.

The streets in Wen'an are quiet

early in the evening, but I was content knowing I had a friend just around the corner from my accommodation willing to keep a light on for me, and wait for hours just to say "hello" and "welcome to Wen'an". How lucky was I!

I spent four days and nights in Wen'an and enjoyed every moment there, even without a must-do list.

With only a few streets, the central area can be easily navigated on foot. Wandering around wet markets, small stores, parks and night markets, I never had to worry about getting lost.

One street from my hotel, I came across my favorite place — a cafe named Tree Coffee.

As its name indicated, the cafe was built under a big pagoda tree last summer. When the gentle sunlight filtered through the leaves and scattered on the ground, seats and across my skin, I stretched my body and greedily breathed in the dry air and the lovely aroma of coffee.

There were no business people holding laptops or conducting meetings, as there would be in a fast-paced city. Instead, young people gathered at their leisure chatting with staff, laughing, taking

photos, singing and playing the guitar.

Sipping coffee under the shady tree, my schedule was not determined by time constraints or the need to complete work. Instead, it was simply the sky gradually getting dark that announced the end of my day.

As I freely roamed the streets with elastic steps, the sound of a live rock song caught my attention. That was another fantastic encounter in Wen'an — an acclaimed local music bar open for a decade with no online posts about it.

It was easy to get in, and the music they played was my taste, with wonderful acoustic shows, drinks and snacks at a very fair price, as well as warm and friendly customers to talk with. I arrived alone, but we sang, laughed and shared the night and created memories together.

Time flew by quietly during my short stay in Wen'an. I felt comfortable assimilating with local residents, who accepted me as a new friend with kindness, hospitality and respectful curiosity. Counties may differ from each other, but for tourists seeking slow-paced relaxation, they might have something in common.

## TOP NEWS

## Beverage: Tea and its role in civilization development

From page 1

Later this body of work and the refined practice of tea drinking became the famous Tea Ceremony or *chanoyu* of Japan. Tea also provided the fuel for creativity of many a great intellect beyond China. For example, Samuel Johnson (1709—1784) is an English writer best known for his influential literary works and his role in compiling one of the most comprehensive dictionaries of the English language. It is well known that Johnson was a ravenous imbibor of tea. Johnson's fondness for tea is evident in his writings, where he sometimes humorously remarked on the pleasures of tea drinking and the social atmosphere it fostered. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724—1804) is widely considered one of the most important figures in modern philosophy. He also made important contributions to what would become International Relations theory. His breakfast is recorded as consisting of "a cup of tea and a pipe of tobacco". As a mild stimulant and refreshing beverage, tea has played a positive role in shaping civilizational development and facilitating the exchanges between civilizations.

Tea and humanity are also entangled in what we can refer to as an ecological civilization. The concept of ecological civilization, also a crucial component of the Global Civilization Initiative, reflects China's commitment to achieving sustainable development while preserving environmental quality and ensuring the well-being of present and future generations in China and beyond. In this regard, the World Heritage listed tea gardens of Jingmaishan in Southwest China's Yunnan province, represent valuable contributions to "tea civilization". Part of the value of these groves of ancient tea trees lies in the lessons they can share with

the tea industry as it seeks ways to encourage resilient and sustainable tea cultivation practices that will help mitigate the challenge of climate change. These tea gardens represent a form of sustainable tea agroforestry that is the embodiment of the Chinese civilizational ideals of "harmony between nature and humanity" (*tian ren he yi*).

Thus no matter how we define "civilization", either as the development of sophisticated knowledge, technology, art and literature, or more inclusively as those knowledge and practices that contribute to a sensitive and sustainable relationship between humanity and nature, we can see that tea has played a significant role. The Global Civilization Initiative advocates for the equal respect of all human civilizations. Tea as a form of ritualized shared experience is an excellent way for us to find the time to celebrate what we have in common and what makes us distinct. This is, in my view, precisely what President Xi and President Macron experienced when they took tea in Guangzhou in April 2023.

As we celebrate International Tea Day in 2024, let's take the time to express our gratitude for the tea plant and all those who work tirelessly to bring us the daily beverage that is the hallmark of a "tea civilization". Tea means "peace" and "harmony" between humanity and nature and between the diversity of human civilizations and cultures. Think about that when you next hold your cup of tea. Think about the breadth of human experience through tea. Like a tea seed that gives life to a tea tree, from little things big things grow.

The writer is a professor of human geography in the Faculty of Geographical Science at Beijing Normal University. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## Tragedy: Iran observing five days of public mourning

From page 1

Iran will observe five days of public mourning, as declared by Ali Khamenei on Monday morning.

"In this bitter tragedy, the Iranian nation lost a warm-hearted, humble and valued servant," said Iran's supreme leader in a public message.

Ali Khamenei expressed his "deep sorrow and regret" on social media platform X for what he called the "bitter news of the martyrdom of the people's President, the competent, hard-working Haj Sayyid Ebrahim Raisi, and his esteemed entourage".

Ali Khamenei also honored others who were killed in the crash, including Tabriz Friday Prayer Leader Hujjat al-Islam Ale-Hashem and "the diligent, active Foreign Minister, Mr Amir-Abdollahian".

Also expressing grief over the dead were former presidents Hassan Rouhani, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Mohammad Khatami.

Millions of Iranians had prayed for the safe return of Raisi from Sunday till Monday morning, only to sink in grief upon hearing of his death.

"I've been grabbed by grief," a middle-aged man in Teheran told CGTN on Monday, saying he loved the president.

Mokhber held an emergency meeting after rescue teams located the helicopter's wreckage, the Islamic Republic News Agency reported on Monday. The meeting was attended by Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and Iranian Judiciary Chief Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i.

Mokhber said that as the country's system is well-established and strong, there will be no problem in the administration of the country.

Ali Khamenei also tasked Mokhber, the Parliament speaker and the judiciary chief to prepare for elections to choose a new president within 50 days.

Iran's Foreign Ministry also expressed gratitude to the international community for its concern and assistance since the helicopter went missing on Sunday afternoon. Neighboring Turkey and Azerbaijan sent rescue teams with night-vision equipment, and Turkish drones located the site of the helicopter wreckage in mountainous forests on Monday morning amid heavy fog. More than 45 local teams were also sent to the region to help find the crash site.

Mike Gu in Hong Kong and Xinhua contributed to this story.

## Unusual contest



International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach (center) plays table tennis with a robot on Sunday at Shanghai University of Sport's China Table Tennis College. The IOC chief was appointed honorary professor of the university during his visit to Shanghai for the Olympic Qualifier Series. WANG XIANG / XINHUA

## Mainland denounces Lai's provocations

International community voices support for achieving reunification

By ZHANG YI and WANG QINGYUN

Lai Ching-te has sent a dangerous signal of seeking "Taiwan independence" and making provocations to undermine cross-strait peace and stability in his speech after assuming the role of the Taiwan region's new leader on Monday, a Chinese mainland spokesman said.

Chen Binhua, a spokesman for the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, said that Lai's speech wretchedly advocated separatism, incited cross-strait confrontation and sought "independence" by relying on foreign support and by force.

"The mainstream public aspiration on the island is to pursue peace over war, development over decline, communication over separation and cooperation over confrontation," Chen said, adding that Lai has ignored public opinion, exposing his nature of being a "Taiwan independence" worker.

Lai, 64, once described himself as a "pragmatic worker for Taiwan independence".

Chen said the current complex situation across the Taiwan Strait is rooted in the fact that the Democratic Progressive Party stubbornly clings to a separatist stance of "Taiwan independence", refuses to acknowledge the 1992 Consensus

The mainstream public aspiration on the island is to pursue peace over war, development over decline, communication over separation and cooperation over confrontation."

Chen Binhua, a spokesman for the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office

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that embodies the one-China principle, and colludes with external forces to continuously provoke separatist activities.

Taiwan is an inalienable part of China, the spokesman said, emphasizing that "Taiwan independence" and peace across the Strait are as incompatible as fire and water.

No matter how the situation on the island changes, no matter who is in power, it cannot alter

the fact that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one China, nor can it impede the historical trend of national reunification, Chen said.

"We have firm determination to resolve the Taiwan question and realize national reunification; we have strong capabilities to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity; and we will take resolute actions to fight separatist activities seeking 'Taiwan independence' and external interference," he said.

The mainland will work together with Taiwan compatriots to promote the peaceful development of cross-strait relations and cross-strait integrated development, and resolutely advance the reunification of the motherland, he added.

Referring to Lai's speech, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Monday that the one-China principle is the solid anchor for peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, and anyone who attempts to challenge the principle will ultimately fail.

Wang made the remarks during the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Recently, political leaders and people from all walks of life in many countries, including SCO

member states, have voiced their support for China's just cause of opposing "Taiwan independence" and achieving national reunification, which once again shows that the international community's adherence to the one-China principle is unshakable, Wang said.

The separatist activities of "Taiwan independence" forces constitute the most serious challenge to the international order and threaten the most severe damage to cross-strait peace, he said.

Emphasizing that the Taiwan question is China's internal affair, Wang said that realizing China's complete reunification is a shared aspiration of all Chinese people, and also a historical trend that cannot be stopped.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said on Monday that a few politicians from certain countries are engaged in political manipulation and "personal shows" on the Taiwan question, severely interfering in China's internal affairs and violating the one-China principle.

China strongly condemns such moves and will take all necessary measures to firmly uphold national sovereignty and territorial integrity, he said, adding that external forces interfering in China's internal affairs and using Taiwan to contain China are destined to fail.

The righteous cause of the Chinese people opposing "Taiwan independence" separatism and striving for national reunification will receive widespread understanding and support from the international community, he added.

Contact the writers at zhangyi@chinadaily.com.cn

## US firms in arms sales listed as unreliable entities

By ZHONG NAN zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

China has decided to add three companies in the United States to its unreliable entities list over their arms sales to China's Taiwan region, the Ministry of Commerce announced on Monday.

The US companies — General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, General Dynamics Land Systems and Boeing Defense, Space & Security — will be barred from engaging in China-related import or export activities, and are forbidden from making new investments in China, the ministry said in two online notices.

Analysts said the move is a rightful countermeasure to safeguard China's national security and territorial integrity. The weapons sales to China's Taiwan region by these US companies pose a threat to peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, they said.

The unreliable entities list targets foreign companies, organizations and individuals who disrupt market rules, breach contract norms, halt supplies for noncommercial reasons or significantly harm the legitimate rights and interests of China and its businesses, according to the ministry.

Zhang Hua, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Taiwan Studies Institute, said this action underscores the necessity of adhering to Chinese laws and regulations for businesses operating within China.

While China remains open to international companies, it will decisively penalize those profiting from undermining the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, Zhang said.

The three companies' inclusion on the unreliable entities list means that the government will neither approve nor maintain the work

permits, stays or residence qualifications in China for their senior executives.

Moreover, Boeing Defense, Space & Security will be subject to fines amounting to twice the value of its arms sales to China's Taiwan region. The company must pay the penalties within 15 days or face additional sanctions, including a further raise of the fines, according to the ministry.

After China placed US defense contractors Lockheed Martin Corp and Raytheon Missiles & Defense on its unreliable entities list in February 2023, the Chinese government found that the US company Caplugs evaded regulations prescribed under the unreliable entities list by transferring products purchased from China to companies on China's unreliable entities list.

Caplugs has been urged to take immediate measures to prevent the

transfer of goods, technologies and services imported from China to companies on the unreliable entities list and to provide relevant evidence of compliance.

Failure to do so will prompt Chinese authorities to enforce actions in accordance with applicable laws and regulations, said the ministry.

Gao Lingyun, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics, said that without proper order, significant disruptions can occur in the global market. The unreliable entities list can effectively deter further violations of international economic and trade rules and the multilateral trading system.

By penalizing rule breakers, a fair trading order among businesses can be established and a trustworthy business environment can be preserved for the world, Gao added.

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Subscription: 212-537-8899

Advertising: 212-537-8816

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

## CHINA

# Additional points policy gets tougher

Stricter requirements make it harder for students to get bonus marks on *gaokao*

By ZHAO YIMENG  
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The policy of giving additional points to students from minority ethnic groups during *gaokao*, the national college entrance exams, has been either canceled or adjusted by provinces in recent years to promote exam equality and more precise protection for candidates in remote areas, experts said.

Chen Zhiwen, a member of the China Society of Education Development Strategy, said the stricter requirements put in place for minority students seeking to take advantage of the policy is the result of the improving education situations of such students and efforts to prevent potential cheating in the admissions process.

Earlier this month, the Henan provincial government released its latest policy regarding the awarding of additional scores during this year's *gaokao*, stipulating that candidates from

to receive them, the notice said. "The educational rights of ethnic students are still being protected, but in a more targeted and precise way," Chen said.

Students who take the *gaokao* are given the option of taking liberal arts exams or science exams, depending on what major they intend to pursue.

In 2009, He Chuanyang, the top *gaokao* scorer in liberal arts in Chongqing, was reported for falsely claiming to be a member of an ethnic minority group, and his admission to Peking University was rescinded.

It turned out that He's father, concerned that his child might have a disadvantage due to being a member of the Han majority ethnic group, lied about He's ethnic identity so that the young man would receive bonus points, even though He would still have been the top scorer without them.

A similar incident that occurred in Guizhou in 2018 appeared to spark efforts to adjust the additional points policy, Chen said.

The top three *gaokao* scorers in liberal arts in Guizhou that year were all Han students, but they almost missed an opportunity to attend Peking University because a group of students from other ethnic groups received 20-point bonuses, giving them higher marks than the Han students.

"Since then, the policy has been comprehensively adjusted. After a two-year transition period, the ethnic bonus points are being managed more accurately," Chen said.

The requirements to qualify for the ethnic bonus points have become increasingly stringent, with eligibility limited to certain regions, including pastoral areas where candidates have studied continuously for three years.

"Those who grew up in urban areas are basically ineligible," he said.

The magnitude of additional points has been greatly reduced. The most anyone can receive is 10 points, and more commonly 5 points or even 3 points depending on the region.

"After 2026, ethnic minority candidates in many regions will no longer receive bonus points," he added.

Zhang Mou, an official with the National Ethnic Affairs Commission, said during a news conference in 2022 that the bonus points for ethnic minority students were initially intended to help those from less-developed regions gain better access to educational opportunities.

One of the reasons for adjusting this policy is that basic education in China has become more balanced, and the educational resources available to ethnic minority students are continuously improving, he said.

The educational rights of ethnic students are still being protected, but in a more targeted and precise way."

Chen Zhiwen, member of the China Society of Education Development Strategy

minority ethnic groups will not receive such points.

Meanwhile, groups such as children of martyrs, self-employed veterans and returned overseas Chinese may still qualify for the additional points, which range from 5 to 20.

The provinces of Fujian, Guizhou and Hunan have also gradually adjusted their version of the policy for minority students in recent years.

Fujian reduced additional points granted from 10 to 5 in 2021 and narrowed qualified candidates to those in remote villages, mountains or islands. The province will cancel its policy starting with the 2026 *gaokao*, according to a notice released in 2020.

The Inner Mongolia autonomous region has divided its 103 county-level regions into two categories and will implement more precise policies for the areas, according to a 2021 notice.

Minority students from the 36 Category A regions, mainly border and pastoral areas, will keep receiving 5 additional points after 2026, while *gaokao* candidates from the remaining Category B regions will no longer be qualified

## Bye bye, bridge



Kejiadun Bridge on the Wuhan-Huangshi Highway in Ezhou, Hubei province, which had been in service for 33 years, is demolished through controlled explosion on Sunday, giving way to the construction of a bigger bridge to accommodate increasing traffic demand. KE HAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Wedding on water



Witnessed by families and bystanders, pairs of newlyweds participate in a Chinese traditional wedding ceremony on dragon boats in Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, on Monday. A commemorative wedding, jointly organized by the Civil Affairs Bureau of Wenzhou and the Ou Hai district government in Wenzhou, attracted six pairs to experience the unique wedding custom in Ou Hai. ZHENG PENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Blood donation drive in Wuhan is proof that 'love knows no borders'

By LIU KUN in Wuhan  
and ZHENG CAIXIONG

A voluntary blood donation drive organized by foreign students at Central China Normal University earlier this month has received widespread praise from other students and teachers at the university as well as the general public in Wuhan, Hubei province.

A total of 150 people successfully donated 41,200 milliliters of blood during the event. It not only attracted international students at Central China Normal University, but also foreign students from 14 other universities in the city.

It was the 10th voluntary blood donation drive that international students have organized on the campus since 2013.

In previous years, the foreign students also spread their love to local communities where they organized activities such as volunteer teaching at local schools, visiting lonely senior residents, and accompanying and encouraging children with leukemia, said Chen Nan, a teacher from the university.

"The foreign students at the university have demonstrated the spirit that 'love knows no borders' through their selfless actions, and they have played an exemplary role among local teachers and students," he said.

Lei Feng, a People's Liberation Army soldier known for his good deeds, is a household name and cultural icon in China symbolizing selflessness, modesty and dedication.

Deih Sedem Akorkor from Ghana said donating blood can help save lives, and more people should be encouraged to donate.

Akorkor, an organizer of the event, joined the "Yang Lei Feng" volunteer service team in 2012, and has donated blood nine times.

With some of her team members, she visited a local blood center and learned more about blood donations to gain a deeper understanding before she decided to organize the campus blood drive last month.

"Although we come from different races and speak different languages, our blood is all red, and our enthusiasm for volunteering and

public welfare is the same," she said.

Nan Wint Phoo Thwe from Myanmar said, "This is a big family with love, where everyone comes together through dedication and gains a better understanding of China, especially the spirit of Lei Feng."

She said she wanted to promote the spirit of Lei Feng in her own way. It was the eighth time she had donated blood in China.

"I really like China, and the country has become my second hometown," said Ozrokova Irina, a Russian who donated blood for the first time. She expressed her love for China in fluent Chinese to local media.

Irina said she has also received a lot of help from people in China, and therefore donating her blood is also a love reward.

"I will encourage more people to donate blood when I have the opportunity, as helping others is a very happy thing," she added.

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## Initiative aids student entrepreneurs

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou  
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A national college student micro-entrepreneurship initiative, which has funded dozens of projects over the past 10 years, gave Zhang Xueying's business a major boost, and more young people are expected to take advantage of the program this year.

"When we started the project several years ago, there was only an idea to develop products, without considering how the product would become marketable," said Zhang, then a college student.

After receiving financial support in 2018, Zhang — co-founder of Shenzhen Starseek Technology Co, which utilizes digital technology to create consumer and urban cultural tourism scene designs — was able to refine her business model and expand it globally.

Over the years, 470 projects created by college students have received funding since the micro-entrepreneurship action plan, organized by the KAB Club (China), was launched in 2014.

This year alone, a total of 1.2 million yuan (\$166,000) was awarded to 50 student startup projects out of 1,000 submitted by students from 262 universities, according to figures announced at an event on Thursday at South China University of Technology in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province.

The event, organized by KAB Club (China), China Youth Daily and GF Securities Social Charity Foundation, was held to publicize

"When we started the project several years ago, there was only an idea to develop products, without considering how the product would become marketable."

Zhang Xueying, co-founder of a company in Shenzhen who received help from the program

the results of the micro-entrepreneurship initiative and promote small student businesses in the fields of scientific and technological innovation, rural vitalization and sustainable development.

Of the projects awarded funding, four are from universities based in Guangdong, an economic powerhouse in South China.

Through activities such as project solicitation, micro-entrepreneurship lectures and project exhibitions, the initiative has helped build a platform for students to connect with venture capital institutions, conduct roadshows and showcase their projects, according to the event's organizers.

The initiative has laid the foundation for the establishment of a college student micro-entrepreneurship ecosystem that encompasses creative incubation, project guidance and investment connections, the organizers said.

The program has achieved significant success in fostering a vibrant culture of innovation and entrepreneurship on campuses, promoting practical entrepreneurship experiences among students and facilitating collaborative innovation between academia and industry, according to Dong Shi, editor-in-chief of China Youth Daily.

"We have also hosted a series of international youth exchange activities, actively promoting China's important achievements in innovation and entrepreneurship to the international community," Dong said.

Zhou Xitai, director of GF Securities Social Charity Foundation, said, "We will continue to leverage capital market resources to create investor matching platforms for student startups."

According to a report on micro-entrepreneurship action projects that was released during the event, most of the projects that received funding were engaged in technological innovation.

"Technological products and services were most notable among all the projects, reflecting the proactive response of college student entrepreneurial teams to the national call for developing new quality productive forces," said Ge Jianxin, a professor from Central University of Finance and Economics.

Additionally, actively promoting comprehensive rural vitalization and developing the agricultural and green economy are also key areas of focus for student innovation and entrepreneurship, according to the report.

## 'Panda dogs' cause a stir at Jiangsu zoo

By CANG WEI in Nanjing  
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Two small dogs resembling pandas at a zoo in Taizhou, Jiangsu province, have sparked discussions among Chinese netizens recently about animal abuse and consumer fraud.

A video captured by a netizen in early May showed the two "panda dogs". They had fur patterns resembling that of pandas, but they were clearly dogs.

An official description of the animals at the zoo states that "panda dogs" are not a specific purebred, but rather pet dogs with panda-like appearances, characterized by white fur with black patches around the eyes and ears, mimicking giant pandas' facial features.

Zoo employee Liu Qiuming said that the "panda dogs" are dyed Chow Chows.

"The concept of dyeing dogs to resemble pandas originated online and was aimed to enhance the zoo's appeal," he said. "This also serves as a way to make up for Taizhou Zoo's inability to bring in giant pandas due to the strict requirements of introducing them. In China, zoos lacking the necessary qualifications cannot introduce giant pandas."

The Market Supervision Bureau of Taizhou Medical High-tech Zone, where the zoo is located, said that the zoo does not claim that the "panda dogs" are actual pandas, so they are not engaging in false advertising.

The animals have been named Xiao Tangbao, or "Little Soup Dumpling", and Xiao Gansi, or "Little Shredded Bean Curd". They were brought from Taizhou Cute Pet Zoo.

Mao Hongjun, one of the operators of Taizhou Cute Pet Zoo, said that the staff uses dye made from natural ingredients on the Chow Chows that will not harm their health.

"The Chow Chow is chubby and has good temperament when it is young," he said. "We select Chow Chows with milk-white fur resembling that of a panda and dye them when they are young to help them adapt gradually."

He explained that turning a Chow Chow into a panda dog takes about two to three hours, and the dye has good color retention, so bathing the dogs does not cause the color to fade.

"However, the fur will grow out, requiring a touch-up dye every three to four months," he admitted.



A "panda dog" in Taizhou Zoo in Jiangsu. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## CHINA

By LI LEI  
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The concept of travel and experiencing new places is often neglected when it comes to the visually impaired, but a kindhearted organization from Shenyang in Liaoning province is doing just that — organizing holidays for the blind and partially sighted.

On a dry January day in Bangkok, a group of 19 Chinese tourists, most of whom were blind, were led by guides through the bustling streets of the Thai capital.

The guides described the scenes around them, made sure they were safe and enabled them to take in the exotic sounds, smells and tastes.

Zhang Yu is the director of Haiman Smart Eldercare Center, which organized the tour in partnership with the China Foundation for Disabled Persons.

The altruistic 43-year-old developed an interest in the plight of the blind and partially sighted community in 2017, after a close friend's accident that resulted in blindness, and her subsequent struggle to come to terms with it.

China has 17.3 million blind or visually impaired people, and a growing number of them are venturing out to travel as their incomes improve and barrier-free accessibility in public spaces continues to grow, according to Zhang.

She said a whole market for non-profits and commercial travel agencies has sprung up, and travel products are being rolled out to meet the needs of the blind and partially sighted.

As a longtime volunteer, Zhang has learned the challenges faced by those with visual disabilities, especially the elderly.

Many standard nursing homes don't accept blind residents, and even if they do, the costs are prohibitive and blind residents are often confined to solitary rooms for safety reasons.

This prompted Zhang and others to establish an elderly care service for the blind in 2019. In its short history, Haiman Smart Eldercare Center has expanded to provide care for 40 people with visual impairment, and it has even started organizing group tours.

"Blind people have a strong desire to travel," she said, adding that most mainstream tour groups do not accept those with visual impairment, or if they do they charge as much as twice the normal price.

In some of China's wealthier coastal regions, there have been charity programs that pair blind travelers with sighted ones. The blind travelers pay half of the sighted companions' expenses in exchange for free guiding services. While being much cheaper, the itineraries are still not tailored to the specific needs of blind travelers.

This is where Haiman has stepped in. It designs its trips based on blind people's interests, with each guide shared by two blind travelers, resulting in a travel cost only a third more expensive than the standard cost.

Starting in the suburbs of Shenyang and neighboring provinces, Haiman has expanded its footprint as far as Hainan, an island province thousands of kilometers away.

Encouraged by their early success in domestic travel, Zhang proposed a trip to Thailand.

Although the journey went smoothly overall, there were some challenges, particularly during their visit to the Chao Phraya River in Bangkok, where they had to board a narrow canoe.

The boat had no steps, so each person first had to step onto a wobbly stool about 80 centimeters tall, and



Left: Some visually impaired people, along with volunteers from the charity group Huoshen Nuanxin, tour Lu Xun Park in Shanghai in October 2020. YANG JIANZHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY Right: Various fruits are served to visually impaired people participating in a tour of Bangkok, Thailand, in January. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



## Specialized travel tours offered for visually impaired

Shenyang elderly care center fulfilling more than just basic needs for people with disabilities



A visually impaired tourist feels a sculpture with the help of a volunteer at Lu Xun Park in Shanghai in October 2020. YANG JIANZHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

climb another 80-centimeter gap to reach the boat. Zhang felt nervous while assisting the blind travelers. Since blind individuals rely on their hearing, they can get confused when too many people talk at once. Instead, guides tapped their legs to signal which one to lift.

Eventually, everyone managed to board the boat safely.

### Eye injury

Among those on the trip to Thailand was 53-year-old Tang Xiantao.

As Tang is not fully blind — he can discern rough outlines and colors — he was able to chip in and sometimes help the guides during their tour.

While usually one guide was assigned to every two visitors, one volunteer ended up overseeing four

people one day. "The guide led the way, with the blind travelers following behind in a slow-moving 'train', their hands resting on each other's shoulders," Tang recalled.

He invited two blind companions to lean on him as the group cautiously navigated a bustling Bangkok street. "I wasn't certain how the locals viewed us, but we must have appeared somewhat peculiar to them."

Tang's life took a drastic turn in 2013 after a car accident left him visually impaired, forcing him to quit his well-paid job at a tech company in Beijing. For five years, he stayed primarily at home while seeking various treatments, only to realize his eyesight wouldn't return.

After the eye injury, everything felt unfamiliar. "I used to drive per-

fectly, but then suddenly I feared even walking," he said.

During one rare outing to a park in Beijing with his wife and daughter, Tang almost drowned. While his sighted companions climbed rocks next to a pond, Tang opted to stay below. However, the blending hues of the water and ground caused a disorienting effect, and he tumbled into the pond.

This added to a growing fear of venturing outdoors, which gradually took a toll on his health, causing significant weight gain.

A change came in 2019 when Tang's pride was stung by his young daughter's innocent query: "Why doesn't papa need to go to work?"

"I didn't want her to think less of me or be negatively impacted by my situa-

tion," he said. The father then embarked on a journey of self-improvement. He started running at the Olympic Forest Park, a habit he continues today. He also started writing and offering voluntary services for the blind. As a result, he shed 25 kilograms and has become more receptive to outings and social engagements.

He traveled to Tianjin and the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, and even to Russia on family vacations — all accompanied by his wife. But he'd never traveled without her after his injury. That is, until the trip to Thailand with Haiman Smart Eldercare Center.

### Goodwill

Guide Nie Zhongyuan was assigned the additional task of doc-

umenting the entire trip to Thailand to capture memories and for marketing purposes. He arrived in Bangkok a day ahead, anxiously awaiting the arrival of the blind tourists flying in from various parts of China.

"The wait was excruciating, and I was consumed with worry about the potential challenges our blind friends might encounter during the journey, especially considering the significant temperature difference between China and Thailand," he said.

To Nie's surprise, upon the arrival of the first group at the hotel, they immediately began sharing jokes, lifting everyone's spirits.

Nie quickly formed a strong bond with Tian Zheng, a blind massage therapist from Tianjin, feeling a deep connection as if they had known each other for years.

Throughout their travels, the group explored attractions like the Golden Buddha at Wat Pho along the Chao Phraya River, the majestic Grand Palace, and Pattaya Beach. Despite the guides' efforts to describe the sights to the blind visitors, they encountered some language limitations.

"However, our blind friends were filled with joy," Nie recalled.

Both locals and foreign visitors generously offered assistance, guidance, photo opportunities and engaged in conversations about the living conditions of disabled individuals in China.

"I felt a sense of genuine pride, realizing that many of our initial concerns were unfounded," he said.

The majority of the visually impaired on the tour were massage therapists, a prevalent occupation for the blind in China. Over the years, the China Association of Persons with Visual Disabilities and authorities have worked to establish a thriving industry for vision-impaired individuals through vocational training and financial aid, particularly in the field of massage.

Unlike many disabled communities worldwide who depend on state benefits, blind individuals in China earn their livelihood through their own skills, Nie stressed.

Massage has been instrumental in helping numerous blind individuals break free from poverty and attain greater social recognition.

"Traveling is a desire they harbor but find challenging to realize given the numerous obstacles they encounter in transportation and communication," Nie added.

Tian Zheng, the massage therapist, was born with glaucoma. Over time, he gradually lost his sight and eventually became fully blind.

Like many visually impaired people, Tian was educated in special schools to learn massage techniques and later pursued higher education in traditional Chinese medicine.

After graduating in 2002, he established himself as a professional therapist in his hometown. At 45 years old, Tian remains unmarried and lives with his mother, who has Alzheimer's disease.

Having previously traveled with Haiman to Hainan and being satisfied with the service, Tian decided to join the trip to Thailand. To make the journey possible, he sought assistance from his sister to care for their mother and paid 5,000 yuan for the trip, during which he got to experience Thai massage.

"It was a reasonable price," he said. "I believe I deserve this vacation to treat myself."

Yan Zhongqian contributed to this story.

## Forbidden City endeavors to improve accessibility

By LI LEI

On May 12, Guo Yuanyuan finally had the chance to set foot in the Forbidden City.

Despite growing up in Beijing, this UNESCO World Heritage Site overseen by the Palace Museum had always felt out of reach to the 39-year-old paralyzed from the waist down due to a congenital condition.

Invited to an exhibition celebrating female artists with disabilities at the museum, Guo finally mustered up the courage to navigate the bustling tourist area, only to encounter hidden accessibility challenges within its grand walls. The ramps meant for disabled visitors became a point of concern for her.

"The national standard specifies a 1:12 slope ratio for ramps," she

said. "But many obviously don't meet the requirement."

Guo said steep inclines and rough surfaces on the ramps could potentially tip over wheelchairs, overshadowing what should have been a moment of awe and wonder in one of the world's most popular tourist destinations.

Fortunately, with the help of volunteers present that day, Guo faced no danger or mobility hindrances due to the ramp.

She said while the design flaws may not be intentional, they reflect a broader lack of understanding of the genuine needs of individuals with disabilities, despite legislative efforts in recent years to shore up accessible features in public spaces such as restrooms, railway stations and hospitals.

She added that accessible features should go beyond symbolic

gestures. Replacing the ramps with longer ones featuring gentler slopes could significantly enhance the travel experience for disabled visitors.

Adding modern accessibility features to historical sites can be challenging due to architectural and structural constraints.

The Palace Museum has worked to balance the need for accessibility with preserving the site's original design and character.

On the day of Guo's visit, the museum made a commitment to improve visitor accessibility and showcase cultural items created by artists with disabilities.

The museum announced plans to collaborate with the China Disabled Persons' Federation to deploy these reforms, with an agreement signing ceremony held at the museum.

Speaking at the event, Wang Xudong, a senior Party official with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and director of the museum, said the museum has a duty to enhance services for individuals with disabilities and encourage their involvement in China's cultural heritage.

He said the museum has in the past rolled out sign language services for tourists and pledged to create a more inclusive environment, enhance experiences for disabled visitors, and organize cultural events to promote their engagement with traditional culture.

Despite advancements in public space accessibility and an increase in disabled travelers due to legislative efforts and higher incomes, challenges persist.

Guo highlighted air travel as an example.



Guo Yuanyuan participates in an exhibition celebrating female artists with disabilities at the Palace Museum in Beijing earlier this month. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Wheelchairs often need to be checked in for flights, risking damage due to rough handling during the process.

"Most of the time, we can communicate with the airport to have our

wheelchairs transported along with carry-on luggage. However, there are also times when, due to insufficient space in the luggage compartment, our wheelchairs have to be checked in," she said.

## WORLD

# Chinese e-tailer encounters US political scrutiny

Fast-fashion company weighs options as resistance hinders New York listing

By HENG WEILI in New York  
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Shein, which is preparing for an initial public offering, has joined TikTok as another company connected to China having to deal with political resistance in the United States.

In November, the fast-fashion e-commerce company filed paperwork confidentially with the US Securities and Exchange Commission for a New York IPO, but it has yet to be approved.

In an interview with the Financial Times published on Thursday, Shein Executive Chairman Donald Tang said progress has been made on changing the perception of Shein in the US, but so far it has not been enough to convince US lawmakers.

That has led Shein, valued at \$66 billion in May last year by PitchBook, to formulate a backup plan to list on the London Stock Exchange.

While Tang has not confirmed if the IPO is headed to London, several people familiar with the company said it was prioritizing the IPO in the United Kingdom, the FT reported.

Tang, however, said, "No decision has been made."

Shein prefers New York as its listing venue and plans to keep its application current, in case there is a change in the stance of US regulators, a source told Reuters. It may also pursue a secondary listing in New York following the potential London IPO when it deems the political climate to be more favorable, the source said.

David Swartz, senior equity analyst at Morningstar, said in a report last week: "Shein would be a large IPO in the apparel industry. There aren't that many apparel companies in the world with valuations that large. Yet Shein is really stuck in the middle of greater geopolitical forces."

Kathleen Brooks, research director at XTB UK, told Morningstar: "Obviously, it is quite good for the London market regardless of what you think about fast fashion. It is a giant company, and it could be one of the largest stocks if it's on the FTSE 100."

Shein, which sells its products in more than 150 countries, was founded in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, in 2008, by entrepreneur Sky "Chris" Yu. Although it moved its headquarters to Singapore in 2022, its supply chain

and warehouses are based in China, particularly in the greater Guangzhou area of Guangdong province.

Shein does not own or operate any manufacturing facilities, relying instead on about 5,400 third-party contract manufacturers, mainly in China.

TikTok, the popular social media app owned by China's ByteDance, has faced repeated political efforts to limit its operation at state and federal levels in the US. That pressure eventually resulted in legislation that gives TikTok until January to either find a buyer or face a US ban.

Shein told fashion publication Women's Wear Daily that it is also considering Mexico as a manufacturing hub, which, under the Mexico-US free trade agreement, would allow goods to be sent duty-free into the US.

## Repeated rejection

In the US, Shein has attempted to join the National Retail Foundation, or NRF, the industry's largest and most influential trade association, but has been repeatedly rejected, CNBC reported, citing people familiar with the matter.

Being a member of the NRF "definitely would put a little bit more pressure on the politicians to accept the company", John Zhang, a Wharton School professor and founding director of the Penn Wharton China Center, told CNBC.

"Simply because the peers recognize the company and they think that it is a worthy competitor... That would definitely create a little bit more legitimacy," he said.

"Most importantly, I think that (NRF membership) really creates the perception among the investors that this is just one of the normal retailers."

Temu, another highly successful Chinese fast fashion retailer, ran catchy, pricey commercials during the NFL Super Bowl broadcast in February, which CNN estimated cost \$15 million.

Shein and Temu have also faced criticism from US lawmakers who said the online retailers take advantage of the "de minimis" rule, which exempts shipments valued below \$800 from US customs inspection and taxes, by shipping parcels to the US directly from Chinese ports.

Agencies contributed to this story.



People shop at Shein's pop-up store in Ottawa, Canada, on Saturday. BLAIR GABLE / REUTERS



Indians display indelible ink marks on their fingers after casting their votes in Ayodhya on Monday. The mark is a vital tool to prevent multiple voting, and typically lasts for several days. RAJESH KUMAR SINGH / AP

## Indians cast ballots in 5th phase of election

AYODHYA, India — Millions of Indians across 49 constituencies began casting ballots on Monday as the country's six-week-long election enters its final stages with voting also being held in northern Ayodhya city, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi opened a controversial Hindu temple on the site of a razed mosque.

Monday's polling in the fifth round of multiphase national elections across six states and two union territories is crucial for Modi's ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, as it includes some of its strongholds in states such as Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

The polls in Uttar Pradesh's Ayodhya are seen as a litmus test for Modi's Hindu-first politics, as he hailed the opening of the Ram temple as his government's crowning achievement.

The staggered election will run until June 1 and nearly 970 million eligible voters, or more than 10 percent of the world's population, will elect 543 members to the lower house of parliament for five years.

Modi this year opened the Hindu temple built on the grounds of a centuries-old mosque razed by Hindu mobs in 1992. The temple was

built at an estimated cost of \$217 million and its opening was seen as a political triumph for the populist leader. The opening of the temple also fulfilled a long-standing demand of the majority Hindus.

Modi and his party, who have mixed religion and politics, hope that Hindu sentiment and fervor over the opening of the temple will help catapult the prime minister to a record third successive term. But experts say the issue may not be enough to rally the region's Hindu majority toward the BJP, particularly at a time when many Indians say they are affected by rising unemployment and inflation.

## 'Glaring problems'

"Issues like unemployment, inflation, lack of security and the government's attempts to muzzle dissent are glaring problems that the BJP has no answers to," said Amarnath Agarwal, a political analyst.

Excitement over the Hindu temple may not have translated into a significant political issue for the ruling party, Agarwal said, and it is "evident from the lack of interest among voters, reflected in a notably low turnout."

With two more phases of polling left, overall voter turnout has been lower than in previous elections.

In Ayodhya, where the temperature is expected to touch 40 C, voters lined up at polling stations early in the morning to cast their ballots.

Sudha Pandey, a teacher, said she is not sure whether the opening of the temple will benefit Modi's party but said the Hindu majority is extremely happy because of it.

"Ram temple is a matter of our faith. Our faith has been emboldened by it," she said.

Shachindra Sharma, who voted on Monday, said while the temple was a matter of faith for many Hindus like him, he would vote for a party that upholds constitutional values.

"Why should the Ram temple be a guiding factor for voters? Lord Ram is a matter of faith, while voting is a democratic process to elect a government. Is there any guarantee that a party advocating for the Ram temple will provide security and lead the country toward progress?" Sharma said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Judge blocks Biden-backed gun rule

BOSTON — A federal judge on Sunday blocked the Joe Biden administration from fully implementing a new rule that would require gun dealers to obtain licenses and conduct background checks when selling firearms at gun shows and online.

US District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk in Amarillo temporarily restrained the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' rule from being enforced in Republican-led Texas or against members of several gun rights groups.

"I am relieved that we were able to secure a restraining order that will prevent this illegal rule from taking effect," Texas Attorney General Paxton, a Republican, said in a statement.

The US Department of Justice, which is defending the rule in court, did not respond to a request for comment.

Kacsmaryk, an appointee of Republican former president Donald Trump, issued his ruling ahead of the rule taking effect on Monday in response to a lawsuit by

Texas, gun rights advocates and three other Republican-led states.

The lawsuit challenged a rule finalized last month that Biden's administration said would affect more than 23,000 unlicensed dealers and tens of thousands of gun sales annually by closing the "gun show loophole."

Under the rule, those selling weapons at gun shows, other venues and over the internet are subject to the same requirements as gun stores to check the backgrounds of potential buyers.

Kacsmaryk, in his ruling, agreed with the plaintiffs that the rule's provisions contradicted the text of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, a 2022 law that broadened the category of gun sellers required to obtain licenses.

He faulted the rule for not allowing people who buy or sell firearms for personal protection from being considered eligible for a statutory exemption to the licensing requirement for people who buy or sell guns for a "personal collection."

Kacsmaryk said that resulted in "the absurdity that the statute's

safe harbor provision provides no safe harbor at all for the majority of gun owners."

Gun rights groups whose members are covered by Kacsmaryk's order include the Gun Owners of America, which boasts 2 million members.

The judge, though, found Louisiana, Mississippi and Utah failed to establish they had standing to challenge the rule and he declined to block its enforcement in their jurisdictions. His order remains in effect until June 2 pending further litigation.

Kacsmaryk is the lone active judge in Amarillo, helping make his courthouse a favored venue for conservative litigants challenging federal government policies during Biden's administration.

He has ruled frequently in his favor, most prominently last year when Kacsmaryk suspended approval of the abortion pill mifepristone. The US Supreme Court has allowed the pill to remain on the market while it considers the case.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Nepal PM survives 4th vote of confidence

By XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong  
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Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal again secured a vote of confidence from the lower house of parliament on Monday, the fourth in 18 months since he took office, local media reported.

In the 275-member House of Representatives, Dahal won 157 votes in favor, against the 138 required. A total of 158 lawmakers took part in the voting process, the Kathmandu-based myRepublica news site reported.

The vote took place amid demands by the main opposition Nepali Congress for an investigation into alleged fund misappropriation involving Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane, who has denied the charges.

Opposition lawmakers are demanding that the minister resign and have been protesting for days inside the lower house, shouting slogans and trying to block the vote of confidence on Monday.

The budget session commenced on May 10, but Nepali Congress had been obstructing it. The entire opposition — except one member — did not participate in Monday's voting.

"There is no doubt that my government will survive the floor test," Dahal was quoted by the Press Trust of India as saying on Saturday in the capital Kathmandu. "The differences between the ruling alliance and opposition parties will be sorted out through dialogue."

## Withdrawing support

On May 13, Janata Samajbadi Party Nepal quit the coalition government, one week after it split. JSPN said it was because of the changed political context.

According to a constitutional provision, a vote of confidence must be taken within 30 days after a coalition partner withdraws its support to the government.

Hours after JSPN quit, a splinter party joined the coalition government. Dahal introduced to his cabinet two ministers from the Janata Samajbadi Party, which split from JSPN with seven lawmakers.

The prime minister belongs to the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Center), which is the third-largest party in the House of Representatives.

Dahal earlier sought a vote of confidence for the third time on March 13, after Nepali Congress withdrew its support. Previously, he took a confidence vote on March 20 last year, and for the first time on Jan 10 the same year.

Dahal took office as the head of a coalition government in December 2022 after no single party won a majority in the lower house of parliament in the general election. He has had different coalition partners ever since.

A new coalition government was formed by Dahal in early March after breaking up with Nepali Congress and rejoining hands with the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist).

Xinhua and agencies contributed to this story.

## US sends condolences on death of Iran's president in crash

By MINLUZHANG in New York  
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The United States — one of Iran's longtime foes — late Monday expressed its "official condolences" for the death of the Iranian president and other officials; Israel, also a longtime adversary, didn't issue a statement.

"The United States expresses its official condolences for the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian, and other members of their delegation in a helicopter crash in northwest Iran," Matthew Miller, US State Department spokesperson said in a statement.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told reporters Monday that "the United States had no part to play" in the crash and that the Pentagon had no insight into the cause. "I can't speculate on what may have been the cause," he told reporters.

Former Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Monday blamed the US for the crash.

In an interview, Zarif said that the unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States compromise Iran's access to modern aviation facilities and the civil aviation industry.

"One of the culprits behind yesterday's tragedy is the United States, because of its sanctions that bar Iran from procuring essential aviation

“One of the culprits behind yesterday's tragedy is the United States, because of its sanctions that bar Iran from procuring essential aviation parts.”

Mohammad Javad Zarif, former Iranian foreign minister

parts," Zarif said in the interview. He said the US has banned the sale of spare parts for planes in Iran.

"This will be listed on the blacklist of US crimes against the Iranian people," Zarif said, the Daily Sabah in Turkey reported.

All eight passengers died in the crash involving a US-designed Bell 212 helicopter.

First developed in the late 1960s for the Canadian military and launched in 1971, the helicopter was purchased by Iran in the early 2000s, according to the IRNA news agency in Iran.

Currently, there are 15 Bell 212 helicopters registered in Iran, each averaging 35 years old. The helicopters or either in active use or stored, according to aviation data firm Cirium, The Associated

Press reported.

Following the first US sanctions on Iran in 1979, Iran's aviation industry suffered due to restrictions on importing new aircraft to the country, leading to an increase in deadly aviation accidents from the 1980s through the early 2000s, according to the data analyzed by Al Jazeera.

By April 2019, nearly half of Iran's total of 300 aircraft were grounded, awaiting replacement parts, with only 156 planes in operation across 23 Iranian airlines, according to data from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Al Jazeera reported.

The United Nations held a

moment of silence for Raisi at Monday's Security Council meeting at the request of Russia, China and Algeria.

United States Deputy Ambassador to the UN Robert Wood participated in the moment of silence.

Israeli UN Ambassador Gilad Erdan called the moment of silence in memory of Raisi a "disgrace".

UN Secretary-General António Guterres is "saddened by the death" of Raisi and other Iranian officials, said his spokesman, Stéphane Dujarric. "The secretary-general expresses his sincere condolences to the families of the deceased and to the government and people of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

# WORLD

**Editor's note:** Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian died in a helicopter crash in the country's mountainous province of East Azerbaijan. China Daily looks at the transition process, as well as the condolences extended by leaders from across the globe.



## World leaders extend condolences

Nation mourns as Iran's president, FM and accompanying members killed in helicopter crash

The helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi takes off at the Iranian border with Azerbaijan after Raisi and his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev inaugurated a dam on Sunday. ALI HAMED HAGHDUST VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

TEHERAN — World leaders have extended condolences to Iran as the country on Monday mourns President Ebrahim Raisi's death in a helicopter crash.

The crash occurred on Sunday in Varzaqan County. The helicopter carrying Raisi was forced into a hard landing while navigating mountain terrain in heavy fog.

Raisi, along with his accompanying team on board three helicopters, was on his way from Khoda Afarin County — where he had attended the inauguration ceremony of a dam along with his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev earlier in the day — to the provincial capital Tabriz for the inauguration of a petrochemical complex.

The other members onboard Raisi's helicopter, including Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and Governor of East Azerbaijan Province Malek Rahmati, as well as the flight crew, also lost their lives.

Raisi's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei declared five days of mourning and assigned Vice-President Mohammad Mokhber, 68, to assume interim duties ahead of elections within 50 days.

Khamenei urged Iranians on Sunday to "not worry" about the leadership of the nation, saying "there will be no disruption in the country's work".

The veteran nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri was on Monday named



A resident reads a newspaper with a report on the crash of the Iranian president's helicopter in Teheran on Monday. ATTA KENARE / AFP

acting foreign minister to replace Amir-Abdollahian.

"We were very sad when we learned the news," said one Teheran resident Nabi Karam.

"Our president was a very good leader, may God bless him."

Iranian authorities first raised the alarm on Sunday afternoon when they lost contact with Raisi's helicopter as it flew through a fog-shrouded mountain area of the Jolfa region.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi at first spoke of a "hard landing" and urged citizens to ignore hostile foreign media channels and get their information "only from state television".

As the sun rose on Monday, rescue

crews said they had located the destroyed helicopter, with no survivors among the nine people on board. State television channel IRIB reported that the helicopter had "hit a mountain and disintegrated" on impact.

Raisi's Red Crescent chief Pirhossein Koolivand said its staff members were "transferring the bodies of the martyrs to Tabriz" and that "the search operations have come to an end".

Arhama Siddiqi, a research fellow at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad in Pakistan, told China Daily: "Under the late President Raisi, Iran has adeptly navigated complex global diplomacy and economic challenges, including sig-

nificant strides in its nuclear program and JCPOA negotiations."

She noted that Raisi's administration has not only made advancements in space technology, but "also capitalized on international sanctions to enhance domestic technologies in defense and nuclear sectors".

"We have also seen this period of strategic diplomatic and economic activity underscore how his foreign policy was premised on the belief that sustainable economic linkages are a precursor to regional development, growth and stability," she said.

### Help pouring in

Foreign countries have been closely following the incident. Expressions of concern and offers of help had quickly come from countries, including China, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Turkey, which offered their condolences.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday hailed Raisi as an "outstanding politician" and said his death was an "irreplaceable loss".

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said in a statement on Monday that he is deeply saddened by the sudden passing of Raisi.

US President Joe Biden was briefed about the search and the European Union activated its rapid response mapping service to aid in the search effort.

According to NBC News, US Sen-

ate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said the intelligence authorities have informed him there is "no evidence of foul play" in the helicopter crash.

"It was very bad, foggy weather, northwest Iran where the copter crashed. So it looks like an accident, but it's still being fully investigated," Schumer said.

Israel was not involved in the death of Raisi, an Israeli official told Reuters on Monday.

"It wasn't us," said the official who requested anonymity.

International organizations and other countries also expressed concern over the incident and readiness to provide help.

The Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Hissein Brahim Taha offered heartfelt condolences and sympathy to the government and people of Iran over the death of Raisi, Amir-Abdollahian and their accompanying delegation.

He "prayed to Allah to shower them with mercy and forgiveness, to admit them to paradise, and to grant their relatives the fortitude to bear the loss," according to a statement from the OIC.

Jan Yumul in Hong Kong and Jiang Xueqing in Tokyo contributed to this story.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## First VP appointed interim president

TEHERAN — Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Monday appointed the country's First Vice-President Mohammad Mokhber as interim president following the death of President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash.

Khamenei stressed that the first vice-president was duty-bound to, in cooperation with the parliament speaker and judiciary chief, make the arrangements for the election of the new president within 50 days.

Mokhber, 68, is expected to serve as caretaker president for some 50 days before mandatory presidential elections in Iran.

Khamenei made the announcement in a condolence message he shared for Raisi's death in the crash on Sunday.

Mokhber became first vice-president in 2021 when Raisi was elected president.

Mokhber had already begun receiving calls from officials and foreign governments in Raisi's absence, state media reported.

An emergency meeting of Iran's Cabinet was held. The Cabinet issued a statement afterward pledging it would follow Raisi's path and that "with the help of God and the people, there will be no problem with management of the country".

As interim president, Mokhber is part of a three-person council, along with the speaker of parliament and the head of the judiciary, that will organize a new presidential election within 50 days of the president's death.

Mokhber oversaw a bonyad, known in English as the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order, or EIKO, referring to the late supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Mokhber has been a member of Iran's Expediency Council since 2022, which advises the supreme leader, as well as settles disputes between parliament and the Guardian Council, Iran's constitutional watchdog that also oversees the country's elections.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Ebrahim Raisi, trusted teammate among the dead

TEHERAN — Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi assumed office in 2021, amid a period of challenges at home and abroad.

On Monday, the 63-year-old president was declared dead after his helicopter crashed a day earlier in a remote and fog-shrouded western mountain region while traveling back from East Azerbaijan Province where he had inaugurated a dam project. Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian was among those killed.

Always dressed in a black turban and religious robe, Raisi was elected to the presidency in June 2021 and sworn in as president in August that year.

Raisi's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had endorsed Raisi as the president of the Islamic republic.



Ebrahim Raisi

lic. Khamenei gave his official approval to Raisi at a ceremony broadcast live on state television.

He described Raisi as "a popular, pious person with a brilliant record of management", saying that the people's vote for Raisi is a sign of the

nation's determination to follow the path of justice, progress and freedom.

Raisi took the reins of a country in social and economic difficulties. He succeeded Hassan Rouhani, who signed the nuclear deal with world powers in 2015 that gave Iran relief from international sanctions.

In 2018, then-US president Donald Trump reneged on the deal that Tehran had made with the six powers and restored harsh US sanctions on Iran. Indirect talks between Tehran and US President Joe Biden's administration to revive the deal have stalled.

"Sanctions are the US' new way of war with the nations of the world," Raisi told the United Nations in September 2021.

"The policy of 'maximum oppression' is still on. We want nothing more

than what is rightfully ours."

Born in 1960 in the northeastern city of Mashhad, he is survived by his wife and two daughters.

Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian was also among those killed. He was 60.

Amir-Abdollahian became foreign minister under Raisi with his election in 2021. He oversaw the indirect talks with the US over the country's nuclear program.

He is survived by his wife and two children.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Chopper safety in focus

A Bell 212 helicopter carrying Iran's president and foreign minister crashed on Sunday, as it flew through mountains in heavy fog.

### Origin of helicopter

Bell Helicopter (now Bell Textron, a division of Textron Inc) developed the aircraft for the Canadian military in the late 1960s as an upgrade to the original UH-1 Iroquois.

The new design used two turbo-shaft engines instead of one, giving it greater carrying capacity. The helicopter was introduced in 1971 and quickly adopted by both the United States and Canada, according to US military training documents.

### Its uses

As a utility helicopter, the UH, in its military designation, represents those words.

The Bell 212 is meant to be adaptable to all sorts of situations, including carrying people, deploying aerial firefighting gear, ferrying cargo and mounting weapons.

Bell Helicopter advertises the latest version, the Subaru Bell 412EPX, for police use, medical transport, troop transport, energy industry and firefighting.

According to its type certification documents with the European Union Aviation Safety Agency, it can carry 15 people, including the crew.

### Organizations using it

Nonmilitary organizations that fly the Bell 212 include Japan's Coast Guard, law enforcement agencies and fire departments in the US, Thailand's national police, and many others.

It is not clear how many helicopters Iran's government operates, but its air force and navy have a total of 10, according to Flight-Global's 2024 World Air Forces directory.

### Incidents involving Bell 212

The most recent fatal crash of a Bell 212 was in September 2023, when a privately operated aircraft crashed off the coast of the United Arab Emirates, according to the Flight Safety Foundation, a non-profit organization focusing on aviation safety. The most recent Iranian crash of the type was in 2018, killing four people, according to the organization's database.

### Spare parts issue

Military analyst Cedric Leighton told CNN the difficulty in obtaining spare parts could have played a factor in the crash.

"In this particular case, I think this confluence of spare parts, because of the sanctions, plus the weather which was very bad over the last few days in this particular part of northwestern Iran," said Leighton, a retired US Air Force colonel.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Poor weather conditions add to difficulty in rescue

TEHERAN — On Monday, Iranian media outlets declared Ebrahim Raisi dead after his helicopter crashed.

This followed a report on Sunday from Iranian state television saying that a helicopter carrying Raisi had been in an accident in the East Azerbaijan Province amid poor weather conditions.

Early on Monday, Iran's Red Crescent chief Pirhossein Koolivand said rescue teams had located the helicop-

ter and were heading toward the site. Rescue teams fought rain, blizzards and difficult terrain through the night to reach the wreckage in the early hours of Monday.

Red Crescent rescue teams were seen on state TV on a steep slope as they attempted to approach the helicopter's location amid thick fog.

With the discovery of the crash site, no signs of life have been detected among the helicopter's passengers, Koolivand told state TV.

Earlier, the national broadcaster had stopped all regular programming to show prayers being held for Raisi across the country.

Video showed a rescue team, wearing bright jackets and head torches, huddled around a GPS device as they searched a pitch-black mountainside on foot.

Raisi's Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi described the accident as a "hard landing due to the weather conditions".

Raisi's convoy comprised three helicopters, including two that landed safely in Tabriz.

Several dozens of rescue teams were involved in the search, according to the Red Crescent, with IRNA saying search dogs and drones were also being used.

Military personnel along with the Revolutionary Guards and the police had also been sent to the area.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## BUSINESS

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# Risk appetite strengthens upbeat mood

SCI nears 3200 level as investors turn positive on bottoming out prospects

By SHI JING in Shanghai  
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Upbeat sentiment marks the A-share market as investors' risk appetite has further recovered amid the recently introduced stimulative policies and improving macroeconomic indicators, said experts.

On Monday, the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index added 0.54 percent to close at 3171.15 points, its highest level so far this year, driven by shares of precious metal companies that rose 7 percent on average and shares of nonferrous metal companies that climbed 4 percent on average, spurred by the rising prices of gold and silver in the global market.

The Shenzhen Component Index rose 0.43 percent and the technology-heavy ChiNext gained 0.59 percent.

Overall, trading was active on Monday, with the combined trading value on the Shanghai and Shenzhen exchanges jumping 12 percent from the previous trading day to 995.4 billion yuan (\$137.7 billion).

Qin Peijing, chief strategist at CITIC Securities, said that the prospect of China's economic fundamentals bottoming out has been further consolidated after the release of April economic data over the past few days. Combined with the supportive property policies, investors' positive outlook on China's economic growth in the second half of the year will be better grounded, pushing up the overall risk appetite in the A-share market, he said.

With fresh optimism sprouting, upward momentum in the A-share market is expected to continue. Investors should direct more attention to growth enterprises and companies showing lower volatility but providing higher dividends, Qin said.

The breezy sentiment in the A-share market found evidence in foreign capital inflows as well, said Qin.

Northbound capital from foreign investors buying A shares via the stock connect program linking the Shanghai, Shenzhen and Hong

Kong exchanges reported net inflows of 1.9 billion yuan over the past trading week, according to market tracker Wind Info. Overseas investors increased their exposure to 1,508 A share firms.

Net A share purchases by overseas investors reached 45.1 billion yuan in April.

Cheng Yu, head of research at Allianz Global Investors Fund Management Co Ltd, global asset manager Allianz Global Investors' wholly foreign-owned public fund management company in China, said the valuation of A shares is "extremely low" at present. The Chinese stock market is at a turning point when companies' improving profitability is driving the market up.

The third quarter may be an optimal time to increase exposure to A shares as China's economic recovery will be further consolidated and the US Federal Reserve is expected to start its interest rate cuts, he said.

But experts from China International Capital Corp Ltd highlighted that foreign investors' exposure to A shares is still at a low level. So more foreign capital inflows can be anticipated, forming another force driving up the A-share indexes.

Chen Guo, chief strategist at China Securities, said the lowered minimum down payment ratios for first and second homes nationwide, which were announced on Friday, have exceeded market expectations and kindled optimism in the A-share market.

But it should be noted that domestic demand still awaits a significant rebound while production has recovered. Investors can be cautiously optimistic about the A-share market performance in light of its marginally recovered supply-demand relationship. But aggressive investment is unwarranted in the short term, given the various uncertainties in the external market.

Opportunities may lie in A-share companies that benefited from improving exports, including engineering machinery and home appliance companies, he said.



An employee installs a solar panel circuit at a high-tech company in Suqian, Jiangsu province.

WANG LI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Exec: Solar firms can still thrive on global footprint even amid trade row

By ZHENG XIN  
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Chinese solar companies are capable of mitigating risks while maintaining their competitive edge in the international market amid an ongoing trade dispute, as they have been stepping up efforts to diversify their global operations in recent years, experts and business insiders said.

A recent decision by the United States to impose additional tariffs on Chinese solar cells, which is based more on political posturing than on economic issues, will have limited impact, as Chinese solar companies have significantly diversified their export market, establishing strong trade relationships with countries across Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America, an executive of a domestic solar company said.

While trade frictions are inevitable with varying development conditions across different regions and countries, Risen Energy has been expanding its production capacities abroad, bolstering its resilience against global market fluctuations while enhancing global competitiveness, said Leon Chuang, global marketing director of the photovoltaic manufacturer.

"Risen Energy places greater importance on the developmental significance brought about by globalization, setting up production facilities in other countries to circumvent US tariffs," he said.

By expanding its business across the globe, Risen Energy has been enhancing its international competitiveness. The first phase of the company's battery component project in Malaysia was successful

put into operation recently, while the company's solar panels are also exported to Mexico, Australia, Chile and Brazil.

Trina Solar Co Ltd, a Chinese solar panel giant, has also been actively advancing its globalization strategy to not only enhance its competitiveness overseas but also strengthen its ability to reduce risks abroad.

While companies cannot control the risks associated with foreign trade policies, those with comprehensive globalization strategies and local operational capabilities will always maintain a leading position in the same policy environment, it said.

An analyst said the diversification strategies of these companies underscore a broader trend among Chinese solar manufacturers, which are navigating the complexities of globalization to secure their positions in an increasingly competitive and volatile market.

The recent focus by the United States and Europe on the risks to other economies from China's alleged excess capacity is misguided and the criticism understates innovation by Chinese companies in key industries and overstates the importance of State support in driving their growth, said Lin Boqiang, the head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

The US is not a major export destination for Chinese solar products, and China has already begun to diversify its export markets, he said.

Last year, China's exports of photovoltaic cells and modules to the US amounted to \$3.35 million and \$13.15 million, respectively. These

two major solar products accounted for just 0.1 percent and 0.03 percent of China's total export of photovoltaic products, respectively, according to the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Machinery and Electronic Products.

The criticism reflects their concern that China's PV industry will soon dominate the global market, which sees significant advantage in technology, prices and services, thanks to years of large-scale development and technological iterations, said Lin.

According to Liu Yiyang, deputy secretary-general of the China Photovoltaic Industry Association, the diversified development of China's photovoltaic industry in the global industrial chain can help domestic solar companies better effectively cope with risks.

In the context of a global energy transition that boosts strong demand for solar products, China's photovoltaic products, with a strong price advantage, remains competitive on the global stage, he said.

According to Liu, the US market adds about 40 GW of new installed capacity every year, accounting for only less than 10 percent of the total global market, and the increased concerns over China's advancing solar capacity is due to the rapid growth of China's solar industry.

The advancement of China's solar sector is crucial for ensuring a stable supply of solar products to combat climate change globally, making solar power one of the most cost-effective energy sources for many countries and regions worldwide, he said.

## China-Russia Expo sees visitor surge

By ZHOU HUIYING  
and TIAN XUEFEI in Harbin

The ongoing 8th China-Russia Expo held in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, is attracting throngs of domestic and foreign companies seeking business opportunities.

More than 120 delegations from 44 countries and regions around the world — as well as over 2,000 representatives from various types of enterprises in China including State-owned enterprises, leading private firms and cross-border e-commerce chains — are participating in the event.

On Saturday, the first day the expo opened to the public, some 75,000 people were present, a significant increase compared to previous sessions.

With an area of 388,000 square meters, the expo is showcasing more than 5,000 products across 10 sectors in more than 20 categories, and has attracted enterprises from such fields as industry, agriculture, trade and logistics.

During the six-day event from Thursday to Tuesday, over 40 activities will be held to highlight local cooperation, economic and trade investment, sci-tech and education.

At the expo, Russian goods like chocolates and dairy products are highly favored by Chinese consumers.

Evgeny Bazhov, general manager of United Confectionery, is looking forward to achieving more trade and cooperation with Chinese enterprises at the expo.

"Our products are available in over 200 supermarkets in China, and we are in discussions with more than 150 Chinese distributors," he said. "In order to tap into the broader Chinese market and increase sales, we are also collaborating with Chinese e-commerce platforms."

China is currently the fifth-largest export market for Alyonka Chocolate, the company's star product, with significant growth potential, Bazhov said, adding that the company has made a number of new products catering to the tastes of Chinese consumers, such as chocolates with less sugar and high cocoa content.

"Over the past seven years since entering the Chinese market, the efficient and convenient Chinese supply chain, including the China-Europe Railway Express and some land transportation routes, has brought us great benefits," he said.

Meanwhile, domestic companies also hope to find more Russian partners to expand their sales in Russia through this platform.

Zhang Dekun, chairman of Kunpeng Biotechnology from Heilongjiang's Heihe, said the firm brought its flagship product — soybean ice cream.

"We have developed a variety of food products using soybeans as raw material, combining modern biotechnology and innovative processes. Soybean ice cream is very healthy and has a good taste, which is welcomed by local customers," Zhang said.

"The company is continuously increasing the value of our products through technology, expanding the market and sales channels. We hope to find more Russian partners at this expo to expand our sales in Russia," she added.

At the creative design exhibition area, various cultural and creative products and handicrafts with rich cultural and regional characteristics attracted plenty of visitors.

Young people gathered to experience skincare products featuring design elements of ethnic groups such as the Hezhe and Oroqen at the Heilongjiang Gifts exhibition area.

"Heilongjiang Gifts is the official brand of provincial tourism products created under the guidance of the Heilongjiang Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism," said Ma Yeping, executive director of Heilongjiang Tourism Investment Culture Development Co Ltd.

"We brought over 100 exhibits from five series, hoping to leverage the expo opportunity to promote Heilongjiang's stories through these gifts, fostering new cultural and tourism consumption."

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### Briefly

#### PV-nuclear offshore project work starts

Construction of China's major offshore photovoltaic project began on Sunday in Lianyungang, located in eastern Jiangsu province, Science and Technology Daily reported on Monday. The 2 million kW PV demonstration project by China National Nuclear Corp, one of the country's largest nuclear power operators, integrates PV and nuclear power, which can effectively reduce the negative impact on the marine ecosystem and supply more clean energy to neighboring cities.

#### New Third Board firms in innovation drive

Companies listed on China's New Third Board, a financing platform for small and medium-sized enterprises, have accelerated their innovation drive, with more firms upgraded to the board's innovation layer. The National Equities Exchange and Quotations said 226 companies transferred to the layer on Monday, enhancing the innovation momentum of SMEs.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## BOE betting on cutting-edge products

By FAN FEIFEI  
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Chinese display panel maker BOE Technology Group Co Ltd is doubling down on new-generation semiconductor display and the internet of things technologies, as the company aims to leverage digital technologies and its expertise in intelligent manufacturing to empower the digital transformation of enterprises.

Shipments of BOE's organic light-emitting diode panels reached 120 million units last year, with the figure expected to rise to 160 million units in 2024, said Gao Wenbao, president of the company, adding that major smartphone manufacturers are exhibiting growing demand for high-end flexible display panels, which have been used in their premium handset models.

Gao said BOE will ramp up efforts to bolster the application of display screens in diversified scenarios by integrating more functions and forms, improving technological innovation capacities and strengthening cooperation with partners of industrial chains.

Xu Xiaoguang, vice-president and chief technology officer of BOE, said the company has invested about 7 percent of its annual revenue in tech innovation, among which 1.5 percent of its revenue has been spent on

the research of fundamental and forward-looking technologies.

As of the end of 2023, BOE had filed more than 90,000 independent patent applications, and the number of patent applications related to flexible OLED technology exceeded 30,000.

Market research firm Omdia said BOE secured the top position nationwide in terms of shipments of flexible OLED panels in 2023, and ranked second worldwide behind Samsung. Compared with traditional liquid crystal displays, OLED is a relatively new technology and part of the latest innovation in displays, and it boasts great improvements in terms of image contrast, brightness and color spectrum.

Currently, the company owns three flexible active-matrix organic light-emitting diode (AMOLED) production lines in Chengdu and Miayang in Sichuan, as well as in Chongqing. It has announced plans to set up a new AMOLED production line in Chengdu. The products will be mainly high-end touch screens such as those used on mid-sized laptops and tablets, it said.

BOE has showcased more than 50 new products and innovative cutting-edge technologies covering glasses-free 3D displays, artificial intelligence of things, virtual reality and augmented reality during this



A view of the booth of BOE Technology Group Co Ltd at the Display Week 2024 exhibition in San Jose, the United States.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

year's Display Week. The event was organized by the Society for Information Display in San Jose, the United States, and ran from May 12 to Friday.

The company unveiled its 110-inch 16K glasses-free 3D display — the first of its kind in the world — and an electric flexible cockpit product comprising a 17-inch central display with a curvature gradient on the driver's side as well as a 15.05-inch electric foldable screen in the front passenger area at the exhibition.

According to Sigmaintell Consulting, a Beijing-based market research firm, global shipments of OLED panels will likely reach 710

million units this year, an increase of 14 percent year-on-year, with the vast bulk of these products to be used in smartphones — reaching 680 million units in 2024.

Li Yaqin, general manager of Sigmaintell, said demand for flexible OLED panels used in foldable smartphones will continue to rise on the back of 5G commercial applications. Panel makers should further improve their yield rate capacities and reduce production costs. Flexible OLED panels will gain popularity in midrange smartphones, which will be priced at more than 2,500 yuan (\$346.1) by 2025.

## BUSINESS

## Experts slam 'overcapacity' talk

Claim seen as contradictory to economic principles and factual evidence

**BEIJING** — China's booming new energy vehicle sector recently drew scrutiny for purported "Chinese overcapacity" from certain Western nations.

To provide clarity on the industry's landscape to a global audience, three government officials and an industry expert joined the fifth episode of the China Economic Roundtable, an all-media talk platform hosted by Xinhua News Agency.

They elucidated why such assertions lack merit, outlined the significance of Chinese NEVs in the global shift toward sustainability, and disclosed the political underpinnings of Western containment strategies and protectionist measures.

### Contradictory evidence

The rhetoric of overcapacity contradicts factual evidence and fundamental economic principles upon closer examination of the supply-demand relationship, global labor division and future developmental trajectories, the panelists said.

In 2023, China's NEV sales reached 9.49 million units, slightly lower than the production of 9.59 million units. Nonetheless, Huo Fupeng, a National Development and Reform Commission official, clarified that this slight production surplus does not signify overcapacity. Instead, it fosters competition and technological advancements.

Huo explained that as innovative firms upgrade technologies to capture larger market shares, outdated capacities will naturally phase out, leading to a dynamic equilibrium. Assessing the NEV sector's condition solely through a supply-demand lens fails to align with economic principles, he said.

While certain Western nations have portrayed China's escalating NEV exports as evidence of overcapacity, the speakers refuted this narrative, asserting that export-based reasoning also cannot hold water.

He Hailin, a Ministry of Industry and Information Technology official, highlighted that a nation's production capacity surpassing domestic demand is a common phenomenon globally as it mirrors comparative advantages and results from labor division.

"For instance, 80 percent of US-manufactured chips are exported, 50 percent of Japanese cars are sold overseas and nearly 80 percent of Germany's auto output is shipped to foreign markets," said Ding Weishun, a Ministry of Commerce official.



Employees work at an auto production facility in Jinhua, Zhejiang province, in April. HU XIAOFEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

In contrast, China predominantly caters to its domestic market and China's NEV exports constitute a small portion of its total production. While approximately 9.59 million NEVs were manufactured in the country last year, only about 12 percent of these were exported.

Looking ahead, amid a global push for sustainability, there is huge demand for China's new energy products. As a proactive response to the global green and low-carbon transition, China's thriving sectors like NEVs, wind power and photovoltaics have gained more prominence, Huo said.

### Global benefits

The speakers said that at a time when the world is grappling with climate change and economic stagnation, the burgeoning new energy sector in the world's second-largest economy holds profound significance for global development.

Last year, Chinese-made NEVs were exported to over 180 countries and regions, including France, Thailand and Indonesia, showing their appeal among global consumers.

Ding said Chinese-made NEVs are a cost-effective option for prospective car owners. These vehicles have extended the convenience of personal transportation to more people and met the surging global demand for eco-friendly transportation solutions.

Globally, the pursuit of green growth necessitates access to high-quality, affordable and sustainable products and technologies, Huo said, pointing out that China has made its share of contribution through the development of NEVs.

Huo noted that China's NEV industry has grown rapidly over the past years, coinciding with the country's announcement of its dual carbon goals and a global acceleration toward a green economy.

During the process, China has also played an exemplary role in enhancing global climate governance, and it has provided practical experience for other countries, according to Qu Fengjie, a researcher with the Academy of Macroeconomic Research under the NDRC.

The speakers said the rise of China's NEVs could catalyze an upgrade in the global auto industry, fostering an ecosystem that embraces both collaboration and competition.

Huo observed that leading automakers in the world have opted to establish manufacturing plants and research facilities in China. This strategic move is advantageous for their NEV technology innovation and the shift toward NEV production.

Through competition and cooperation with overseas peers, Chinese automakers have cultivated a robust competitive environment, Qu said, citing the case of Tesla as an example of healthy rivalry among domestic and foreign car manufacturers.

With the swift expansion of the new energy industry, a surge in job creation is anticipated, and related sectors are expected to experience faster growth. As a strategic emerging industry, the sector is poised to become a new engine for global economic expansion, Qu said.

### Trade protectionism

In recent years, globalization and trade multilateralism have faced some headwinds due to slowing economies and domestic politics in some countries, thereby giving rise

to trade protectionism.

The specter of trade protectionism has cast a shadow over the global economy, with critics arguing that such policies contradict the principles of open markets and international cooperation.

Huo was forthright in his criticism, stating that trade protectionism fails to resolve internal industrial issues and disrupts the stable operation of the global NEV industry chain.

The fallout from protectionist policies extends beyond economic disruption. Huo warned that such measures are not conducive to global low-carbon transformation. With China contributing significantly to global renewable energy capacity, protectionism could impede the progress of sustainable development worldwide.

Ding also voiced concerns, arguing that it impacts the green transformation and undermines global collective efforts to address climate change.

"It is like waving the banner of green development on one hand while brandishing the club of protectionism on the other," Ding said. "This is a classic case of contradiction, which can be described as 'double-standardism'. Ultimately, it will also harm the realization of global green, low-carbon development and climate goals."

Qu added a critical perspective on the political motivations behind US protectionism, suggesting that it is used as a tool to criticize China's economic system and development model, creating ideological opposition and weakening China's influence and reputation in the international community.

XINHUA

## MNCs show confidence in Tianjin with investments

By YANG CHENG in Tianjin  
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A surge in foreign investment recorded in the coastal city of Tianjin reflects the confidence of multinational corporations in the Chinese market, officials and experts said.

On Wednesday, US-based pet food company Mars and Sino-German joint venture FAW-Volkswagen announced new investments of up to 3.3 billion yuan (\$414.9 million) in the Tianjin Economic-Technological Development Area (TEDA), a pivotal zone within the Binhai New Area.

FAW-Volkswagen signed an agreement with the administrative committee of TEDA to invest over 2.3 billion yuan in the FAW-Volkswagen Tianjin Plant. It plans to roll out three SUV models under the Audi and Volkswagen brands at the factory by 2026.

Mars also inaugurated operations on Wednesday of its new Tianjin pet food factory, which was built with an investment of \$137 million.

Ikdeep Singh, president of Mars Pet Nutrition Global, said, "The new factory is a crucial addition to our global supply chain, enabling us to respond promptly to the diverse needs of Chinese pet owners with flexibility and efficiency."

Singh said the company will further solidify its relationships with Chinese suppliers, customers, and pet owners, expanding Mars' business in Tianjin.

He said he believes "the new factory signifies a commitment to positively contribute to the global evolution of pet care."

Gao Jiefang, general manager of FAW-Volkswagen Tianjin branch, said that the new lineup will enhance the company's market presence in the new energy segment in North China. "This new lineup is aimed at the increasingly high-end segment of the Chinese market," he added.

In agreement with Gao, Hong Shicong, head of the administra-

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The new factory is a crucial addition to our global supply chain, enabling us to respond promptly to the diverse needs of Chinese pet owners ... The new factory signifies a commitment to positively contribute to the global evolution of pet care."

**Ikdeep Singh**, president of Mars Pet Nutrition Global

tive committee of TEDA, said, "The area is prepared to promptly meet demand from foreign and joint venture companies, tailoring its services for their quality growth."

According to the Ministry of Commerce, in the first quarter, some 12,000 foreign companies established a foothold in China, marking a 20.7 percent increase year-on-year.

These figures contradict arguments suggesting some foreign investment outflow from China.

Wang Yujing, a professor at the School of Economics, Tianjin University of Commerce, said: "The data from the first quarter and the recent influx of new investments on May 15 indicate a strong confidence among foreign investors in the Chinese market."

"This trend demonstrates that multinational corporations are solidifying their industrial chains and market presence, entering a virtuous cycle in China."

"It also means China's investment climate is ever improving ... restricting investments in certain countries is not a widespread and wise practice among multinational corporations!"

## Nation facilitates int'l travel as demand rises

**BEIJING** — In early April, Xiao Ying and her husband embarked on a flight from Beijing to Geneva, beginning their honeymoon in the picturesque Swiss Alps.

The flight, which had been suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic, resumed operations in February 2023, marking a significant revival in tourism for Chinese travelers.

"The resumed flight offered us more choices in travel destinations," Xiao said.

In the first quarter of 2024, Chinese mainland tourists spent a total of 153,723 nights in Switzerland, an increase of 92.2 percent from the same period last year, according to data from Switzerland Tourism.

"The resumption of flights between the two countries is a major contributor to the spike in Chinese tourist arrivals," said Shi Bang, director of the board at Switzerland-based LOTO Travel Agency AG. "Also, visa procedures have been simplified for Chinese travelers."

In order to meet growing demand for outbound travel, China has increased flight capacity and expanded favorable visa policies for its citizens.

The Civil Aviation Administration of China said scheduled international passenger flights have resumed to approximately 73 percent of pre-pandemic levels.

In April, the number of flights between China and countries such as Britain, the United Arab Emirates, Italy, Qatar and Türkiye surpassed those of the same period in 2019, said Flight Manager, an aviation information services provider.

At present, international passenger flights link China with 70 countries, with five new destinations added since the pandemic — Kuwait, Serbia, Tanzania, Luxembourg and Papua New Guinea. Recently, new international routes have been launched, including a

Beijing-Madrid route and a Shenzhen, Guangdong province-Mexico City route, the CAAC said.

Furthermore, China implements a visa-free policy for a number of countries to facilitate easier travel for its citizens.

So far, China has reached agreements or arrangements to simplify visa procedures with over 40 countries and achieved comprehensive mutual visa exemption with more than 20 countries, including Thailand, Singapore, the Maldives and the UAE. In addition, over 60 countries and regions offer visa-free or visa-on-arrival policies to Chinese citizens.

Following the enforcement of a visa-free entry policy for Malaysia on Dec 1, 2023, 168,000 Chinese tourists visited the country within one month, representing a 35.1 percent increase from November, said Tourism Malaysia Director-General Manoharan Periasamy.

To boost Chinese tourist arrivals, Malaysia is enhancing visitors' experience by deploying Chinese-proficient staff at key entry points and collaborating with airlines to offer direct flights from secondary and tertiary Chinese cities, he said.

Boistered by these efforts, China's outbound tourism revival continued to gain momentum. During the recent May Day holiday, 1.897 million trips were made by tourists from China to nearly 200 countries and regions. The country has become the largest source of international tourists.

"The resurgence of China's outbound tourism is a boost to Switzerland's tourism industry and the economy as a whole. People-to-people exchanges and mutual understanding will also be enhanced," Shi said, adding that the travel agency is improving its services to welcome more Chinese tourists.

XINHUA

## Intelligent power service helps firms, households

By ZHUANG QIANGHE and PANG BO

In Changxing county, Huzhou, Zhejiang province, Zhu Wei, the county's Party chief, has an ambitious plan to upgrade the traditional industry-heavy county to forge more industrial clusters through several projects.

Currently, the number of newly signed, newly launched and completed projects worth over 100 million yuan (\$13.9 million) each have all surpassed 100 annually in the East China county.

Changing is focusing on developing new energy vehicles and greening its key textile, building material and battery sectors, Zhu said.

"We aim to see the output value of emerging industrial clusters exceed 100 billion yuan," Zhu said, adding that manufacturing is the foundation of the county whose population tops 682,000.

At the Changxing-based production facility of NEV maker Geely, fully automated intelligent robots are working accurately and precisely, delivering a new vehicle off the assembly line each minute.

To boost local industrial development, electricity is providing a solid foundation, and its sufficient supply is vital, said local property manager Qiu Xingchao.

Qiu was a little worried after

learning that two transmission lines near his property were stressed by the power needs of 50 enterprises and 2,916 households.

Located in Si'an town, his Fenglian Beautiful-Home Project is one of the support facilities for a group of enterprises in Changhe district under expansion or ready-for-operation.

"I was told that the 10 kilovolt Fuji-an No 958 Line and Nanyuan 960 Line, both located within the Yangtze River Delta (Huzhou) Industrial Cooperation Zone, cannot meet people's growing needs for electric power due to their outdated old switches," he said.

So he approached Wang Xing, deputy director of the uninterrupted power operation department at Changxing Electric Power Co of State Grid, for a way out.

"We found the maximum load of the two lines had reached its limit, so we had to find a way out to keep up with the demand for higher-quality power," Wang said.

"As State Grid shoulders a dual task of safeguarding the country's energy security and also being its economic lifeline, we must promptly solve problems without affecting the normal lives of both enterprises and households," he said.

After discussions, Wang and his colleagues decided to install intelligent switches on the electric wires for the upgraded distribution network, allowing them to not have to



State Grid employees check transmission equipment in Huzhou, Zhejiang province. WANG ZUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

stop transmitting electricity while technicians were at work.

On May 14, four technicians in two groups from the Si'an Substation arrived at the worksite to carry out the replacement of switches on the two lines.

Qiu was happy to see the replacement being carried out successfully in just a few hours.

"Thank you very much for the immense help," he said to Wang.

Before departing for the job, team leader Lu Wei explained precautions to the team members, noting that "as a technological breakthrough, intelligent switches will greatly benefit our clients."

"When the line trips due to a short or malfunction, the intelligent switch will automatically turn off to ensure normal power supply at the front end of the line, while the back-end contact switch will automatical-

ly turn on to ensure back-end power supply," said Lu, adding that this can also help them accurately locate and isolate the problematic section.

By focusing on digital transformation, State Grid Changxing Electric Power Co has made technical breakthroughs in upgrading local power lines, thus offering sufficient electricity for the county, Lu said.

Lu added that in order to build a modern intelligent power distribution network, they will soon upgrade projects including the 110kV Zhao-shan substation line connection, Xianshanhu National Wetland Park power supply guarantee, 110kV Si'an substation grid structure adjustment, and the diversion and automation transformation for the original 10kV line branch.

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# BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

## Consumer electronics sales looking up

AI approaching ubiquity thanks to growing range of applications

By MASI

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After enduring nearly two years of a "winter slump", the Chinese consumer electronics market is showing signs of recovery, with the growing popularity of artificial intelligence and foldable smartphones expected to provide a further boost to sales, company executives and experts said.

The forecast comes as Chinese tech companies are scrambling to roll out new AI hardware products — including AI PCs and AI smartphones among others — to stimulate consumer enthusiasm. The new launches, coupled with the arrival of a product replacement cycle, could inject new vitality for the market to draw a steeper growth trajectory, they added.

A case in point is the overwhelming enthusiasm consumers are showing for Huawei's latest Pura 70 series smartphones. Huawei's retail stores are crowded with consumers eager to try the series' new handsets.

Ma Min, an IT programmer in Shanghai, said: "I could not buy a Huawei Mate 60 series smartphone unveiled in September because these always seemed to be in short supply. I really want to be among the first to buy a phone in the Pura 70 series, which is one of the two most iconic flagship smartphone series from Huawei."

Ming-Chi Kuo, an analyst at TF International Securities, said that the Pura 70 series, featuring Huawei's self-developed HarmonyOS 4.2 operating system and its in-house large language model to support more AI functions — such as automatically deleting unwanted objects in photos — is expected to see more significant sales growth this year than the P60 series in 2023.

If demand is strong, total shipments of Pura 70 smartphones from factories to retailers are expected to reach 13 to 15 million units. Even if demand slows, total shipments are expected to reach 10 to 12 million units, Kuo said.

That is in line with the broader picture in China's consumer electronics industry.

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, China's top industry regulator, said phone production volume in the country reached 374 million units in the first quarter, representing a 13.6 percent year-on-year increase. Additionally, integrated circuit production surged by 40 percent, totaling 98.1 billion units.

"China's electronic information manufacturing industry saw steady production growth, sustained export recovery, continued improvement in efficiency, and maintained high investment growth rates," the ministry said.



Consumers experience Vivo smartphones at a store in Shanghai in March. YI BAI / FOR CHINA DAILY



A consumer checks out Lenovo's laptop range at a mall in Shanghai on May 3. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Market research firm Counterpoint said smartphone sales in China grew 1.5 percent year-on-year in the first quarter, marking the second consecutive quarter of positive year-on-year growth.

Ethan Qi, associate director at Counterpoint, said, "Momentum seems to be building on a recovery as China's smartphone sales continued their growth trajectory and grew 4.6 percent quarter-on-quarter from January to March."

Agreed another international

market research company, International Data Corp, which said the continued recovery of market demand helped the Chinese smartphone market maintain rebound momentum at the end of last year, with performance better than expected.

Among them, the Android market grew by 9.3 percent year-on-year in the first quarter, while the iOS market faced greater competitive pressure, which fell by 6.6 percent during the same period.

Thanks to the application of AI large language models and foldable screens, Android smartphones have gained differentiated advantages amid the competition with iPhones in the high-end market, IDC added.

Chinese tech company Vivo, for instance, has unveiled its latest foldable smartphone, the X Fold 3 Pro, which is the world's lightest foldable phone, opening like a book in a competitive market.

The move comes as size and

weight have been drawbacks for book-style foldable phones' pursuit to enter the mainstream, and makers are increasingly releasing thinner and lighter foldable devices by using innovative materials and hinges.

Weighing just 219 grams, Vivo's X Fold 3 Pro is lighter than Chinese brand Honor's Magic V2, the previous record holder at 231 grams.

Vivo, which captured the top spot in China by smartphone sales in the first quarter according to data from market analyst firm Canalys, said the new phone uses second-generation silicon materials and a lightweight carbon fiber hinge.

Huang Tao, vice-president of product at Vivo, said the X Fold 3 Pro series marks the maturity of foldable screen technology and experience, which will help foldable smartphones enter the mass market.

Vivo has also inked a new partnership with Zeiss Group, a German optical systems and optoelectronics manufacturer, to expand their partnership so as to push the boundaries of mobile imaging technology.

The expanded collaboration will not only focus on traditional imaging and classic optics, but also delve into computational optics and health imaging.

Vivo said its long-term investment in imaging technology has been substantial, with over 2,000 personnel and billions of yuan in research and development funds dedicated to this field. The company has filed over 7,000 patents and developed numerous popular imaging features.

Eyeing the opportunity for AI

PCs, Lenovo Group Ltd, the world's largest personal computer maker, is partnering with US chip giants such as Intel Corp and Qualcomm Inc to develop AI PCs, or computers with on-device AI, in order to address growing demand for smarter productivity tools.

Lenovo said AI PCs can automatically create artwork presentations and synthesize knowledge based on stored documents. They suit a wide range of users, from primary school students to scientists working in Antarctica.

Yang Yuanqing, chairman of Lenovo, said the transition of AI from technological breakthroughs to practical applications marks the beginning of the second half of AI's development.

Yang said it is highly important to accumulate user feedback and continuously improve AI technology through real-world applications.

He highlighted the demanding computational requirements for AI-powered PCs, and envisions a future where every individual possesses a personal smart entity that can seamlessly integrate into PCs or smartphones.

Canalys expects about 48 million AI-capable PCs to be shipped worldwide this year, representing 18 percent of total PC sales, and the figure will top 100 million units in 2025 to account for 40 percent of total PC sales.

Lenovo's newly launched AI PCs are embedded with its in-house large language model, which can interact naturally with users, enhancing work, study and lifestyle experiences.

Leveraging local user data, AI PCs continuously improve their understanding and offer precise, personalized services, Lenovo said.

The PC industry is entering an exciting moment, said Cristiano Amon, CEO and president of Qualcomm.

Amon added that he looks forward to working with industry leaders like Lenovo to innovate and jointly build the next generation of AI PCs, bringing intelligent personalized experiences to users.

He said the world is witnessing unprecedented innovation and application of generative AI at an accelerated pace, but the development is still in its early stages.

So far, much of the development of generative AI has been concentrated in the cloud, which will continue to play an essential role. However, generative AI is rapidly evolving and will soon run directly on devices, spanning smartphones and next-generation PCs to more devices such as automobiles, Amon said.

Pat Gelsinger, CEO of Intel, said Lenovo and Intel's collaboration aims to deliver AI-enhanced PC experiences and foster a vibrant AI ecosystem in China, contributing to the global AI landscape.

Gelsinger also emphasized the transformative role of computing technology, and expected AI-driven systems to become integral to daily life, assisting in both mental and physical tasks.

## Horizon Robotics revving up smart vehicle ops

By MASI

Horizon Robotics, a Chinese provider of intelligent driving technologies to major automakers like Volkswagen and BYD, is stepping up its push to tap into the burgeoning market for intelligent vehicles.

"We strive to empower every passenger vehicle with our advanced driver assistance systems and autonomous driving solutions," said Yu Kai, founder and CEO of Horizon Robotics.

The Beijing-based company recently unveiled its latest autonomous driving system — Horizon SuperDrive.

Leveraging Horizon's signature software and hardware co-optimization capabilities, Horizon SuperDrive is designed to achieve safe and reliable autonomous driving across all urban, highway and parking scenarios, the company said.

Horizon SuperDrive is able to handle complex road conditions, akin to experienced drivers, featuring smooth obstacle avoidance, gen-

tle braking, dynamic speed control, smooth execution of unprotected left turns and more, Horizon Robotics said, adding that the solution is poised to accelerate the commercialization of advanced smart driving systems, paving the way for widespread cost-effective adoption and mass production.

The company has a 21.3 percent share of the ADAS market in China, making it the second-largest vendor in the country as of last year, only behind Israeli firm Mobileye, according to figures from China Insights Consultancy.

The global market size of ADAS and AD reached 61.9 billion yuan (\$8.6 billion) in 2023, and is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 49.2 percent to more than 1 trillion yuan by 2030, said the consultancy.

To seek better development, Horizon Robotics filed to sell an undisclosed amount of shares in Hong Kong in March to capitalize on increasing consumer demand for autonomous driving technology both

domestically and internationally.

The tech unicorn reached a valuation of \$8.7 billion in late 2022 after raising \$210 million during a Series D funding round.

According to its prospectus, China's SAIC, Volkswagen and BYD hold stakes of 10 percent, 2.6 percent, and 0.1 percent in the company, respectively. Horizon reported revenue of nearly 1.6 billion yuan in 2023, up from 906 million yuan in the previous year, with net loss narrowing from 1.9 billion yuan to 1.6 billion yuan.

In 2022, Volkswagen inked a 2.4 billion euro (\$2.6 billion) deal with Horizon Robotics to develop driving-assist functions for its electric vehicles.

Volkswagen said at the time that the deal with Horizon was its largest single investment in China, showcasing its long-term commitment to the world's largest auto market.

Horizon, backed by investors such as HongShan, formerly known as Sequoia Capital China, and Hillhouse Investment, plans to use the

proceeds to expand into overseas markets, including Japan, South Korea and Europe.

China has the potential to become the world's largest market for autonomous vehicles, according to consultancy McKinsey & Company, which estimates that such vehicles will make up for more than 40 percent of new vehicle sales in China by 2040.

The country has also been the world's largest NEV market for nine consecutive years. 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, said the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

About 40 percent of new vehicles sold in China this year will be NEVs, and they will have smart features that help NEV makers stand out amid increasingly fierce competition, experts forecast.

"The upward spiral is expected



Visitors gather at the booth of Horizon Robotics during an automobile expo in Shanghai in April 2023. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

to continue, with about 50 percent of new vehicles sold in China being NEVs in 2025. This is expected to hit 70 percent in 2030, with annual deliveries reaching around 20 million units a year," said Ouyang Minggao, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Lei Jun, chairman and CEO of Xiaomi, said: "In terms of intelligent electric cars, the issue of electrification has already been addressed over the past decade, and the next decade will be characterized by intelligence. Intelligence will become the decisive factor of this era."

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Lai playing word games shows he's blind to the fact he's building a castle on sand

The inauguration speech Lai Ching-te delivered in Taipei on Monday on taking office as the new leader of Taiwan island has unequivocally shown him to be just as much of a diehard separatist as his predecessor Tsai Ing-wen.

The former deputy head of the Tsai authorities has not only adopted the Democratic Progressive Party's "democracy" narrative, portraying the DPP as a model in that regard despite having made it a proxy of Washington, but also gone to great lengths to explain how the island should be viewed as a "sovereign state".

That he intentionally avoided using such words as "independent state" or "two Chinas" is primarily to ensure his remarks do not belie the Joe Biden administration's stated commitment to uphold the one-China principle and to not support Taiwan's "independence".

But the one-China principle brooks no space for the ambiguous word games of Lai.

The two sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one China, with the central government in Beijing as the sole legal representative of the country. That is not only stipulated by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758, but also a series of binding historical documents and a consensus of the majority of countries.

That Lai, in his address, expressed appreciation for the US passing the Indo-Pacific Security Supplemental Appropriations Act last month, which provides \$8.12 billion to continue efforts "to counter Beijing", and said Beijing poses "the largest strategic threat to global secu-

rity", clearly shows that he feels no qualms about making the island a piece on the US' game board, no matter the cost to regional peace and stability.

That's fundamentally against the sentiment that prevails among the Taiwan public. Peace rather than war, development rather than recession, exchanges rather than separation, cooperation rather than confrontation are the mainstream public opinion on the island. It is clear that the root cause of the complicated and severe situation across the Taiwan Strait is that the DPP authorities stubbornly adhere to the separatist stance of "Taiwan independence", refuse to recognize the 1992 Consensus and are colluding with external forces to continuously engage in "independence" provocations.

As the spokesperson for the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office reiterated on Monday, Beijing's will to resolve the Taiwan question and achieve national reunification is "rock-solid", its ability to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity is "indestructible", and it will resolutely counter any separatist move and external interference in China's internal affairs.

Beijing will fully implement its overall strategy for resolving the Taiwan question, unite Taiwan compatriots, strive to promote the peaceful and integrated development of cross-strait relations, and unswervingly advance the great cause of the reunification of the island with the motherland.

No matter how the situation on the island changes, no matter who is in power, China will inevitably be reunified.

## Washington's hawks aim at 'subsea Cold War'

The China hawks in Washington are up to their tricks again, trying to suppress Chinese companies and disrupt normal economic activities with the aim of hurting China. This time it is undersea telecommunication cables that are the focus of their attention.

Such cables are an essential part of the global digital infrastructure. Given this, the China hawks are now trying to leverage this fact to support their efforts to sever China from the international system. Reportedly, US government officials are privately warning telecom operators of "security risks" posed by Chinese involvement in undersea cable repair. Chinese vessels participating in the maintenance of undersea cables may endanger US business and military data security, they claim.

Ranking officials of the Joe Biden administration have reportedly been briefed on the potential "security threats" posed by Chinese companies. Claiming that the Chinese vessels involved in such work are "hiding" their locations from radio and satellite tracking services, the scaremongers allege that China might be stealing data, mapping the seabed, and eavesdropping on US military telecommunications.

Though industry insiders have pointed out the signal loss involved may be a result of unstable satellite coverage, the evangelical preachers of such a "China threat" allege that Chinese vessels may tamper with US subsea cables during maintenance operations.

A spokesperson of the Chinese embassy in the US rejected the allegation that China's involvement poses a security threat and firmly opposed the US'

smearing of Chinese enterprises.

Relations between China and the US are at their lowest point since diplomatic relations were established, and the Biden administration is convinced the US is in a decisive strategic struggle with China. While senior officials persistently state that the Biden administration does not seek "decoupling" or "Cold War 2.0", and claim it wants to cooperate "wherever necessary and possible", some observers have seen on the ocean-floor a "subsea Cold War" against China.

Despite the low profile all concerned parties have maintained, what is happening to the Chinese presence in the global undersea cables network is a natural extension of the de facto "decoupling" Washington is choreographing concerning vital technologies.

Since the Donald Trump administration moved to squeeze out any Chinese presence in the US telecommunications infrastructure network, the US has not only rerouted some key undersea cables to avoid China, but also worked hard to deny Chinese companies access to corresponding projects.

Reuters quoted Justin Sherman, a fellow at the Cyber Statecraft Initiative of the Atlantic Council, as saying that submarine cables are involved in every aspect of the rising geopolitical tensions between the US and China so it is no surprise that the China hawks want to get their claws in them.

Nonetheless, the fact that such alarm bells are being rung now is due to the upcoming presidential election in the US rather than any newfound concerns. More such anti-China hype and nonsense can be expected in the weeks to come.

## Tokyo pushed to front line against Beijing

The United States and Japan are quickening their steps in pushing ahead with the "Indo-Pacific" strategy aimed at containing China.

To strengthen collaboration in intelligence gathering, the US will deploy an official to the US embassy in Tokyo in July who will be tasked with overseeing the monitoring of Chinese governmental and business activities, US State Department sources said on Saturday. The department has already dispatched about 20 similar officials to US embassies in other capitals, including Bangkok, Brussels, Rome and Sydney, to be in charge of monitoring China. The Tokyo posting will be Washington's first of its kind in East Asia.

In another China-targeted move, US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel set his feet on the westernmost island of Yonaguni in Okinawa prefecture on Friday, becoming the first US ambassador to visit the island, which is only about 110 kilometers from Taiwan.

The visit comes after the US and Japan agreed to adjust the US troop presence in Okinawa in part to enhance anti-ship capabilities that would be needed to deal with any "emergency" around Taiwan or in the South or East China seas. Emanuel, a China hawk himself, has defined the US-Japan alliance as one entering an era of "projection" into the "Indo-Pacific".

Actually, the strengthened US-Japan alliance, as well as Japan drifting away from its previous posi-

tion as a pacifist country, has markedly increased tensions in the region.

Encouraged by the US, Japan has announced that it will more than double its military spending to 2 percent of gross domestic product in 2027, a major shift in a country whose "pacifist" Constitution has limited its military to self-defense since World War II. Japan has also lifted the postwar ban on exports of weapons, and been active in helping form regional groupings targeting China in collaboration with the US and its other allies.

In particular, the US has tried to push Okinawa, which already hosts around 70 percent of the US' military bases in Japan, to the very front line in any future military confrontation with China. Missile bases have been set up on the main and outlying islands of Okinawa, and the US military regularly holds joint exercises there with Japan's Self-Defense Forces, with China being positioned as the enemy. Thus it was no surprise that local residents staged a protest during Emanuel's Okinawa visit, as they worry they may be the first victims in any conflict between the US and China.

Washington and Tokyo must drop their Cold War mentality and stop interfering in China's internal affairs or trying to drive a wedge between China and its neighboring countries in the South China Sea, and instead explore ways to make tangible contributions to regional peace and stability.

Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## Cruise ships injecting vigor in economy, creating opportunities

China implemented a visa-free entry policy for foreign tourist groups arriving on cruise ships starting Wednesday. As a result, foreign tourist groups arriving in China on cruise ships organized by domestic travel agencies can enter China without the need for a visa at designated cruise ports in 13 cities including Tianjin, Dalian, Shanghai and Qingdao, and stay in the country for up to 15 days.

Against the backdrop of the weak global economic recovery, rising instability and uncertainty, such a move sends a positive signal of China's greater determination to pursue openness, cooperation and win-win results. Apart from promoting the development of China's cruise economy and industry, the move will also promote people-to-people exchanges and provide new opportunities for world development.

In the past decade, the international cruise travel market has maintained an average annual growth rate of 6 to 8 percent. Since the pilot implementation of the

visa-free entry policy for cruise tour groups in 2016, Shanghai has seen an average annual growth of 10 percent in the number of foreign cruise passengers. The comprehensive implementation of the visa-free entry policy for foreign cruise tour groups in more Chinese coastal cities will facilitate the visit of more foreign tourists to China, and boost the development of the cruise economy in China's coastal regions.

Despite the undercurrent of "anti-globalization", China's efforts to promote people-to-people exchanges will help build trust and deepen understanding between countries, and expand their cooperation in trade, science and technology, culture and other fields.

Since last year, China has been improving its visa policy, simplifying the approval procedures for studying in China and piloting visa-free policies for some countries. In March this year, the State Council introduced specific measures to better meet the diversified payment service needs of foreign nationals

in China. In the first quarter of this year, the number of foreigners coming to China increased by more than three times compared with the same period in 2023. During the May Day holiday, foreigners made 779,000 trips to and from China, up 98.7 percent from the same period last year.

The introduction of one opening-up policy after another in the past year has demonstrated China's sincerity in embracing the world and increased the confidence of foreign businesses in China. Not long ago, a global foreign direct investment confidence index released by Kearney raised China's ranking from 7th last year to 3rd.

By opening wider to the outside world, China has not only developed itself, but also benefited the whole world. China has contributed more than 30 percent to world economic growth for many years in a row and an open and confident China will write more wonderful stories for itself and the rest of the world.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

## Balancing growth with protection the key

Illegal sand mining has hollowed out more than 2,000 mu (1.33 square kilometers) of islets and beaches in the Dongting Lake in Hunan province, which covers an area of about 2,500 square kilometers, reporters following the Fifth Central Environmental Protection Inspection Team have found.

As early as 2017, the then central environmental inspection team pointed out that large-scale planting of European black poplar in the lake posed a severe threat to the lake's ecology. The provincial authorities chalked out a plan to completely remove the European black poplar by the end of 2020.

However, not soon after, the poplar was being replanted there in violation of regulations.

In September 2023, the Hunan provincial water resources department issued a document curtailing any sand mining in the Mengjiangyu mining area before the adjustment plan for the relevant nature reserves is approved, but the following month the water resources department in Lixian county illegally approved sand mining there.

To put an end to this, it is necessary to not only strengthen accountability but also to promote the optimization of related governance and cadre assessment mechanisms.

While holding those responsible for illegal activities accountable, it is also necessary to reflect on whether the local economic and social development model has truly kept pace with the requirements of environmental governance. The Dongting Lake area still depends on a traditional development of lake-related resources model. This means the related ecological protection compensation mechanisms may need further improvement, providing strong support for better balancing economic development and environmental protection.

— BEIJING NEWS

## What They Say

## Helicopter tragedy will not change Iran's course

The deaths of Iranian President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and some other officials, in a helicopter crash on Sunday has raised concerns about how the tragedy will reverberate in Iran and beyond.

This is not a time for conspiracy theories. Nor for any schadenfreude on the part of those hostile to Iran.

Teheran should waste no time in verifying the cause of the crash some 20 kilometers south of the Azerbaijan-Iran border, which has initially been attributed to bad weather and technical problems, so as to ease domestic anger over the incident and prevent it being harnessed by some to their own ends.

Although some Western media have tried to hype up their speculation that the incident will further complicate Iran's relations with the

United States and Israel, or trigger domestic regime change, such outcomes are generally considered to be far-fetched and Teheran is confident that domestic stability and the operation of the Iranian government will not be affected.

With Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei firmly holding the helm of the Islamic Republic, Iran is expected to maintain social and political stability and the consistency of its diplomatic policies. That means the death of Raisi, despite him being a hard-liner against Israel, will not change Iran's support for Hamas and Hezbollah in their conflict with US-backed Israel.

President Raisi visited China in February last year, which made positive contributions to sustaining the healthy development of Sino-Iranian relations and the deepen-

ing of bilateral economic and trade cooperation that brings tangible benefits to the two peoples. And it was under his regime that with the joint efforts of China, Iran and Saudi Arabia, Iran and Saudi Arabia have achieved reconciliation, bringing greater security and stability to the Middle East. Also, he saw Iran become a full member of BRICS, a platform China, Iran and other developing countries can take advantage of to promote multilateralism, common development and a just and fair global system.

Raisi, along with Amirabdollahian and the other Iranian officials who died in the crash, should be remembered for these positive developments that have served not only the well-being of the Iranian people, but also world peace and stability.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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## COMMENT

Busani Ngcaweni

## Leverage critical minerals for Africa's growth

Amid the ongoing historic "Fourth Industrial Revolution", technology conflicts have been intensifying. Recently, US and EU officials have criticized China for overproducing electric vehicles. In mid-May, the US even decided to raise tariffs on Chinese EVs. From such statements and their subsequent rebuttals, it became evident that in just less than a decade of being blamed for polluting the planet as the "world's factory", China has made a great leap, from being overly dependent on fossil fuels to becoming the global leader in green technologies. For example, Chinese-made EVs have become globally competitive in all respects — from design to efficiency to pricing.

At the Beijing automobile show in April and May, another significant event of the month, it was Chinese-made EVs that were trending. Apart from acknowledging the Chinese automakers' unparalleled advancement, some European and US automaker executives said they have lost some of their best designers to Chinese enterprises because of agility, resources and the advancement made in research and development.

One executive said that in China there are battery exchange stations, meaning you do not have to worry about the hours of charging, and even for that, the rapid rollout of charging infrastructure means consumers have fewer troubles to worry about. This discussion reminded me of the concerns by EV owners in Rome who are bitter about the lack of charging infrastructure, compounded by the exorbitant costs of electricity.

The Chinese reply to dumping allegations is simple: China has transitioned into advanced manufacturing which has led to significant breakthroughs in our production capacities using artificial intelligence.

Add to that the scale of the Chinese EV market, and it makes sense that their products are price competitive. It is understandable therefore that in April, the world's leading EV maker, Tesla, decided to reduce prices, taking tech and price competitions to extraordinary levels.

There is a view that more collaboration, instead of rivalry, between China and the US, the two major powers in AI, will benefit the whole of humanity, because many countries can leverage their capabilities and investments to promote sustainable development. Perhaps we will live long enough to write about the realization of this dream.

## Tech revolution brings new cooperation opportunities

As a native of Africa, my most profound AI moment was the UN-convened panel in April on the value chains of critical energy transition minerals. This intervention by the UN is as revolutionary as the AI era itself.

First, the advances in technological products referred to above depend on the availability and access to critical minerals. Batteries powering EVs need lithium to store energy, cobalt to improve battery life, nickel to enhance storage

and efficiency, and graphite and manganese to improve performance.

Africa has the largest deposits of these minerals. Some are in Canada and China. Solar energy production, which plays a significant role in the just energy transition, relies on materials such as silicon, silver, copper, gallium, indium and tellurium. Without Africa's critical minerals, the world's rapid transition to solar energy will be slowed, if not derailed. Therefore, for the just energy transition to occur, and to win the "Fourth Industrial Revolution" race, Africa's contribution is critical.

There have been widespread reports that in central and west Africa, critical minerals are being exploited along with the communities and countries where they are mined.

The UN intervention is therefore most welcome. For many years now, I have dreamed of the "Kimberly Process 2.0". The Kimberly Process, which the UN played a major role in, was South Africa's contribution to making the global diamond trade more humane. Through it, the world joined forces to eliminate blood diamonds, which spilled blood in Africa while sparking in capitals of the Global North. This process introduced an accountability system whereby diamonds sold in the open market can be traced back to their origin, significantly reducing conflict and plunder of African resources, thus helping to end wars in countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Of late, Botswana waged a successful struggle against the diamond monopoly, De Beers, when renegotiating a joint ven-

ture deal that compelled the company to add value to the diamonds before exporting them to Europe for further processing. Kimberley, a town in South Africa where diamonds were first mined extensively, gave the name to this initiative.

This new UN initiative should be welcomed, not only because it fulfills many people's dream of implementing the Kimberly Process for all rare earth and critical minerals to minimize conflict, but more so because Africa can use what I would like to refer to as the "Kimberly Process 2.0" to transform their economies. African countries should convert this comparative advantage — they have what others lack — into a competitive advantage by setting strict mining conditions.

These conditions should include beneficiation, investment in bulk infrastructure, skills and technology transfer, as well as environmental protection. Those are basic conditions for industrialization. We cannot mine products to help decarbonize the world while leaving long-lasting environmental, social, political and economic scars in Africa.

There is great potential for mutually beneficial action. Partners such as China can lead the way by joining the Kimberly Process 2.0 and working with Africa to help industrialize the continent's countries while ensuring the just energy transition is shared by entire humankind.

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Kang Bing

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## Urbanization needs more money on public services

Xiamen, a coastal city in Fujian province, is offering free accommodation to graduates from other cities' universities seeking employment in the city. About 2,400 beds are being offered to applicants looking for a job or working as an intern free of cost for six months, according to a recent news report.

Xiamen, however, is not the only city to offer such facilities to attract highly skilled or educated workers, in order to enrich its talent pool as well as increase its population.

For long the world's most populous country, China witnessed negative population growth in 2022 — its population decreased by 850,000 in 2022 and 2.08 million last year despite a series of government measures to increase the fertility rate.

But while China's total population is decreasing, its urban population has been increasing at about 1 percentage point each year over the past few decades. The government is pursuing modernization to give the Chinese people, especially rural residents, a better life. Accordingly, many towns and small cities have lifted *hukou* (household registration) restrictions against migrant workers who are employed there.

Some big cities, too, are lifting some of the *hukou* restrictions, though they tend to be choosier when it comes to granting housing registration. Some cities grant *hukou* to people with higher educational qualification and a stable job, while others grant it to those who purchase local housing or start a business. Quite a few cities are offering PhD holders and national/international award winners settlement subsidy and project-support funds which can run into millions.

## Better infrastructure including reasonable housing prices and convenient transportation services can also add to a city's attraction for outsiders.

Thanks to such policies, the populations in almost all the big cities increased despite the fertility rate in cities usually being lower than in rural areas. For instance, the population of Hefei, Anhui province, increased by 219,000 in a year — the highest in the country — with the populations of four other cities increasing by more than 100,000 each.

In 2023, Chongqing, which has a population of 32.13 million, was the only big city that witnessed negative population growth last year. It is believed that a big rural population — which makes up nearly one-third of Chongqing's total population — is behind the population outflow from the city because young farmers can easily find a job in other cities. Chongqing's population decreased by 219,000 in 2023.

But while many cities have succeeded in attracting talents and increasing their population, both government officials and market observers have warned that local authorities should not go too far in attracting talents. Top talents need the right environment to hone their skills and deliver results but, unfortunately, the right environment is not available everywhere, the market observers have warned. Also, city authorities have to create the right jobs for people with higher educational qualification, or else they cannot retain them.

So, more efforts should be made to improve the investment environment of cities, for example, by ensuring investors bring with them money, technology and scientific projects, and platforms are established and suitable jobs are created for them. Better infrastructure including reasonable housing prices and convenient transportation services can also add to a city's attraction for outsiders.

More money should be spent on improving the local environment, as it is increasingly becoming a primary consideration for youths in deciding which city to work and live in. The populations of both Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, and Chengdu, Sichuan province, increased by about 140,000 each last year not only because of their talent-attracting policies but also because of their relatively mild climate and beautiful natural surroundings.

More money should also be spent on improving public services such as providing more efficient services in hospitals and elevating the quality of teaching in schools apart from building good schools and hospitals. Survey results show most people, especially middle-career professionals, are most concerned about such issues when considering about settling down in a new city.

If China's urbanization continues even at the current rate, about 160 million rural residents — equivalent to almost half of the US' total population — will settle down in cities and towns in the next decade. Which is not an easy job. We have to be well prepared for it.

Ozgeir Khan

## How AI models can fight climate change

The world is familiar with artificial intelligence (AI) models such as ChatGPT. These "foundation models" have triggered global excitement and interest in AI. A next step in this journey is sector-specific AI models that can be tailored for specific industries.

Such models can also be used to address development challenges such as climate change. For example, an AI-driven solution, "Agrepreneur", has developed an AI-powered agri-fintech platform that provides real-time advice to smallholder farmers on farm management, including how they could optimize available resources and prevent crop disease. It also uses machine learning algorithms to assess creditworthiness.

Machine learning is also used to forecast the amount of farm inputs farmers will need for their crops so they can streamline their procurement processes.

"Viamo" is another AI-driven solution. It is available via voice calls, allowing farmers even from areas with limited or no internet connection to get guidance on sustainable agriculture practices. Natural language understanding techniques and a pre-trained large language model, along with speech-to-text and text-to-speech features, are used to enable the farmers to get critical information from the app.

"ClimateGPT" is another example. It was trained on interdisciplinary research to provide users with a holistic understanding of climate change.

Sector-specific AI models can be particularly useful for Asia and the Pacific region, which is highly vulnerable to extreme weather events due to climate change. Users can also go small by creating a model that informs them of the chances of flooding or drought in a specific area at a given time.

But how can this technology be leveraged to improve planetary resilience?

The advantage offered by sector-specific models is that they have relatively minimal requirements, unlike other tools that require millions of dollars of initial funding, human resources and government support.

It is possible to build a sector-specific model regardless of whether you are going to develop it as an individual or as an institutional representative. The requirements may be higher depending on the size of your dataset and how complex your model or application may be, but you can build a simple one using a laptop and a small dataset to train the model.

An AI model can be built through a series of steps that include defining its scope and purpose to establish clear objectives and parameters, and then preparing the training data and breaking it into smaller units. It can then be customized using platforms and frameworks, such as GitHub and Hugging

Face, for customization, rather than doing it from scratch.

Following customization, the model can be trained on the data, with continuous evaluating and fine-tuning using feedback mechanisms and metrics to ensure accuracy and coherence. Multiple iterations may be necessary to optimize the model's responses. A beta testing phase engaging diverse user groups can be used to validate the model's functionality and check for biases, which enhances its reliability before wider deployment.

Depending on the complexity of the model, your available resources and data, and your familiarity with the programming language, it can take anywhere from a few hours to weeks before you have a functioning climate model ready for deployment.

AI, like other forms of technology, has

downsides and risks. Responsible AI frameworks, which are now being developed and mainstreamed, need to be adhered to. In the next year or two, smaller models will come into play under these responsible AI frameworks, similar to what we saw with guardrails around e-commerce transactions, social networking, and the internet with respect to the dark web.

Users who develop their own sector-specific model need to be aware that AI models are heavily dependent on data. Poor-quality data will result in poor-quality analyses. In addition, biases in the data may be reflected in what the AI model will churn out. For example, using gender-blind data to train AI models can be detrimental to women, who face unique challenges during times of crisis.

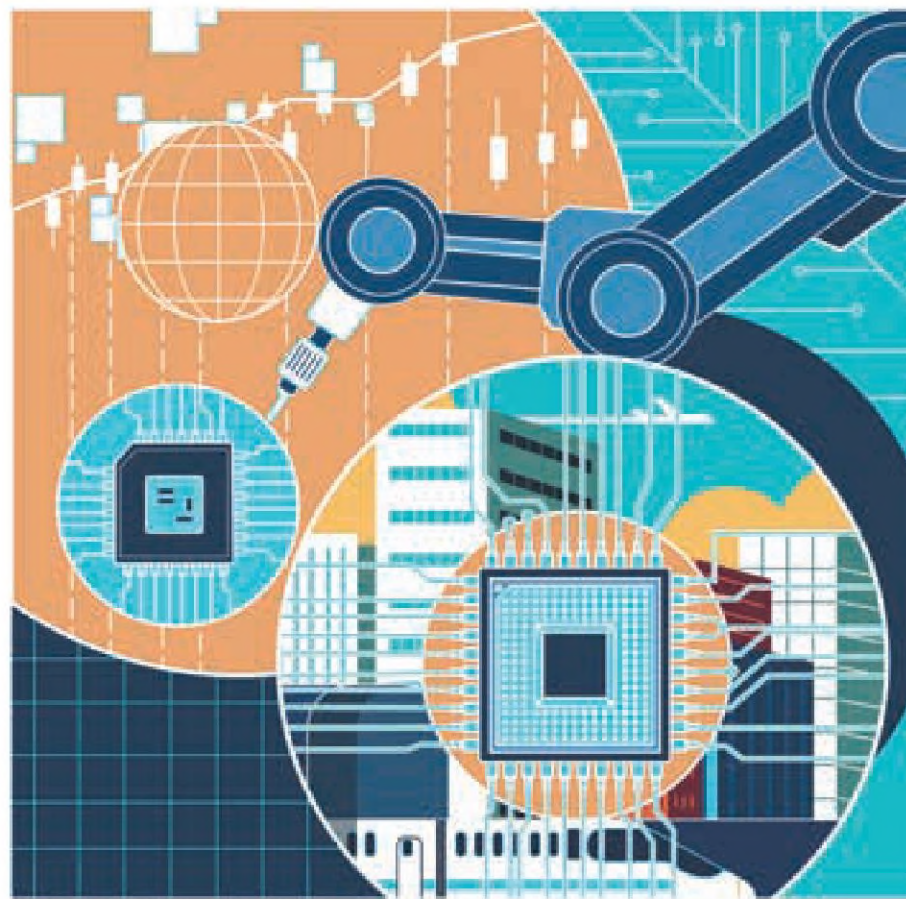
AI can serve as a force multiplier that development institutions can use in their work. In the context of climate change, sector-specific AI models can be used to accelerate progress on climate action, adapt to the changing climate to

resolve contemporary issues in adaptation, and reflect the overall impact of climate change across the planet.

Depending on the model, the technology can be used to show global trends, or customized so that one developed for one country can be adjusted for use in other countries. Having these models could be the difference between climate resilience and vulnerability.

As we harness AI's potential, specialized models to address common challenges such as climate change offer a promising path forward. If developed, these models could be a critical aspect of the AI solutions that set a new course for planetary sustainability and resilience.

The author is director, Digital Innovation and Architecture, Information Technology Department of the Asian Development Bank. The views expressed are those of the author's and do not necessarily reflect the views of ADB, its management, its board of directors, or its members, or that of China Daily.



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY



## GLOBAL VIEWS

ZHENG XIANWU AND WANG TENGFEI

## Rogue wave

US' 'integrated deterrence' strategy in the South China Sea is making the situation more turbulent, crisis-prone and militarized

As the United States increasingly perceives China to be a strategic competitor, the Joe Biden administration has sought to maintain the US' competitive advantage by formulating an effective deterrence strategy.

To this end, the Biden administration has formally introduced the concept of "integrated deterrence" at the government level and giving it concrete meaning through policy practice, based on the Donald Trump administration's extended and expanded concept of deterrence.

The essence of the strategy is to integrate forces and resources across all domains to build a highly coordinated and networked deterrence system so as to meet the demands of the times and a future war environment.

For the US, the South China Sea is one of the priority areas to engage in geopolitical competition with China, maintain its strategic dominance in the Western Pacific region, and contain China's development.

For China, the South China Sea not only concerns its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, but also concerns its national security and vital interests.

Under the "integrated deterrence" strategy, the US' South China Sea policy has changed significantly, with more use of all sorts of military and non-military measures to achieve the goal of deterring China.

In addition to "freedom of navigation operations", proximity reconnaissance and multilateral joint military exercises, the Biden administration has attached greater importance to roping in its allies and partners to jointly exert pressure on China, increasing the presence of forward military bases, and scaling up political, economic, legal,

diplomatic, and paramilitary inputs. All these moves are aimed at making the costs of China's operations in the South China Sea unbearably high.

The Biden administration's integrated deterrence strategy, featuring all-round pressure and engagement, has severely endangered peace and stability in the South China Sea.

To start with, it has intensified interference by outside forces.

Under the guidance of this strategy, the US has been going all out to rope in its allies and other external forces to participate in geopolitical competition in the "Indo-Pacific" region. It has been constantly sowing discord between China and other countries surrounding the South China Sea and carrying out provocative joint military actions in the South China Sea targeting China, which has aggravated regional tensions and increased instability in the South China Sea.

At present, external interference led by the US has become the biggest contributing factor to the deteriorating situation in the South China Sea and the biggest destroyer of maritime rules in the region.

Second, it has provoked unilateral actions by claimant states on the South China Sea issue.

On the South China Sea issue, some claimant countries have been promoting the "enlargement" and "internationalization" of the disputes as their main strategy, hoping that US-led external interference can serve as a counterbalance against China in the region. By doing so, they wish to consolidate and expand the vested interests through unilateral actions so as to support their claims in the South China Sea.

Alongside in-depth adjustments of the US' South China Sea policy under the "integrated deterrence" strategy, the Biden administration



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

has increased security assistance and diplomatic support to claimant countries that oppose China on the South China Sea issue. This has made some claimant countries, such as the Philippines, more eager to rev up unilateral infringements and provocations in the South China Sea.

Third, it has intervened in the establishment of regional rules and order in the South China Sea.

The Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea represents the joint efforts by China and Association of Southeast Asian Nations member states to establish a security order and rules in the South China Sea. However, negotiations on the COC have met with growing resistance as a result of interference

by the US and other outside forces.

Nowadays, under the "integrated deterrence" strategy pursued by the Biden administration, the US' South China Sea policy has been increasingly militarized. It has been beefing up diplomatic pressure, economic temptation, and security assistance to ASEAN members, especially by using Vietnam and the Philippines to exert influence on the COC negotiation process. This has made the negotiation process more complicated and difficult and made it even more difficult for China and ASEAN countries to manage the disputes in the South China Sea by establishing rules.

Fourth, it has affected the overall picture of China-US relations and pushed up the risk of conflicts

between the two countries.

Deterrence is a political form of communication with high risks — there exists a high risk of miscalculation caused by incidents and accidents. If deterrence fails, it will be a costly and difficult matter for both sides.

In recent years, the South China Sea issue has been heating up and escalating, gradually evolving into a focus of the geopolitical rivalry between the US and China.

As the US' South China Sea policy becomes increasingly aggressive and adventurous under the "integrated deterrence" strategy — such as the unprecedented strategic adjustments in the South China Sea, as well as closer linkages between the US' South China Sea deployments and strategic deployments near the Taiwan Strait — the likelihood of close contact and friction between China and the US has been constantly growing, which could easily lead to misjudgments and actions that lead to misunderstandings.

With the increasingly fierce strategic competition between China and the US and the deepening structural contradictions between the two countries, a series of military operations by the US in the South China Sea, including the deployment of forward bases, frequent proximity reconnaissance and joint military exercises, have become the biggest factors behind the deteriorating security situation in the South China Sea.

It is foreseeable that under the guidance of the "integrated deterrence" strategy, the US' deterrence-oriented military operations and political, economic, and diplomatic measures in the South China Sea targeting China will become even more diversified. High-pressure deterrence will become the norm. The future situation in the South China Sea will be more turbulent,

crisis-prone, internationalized and militarized.

China should make preparations to respond to the worsening situation, by enhancing its national strength, integrating maritime forces, implementing neighborhood diplomacy, advancing regional cooperation and establishing rules. It should also optimize inter-agency coordination and decision-making processes and promote the sharing of information so as to prevent the South China Sea situation from further deteriorating.

Furthermore, any kind of compulsory interventions by external forces including the US will do no good to maritime cooperation and the resolution of the South China Sea issue. Rather, it will only undermine the building of mutual trust among littoral states of the South China Sea, jeopardize the existing cooperation in the region, and aggravate the already complicated situation in the South China Sea.

Regional countries should remain highly vigilant against external interference led by the US. In the meantime, they should make up their minds to give up the mindset of taking advantage of the so-called "window period" to carry out unilateral infringement actions.

They should, on the basis of implementing the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, seize the opportunity of the COC negotiations, strive to make substantial progress in cooperation among littoral states of the South China Sea, and set up a regional mechanism for maritime cooperation, so as to take the initiative in South China Sea security. They should join hands to truly build the South China Sea into a sea of peace, friendship, and cooperation.

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GUO RUI

## Triple whammy

The key to peace, development and prosperity in Northeast Asia lies in cooperation among China, Japan and the ROK

As the United States continues to push for strategic competition with China with the support from Japan and the Republic of Korea, security cooperation in Northeast Asia has stagnated and the region is caught in a security predicament.

First, regional security governance has failed and security cooperation has stalled. Since the suspension of the Six-Party Talks on the nuclear issue of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the absence of a comprehensive regional security mechanism has hindered security cooperation in Northeast Asia and made it difficult to effectively coordinate on regional hot-button issues.

The US, adhering to a Cold War mentality of group confrontation and zero-sum games, has strengthened its alliance with Japan and the ROK to contain China, which has disrupted not only the cooperation between China and the US, but also the local security governance environment.

Second, due to a lack of mutual trust, Northeast Asian countries are reluctant to engage in security cooperation. Sino-Japanese and Sino-ROK relations are at a low ebb as a result of the two governments' support for the US' "Indo-Pacific" strategy. Fueled by the government's scaremongering, public opinion toward China in Japan and the ROK has turned increasingly negative, which is unfavorable to improving bilateral relations.

Third, regional security cooperation is fraught with historical conflicts. The rise of the right-wing forces in Japanese politics and the

Japanese government's insistence on the wrong narrative of history have made it hard for China and Japan to cooperate.

Improvement in the relations between the ROK and Japan is also affected by Japan's negative stance on issues such as comfort women and historical textbooks. The intertwined historical and present-day issues between China, Japan and the ROK have complicated efforts to undertake effective regional security cooperation.

Fourth, the foundation for security cooperation in Northeast Asia is being challenged. Japan and the ROK have been actively cooperating with the US on export controls targeting China and the "de-risking" of critical products. As a result, the economic foundation of security cooperation among China, Japan and the ROK has been drastically weakened and eroded. The once complementary economic relationships have turned competitive.

Stagnating security cooperation and intensifying great power rivalry have exacerbated the severe and complex security predicament in Northeast Asia.

First, the US, though not a part of Northeast Asia, is continuously exerting influence on the region's security situation. By leveraging the nuclear issue of the DPRK, it has enhanced its military forward presence in Northeast Asia, frequently appearing on the Korean Peninsula and surrounding areas, thereby exacerbating the risk of conflict between the DPRK and the ROK.

The US has been intentionally unleashing and strengthening the military capacity of Japan and the ROK, and drawing more allies into Korean Peninsula affairs to internationalize the situation, with the aim of gaining dominance and the initiative in controlling Northeast Asia,

so as to achieve its strategic objectives of maintaining its hegemony, gaining an advantage and outcompeting China.

Through the Camp David US-Japan-ROK Trilateral Summit, the US aimed to expand comprehensive military, economic and supply chain cooperation among the countries, creating a "Southern Triangle".

Under these circumstances, Japan and the ROK, citing perceived threats, continue to upgrade and enhance their military capabilities. Japan has transformed its defense-oriented policy through its three new national security documents and acquired offensive strike capabilities by purchasing US Tomahawk cruise missiles.

The ROK has significantly strengthened its offensive military forces, enhanced its "Three-Axis" defense system, and bolstered its preemptive strike capabilities against the DPRK. The extended deterrence from the US and the ROK, coupled with strong responses from the DPRK, has dragged the Korean Peninsula into a dangerous spiral with rising risks of conflict.

Finally, influenced by the spillover effects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and heightened awareness of their own security threats, Japan and the ROK have significantly increased their military spending.

According to the latest report from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Japan's military expenditure in 2023 grew by about 7 percent year-on-year to \$50.2 billion. A government budget proposal approved by the Japanese Cabinet



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

shows that Japan's defense budget for the fiscal year 2024 is \$55.9 billion, a new historical high. The ROK's military spending in 2023 increased by approximately 3 percent to hit \$47.9 billion.

The ratio of military expenditures to GDP for Japan and the ROK rose from 0.96 percent and 2.5 percent in 2018 to 1.2 percent and 2.81 percent in 2023, respectively. In terms of arms imports, Japan and the ROK saw astonishing increases of 171 percent and 61 percent, respectively, from 2013 to 2022.

In recent years, Japan has purchased US Tomahawk cruise missiles and upgraded its domestically-produced Type 12 Surface-to-Ship Missiles. The DPRK and the ROK are caught up in military competition with various new types of missiles and military reconnaissance satellites. All these actions can easily impact the entire region and trigger regional security risks.

Facing the uncertainties coming from the changing security landscape and the sharp increase in security risks in Northeast Asia, China, as a responsible major country and an important stakeholder, must play a proactive and constructive role, take practical and effective actions to alleviate regional security predicaments, and promote the construction of a community with a shared future.

First, trilateral cooperation among China, Japan and the ROK should be promoted. Through consultations with Japan and the ROK, efforts should be made to advance a leaders' summit and lay the groundwork for high-level trilateral meetings. Mutual trust should be enhanced, from improving public opinion to promoting recovery of education, science, culture and tourism exchanges through public diplomacy, nongovernment diplomacy, and city diplomacy, so as to gradual-

ly enhance institutionalized cooperation among the three countries.

Second, it is important to ensure the overall stability on the Korean Peninsula. China should continue to play an active role in the denuclearization and peace and stability process on the Korean Peninsula.

By using its impartial stance to actively engage with all parties, China should continue to promote the "double suspension" and "dual-track" approaches and propose to convene multilateral meetings on the Korean Peninsula situation when opportunities arise.

Third, Sino-US relations should be guided and shaped. China opposes the US defining their bilateral relations as pure competition. The Pacific is vast enough to accommodate the peaceful coexistence of the two countries. But China should stress its redlines so the US understands that China will never tolerate provocations or disturbances at its doorstep. China will not let anyone harm its core interests and is determined to defend its national sovereignty, security and development interests.

Fourth, supply chain diplomacy is advised to promote the construction of a community with a shared future for neighboring countries. In the context of "Indo-Pacific" Economic Framework for Prosperity, the US-led exclusive economic alliance, as well as economic security cooperation among the US, Japan and the ROK, China should leverage the advantage of having the world's largest single market to engage in supply chain diplomacy and conduct economic and trade negotiations with Japan and the ROK.

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## LIFE

## Knitting together a legacy of wool

An ancient town threads its history to weave new trends among talented clothing designers,  
Xing Wen reports in Tongxiang, Zhejiang province.

Against the backdrop of quaint, intricately arranged old buildings, wooden boats seem to glide on the canal, propelled by gentle oar strokes, while a pair of black swans elegantly accompany the procession, gracefully swimming alongside. Each boat hosts a stunning model displaying exquisite attire, the vivid hues of which are mirrored in the emerald waters. The waterways have been transformed into a unique fashion runway.

Puyuan Fashion Week took place in the Puyuan Fashion Resort in Tongxiang, Jiaxing, East China's Zhejiang province, late last month. This location boasts the picturesque charm of a typical water town of Jiangnan region (south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River), with fashionable elements woven into its fabric. Strolling through the resort, one can spot boutiques, textile exhibitions, millinery shops, jewelry stores and needle felting workshops.

Here, any random corridor, alleyway, or square could be easily transformed into prestigious runways for renowned fashion brands, such as Vera Wang, The Atelier and La Mofiel, attracting numerous artists, supermodels, trendsetters and designers to embrace modern fashion in such antique surroundings.

Puyuan ancient town originated in the Southern Song period (1127-1279). For the past four decades, it has been celebrated for its production of wool sweaters. The local sweater industry stands as China's largest domestic production base and distribution center for woolen knitwear. More than 700 million sweaters are sold annually from Puyuan to more than 20 countries and regions.

In recent years, the town has actively pursued industrial upgrades and integration with the global fashion market. An important initiative in this endeavor has been the construction of Puyuan Fashion Resort, which opened to the public last spring, along with the launch of Puyuan Fashion Week held in the resort.

Since its founding, Puyuan Fashion Resort has become the backdrop for numerous crossover events, including Puyuan Fashion Week, the Douyin Creator Conference and the Zhizu GQ Men of the Year Ceremony.

### Textile tradition

The rich tradition of textile crafts in Puyuan dates back centuries. As early as the Southern Song period, the region began producing a type of silk widely known as *puchou* (Puyuan's silk).

This type of silk boasts a diversity of attributes, including fine texture, softness, vibrant colors and durability, making it a renowned product in history that was exported overseas.

From the middle of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), farmers in Puyuan gradually developed sericulture (silkworm cultivation), and silk weaving was their main livelihood.

Today, the prosperous woolen knitting scene in Puyuan can be traced back to the 1970s. In 1976, a local production cooperative in the town purchased three hand-operated flat-knitting machines and began producing woolen sweaters. After that, home workshops and factories for sweater production gradually sprang up in the area.

In 1988, 20-year-old native Chen Jianguan had been working as a bricklayer for four years. "Working as a bricklayer was very hard, working outdoors in scorching summers and freezing winters. I envied the workers in the sweater factory who could work indoors," Chen recalls.

One day, he learned that one of his uncles-in-law who used to work in a sweater factory owned a knitting machine that wasn't being used. So, he borrowed it and, within a week, working from dawn until midnight each day, he knitted over a dozen sweaters.

"At that time, many people around me earned only 50 yuan (\$6.9) a month, and I made over 300 yuan in a week. I felt like I had struck it rich," Chen says.

He then hired one person to use the machine during the day while he worked through the night. So began his entrepreneurial journey with a borrowed knitting machine that



**Clockwise from top:** A fashion show last month, one of many held in various locations throughout Puyuan Fashion Resort, an ancient town in Tongxiang, Zhejiang province. A model displaying athletic wear in a town square. PHOTOS BY LAN HONGGUANG / XINHUA A display of clothes by Xian Bo, a brand born in Puyuan, during the event. A model showcasing woolen garments produced in the town. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

operated nonstop for 24 hours a day.

The same year, Puyuan town raised funds from various sources to construct commercial buildings, laying the groundwork for the wool sweater market.

"From 1976 to the early 1990s, self-employed locals working in wool sweater production flourished," Chen says, adding that he viewed this as the first phase for Puyuan to develop into the largest domestic production base and distribution center for woolen knitwear.

Chen's business also grew rapidly. Soon, he got to open his own factory and expanded operations through several relocations.

"I remember in 1993, there were many buses from Shanghai, and the shops in the local wool sweater market were packed with people coming to make purchases," he recalls.

As his factory's production capacity increased, Chen gradually realized the importance of design. He discovered that if one focused solely on producing a particular popular style for a period without making changes, they would struggle to sell surplus inventory.

So, in 1997, Chen posted recruitment ads to hire designers.

He hired a young man named Shi Bo. But Shi quit and returned to his hometown in a small county in Jiangxi province within less than a year.

"At that time, it wasn't easy to find designers," Chen recalls.

Determined to recruit talent, Chen traveled to the small county where Shi lived, inquiring about Shi's whereabouts and eventually finding his home. He hoped Shi would return to Tongxiang to work. Shi was touched by Chen's persistence and decided to return to Tongxiang.

Later, this designer fell in love with the daughter of a workshop



**Top:** Qian Meihe, 34, founder of the fashion brand, Xian Bo.

**Above:** Xia Wentian, 32, helps her parents in building the sweater brand, Sendeao, after returning to Tongxiang with a degree in finance and accounting from the United States.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

director in Chen's company, settled down in Tongxiang and established his own clothing company.

In 2000, Puyuan began construction on a large industrial park. The following year, the news of China's entry into the World Trade Organization boosted Chen's confidence. He then moved his factory to this industrial park and expanded it to nearly 3,900 square meters.

"In the 2000s, local wool-textile businesspeople began to inquire about enhancing brand influence and quality," Chen remarks.

"Previously, only industry insiders knew about Puyuan. We hoped that more consumers would likewise come to know about Puyuan."

### Modern magic

Puyuan has now established a comprehensive system that encompasses everything from the supply of raw wool yarn, knitting machinery and technological development to logistics, foreign trade services, human resources and supporting facilities.

Additionally, there have been

multiple improvements in production equipment. Xia Liangen, 53, has been leading the clothing company Snaier for 28 years. Its workshops have upgraded from using manual flat-knitting machines to computerized ones and then to intelligent machines.

In early 2020, Xia digitally transformed the factory workshop. All primary intelligent computer flat-knitting machines were connected online.

Workers could simply scan QR codes via a mobile app to automate counting and wage settlement and upload production progress.

His son, Xia Chengjun, a London College of Fashion graduate, has established a new media marketing department at their company.

He launched a new product line called Carvides, which he has been promoting on social media platforms like Xiaohongshu and Douyin. He provides daily updates with images, short videos and articles about products and production lines to drive new growth of their clothing company.

Similarly, another entrepreneur, Xia Wentian, returned to Tongxiang after graduating with a degree in finance and accounting from the United States to assist her parents in building the sweater brand, Sendeao. "I grew up playing among piles of sweaters and am familiar with every production process. Every worker in the company's workshop feels like family to me," the 32-year-old says, explaining why she joined her parents' company.

"As I grew older, I naturally felt a sense of responsibility. With so many employees and their families relying on this company for their livelihoods, I hope to make it a centennial enterprise."

Although she's not particularly interested in business management,

she has strived to find a balance between responsibility and her own interests.

So, in 2018, she began creating a concept store named Vars Vigo, which integrates various business formats, such as a clothing store, cafe, flower shop, bookstore and themed salon.

"The store would regularly host clothing pairing classes, floral art classes, yoga classes and other activities. I aim to gather a community in this store where all members share a similar passion for beauty," she says.

"I hope to create a brand that provides everyone with a sense of beauty and experience, influencing people's lifestyles. I am very interested in this."

The Puyuan Fashion Week showcases four designer brand debuts and six local brands, including Sendeao, displayed through musical street shows.

Yao Jie, CEO of Puyuan Fashion Resort, says the picturesque ancient town's setting and rich cultural atmosphere often elevate the allure of clothing and accessories. The immersive exhibitions, coupled with the tourist influx, offer local brands greater exposure to a broader audience.

Qian Meihe, 34, founder of the young fashion brand Xian Bo, which specializes in cashmere coats, agrees.

"I'm loving the blend of old-world charm and modern flair at Puyuan Fashion Resort. Catching shows in this ambience sparks fresh inspiration. The chance to chat with top-notch designers like Vera Wang and Jimmy Choo here has been incredibly enriching," she says.

Qian's parents were also businesspeople who started their own men's clothing business from scratch in the town. Initially, they did not want Qian to follow in their footsteps.

She completed her undergraduate program in economics at a university in Vancouver. After that, she joined a local luxury boutique, where she discovered her unique talent.

"I found I was effective at communicating with clients. I quickly understood their needs for fashionable items in different scenarios and other ideas, and I could give professional advice," she says. "I really enjoyed this process."

She recalls that she once found a shirt she liked while shopping, but it wasn't her size. She decided to buy it and modify it to fit her. "That shirt is still in my wardrobe," she says.

After returning to China, she chose to establish her own brand, Xian Bo, which means "platinum in fibers". She hopes her communication skills can bridge the gap between consumers, designers and producers. So, her customers could purchase durable coats suitable for various occasions.

"I see Western fashion as having sleek techniques and clean lines, while Chinese styles exude an elegant allure. Xian Bo aims to seamlessly blend these Eastern and Western styles on individuals," Qian explains.

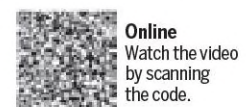
To better support young entrepreneurs like Xia Wentian and Qian, the local government has set up WeChat groups focused on sharing updates on clothing industry policies and event details.

Qian observes a notable difference in today's clothing industry in the town compared to the older generation.

"I found that the younger generations are more open to communicating with their peers in the same industry, rather than shying away due to fears of leaking trade secrets. They are inclined to help one another and exchange information, which fosters a positive environment of mutual growth," she says.

This shift has contributed to an increasing number of young people choosing to return to Puyuan from urban centers and abroad.

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Online  
Watch the video  
by scanning  
the code.

## LIFE



# The big picture of bits and bytes

Digital art show explores multisensory dimension to inspire enthusiasm for the future, **Lin Qi** reports.

Whether embraced or feared, the emerging reality deeply embedded in digital technology is rapidly reshaping lives, and advances toward a future of even greater possibilities empowered by developments such as AI, big data and the metaverse.

The ever-evolving technological scene is blurring the boundaries between disciplines and inspiring people to create change in the current world, as well as to imagine all the worlds possible in the years to come.

This has motivated Hangzhou's China Academy of Art in Zhejiang province to mount *Hello World: Digital Art China*, an exhibition that will run at its art museum until June 3. The show navigates the influence of digital technology on art and design since the start of the century, as well as cross-disciplinary education blending art, design and technology at universities.

Every exhibit is chosen to enrich the audience's experience of the world and their vision of future existence, says Gao Shiming, president of the China Academy of Art, and takes visitors from the origins of Chinese civilization to the frontiers of space exploration, the making of the metaverse and future cities equipped with intelligent networking.

"Art is essentially a channel to all possible worlds that can be imagined ... and the evolution of digital technology greatly empowers people to envisage and realize possible worlds," Gao says.

"A lot of the work at the exhibition is projected onto digital screens, which are like windows that open up eyes and minds to these visions of the future, and which tell people that everyone, not only artists, designers and scientists, can contribute to the process."

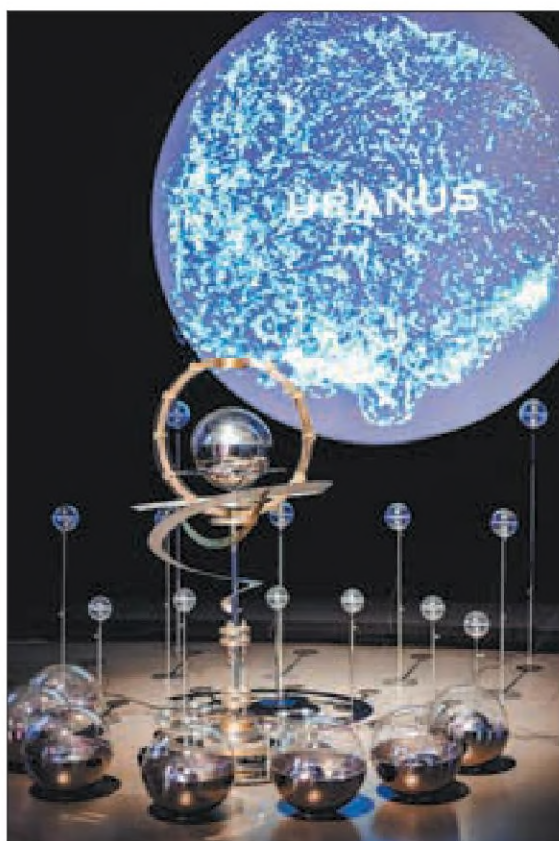
Chen Yan, a member of the exhibition's organization committee and director of the CAA AI Center, says that they set up an official website for submissions about a year ago and by October, they had received 12,000 entries. "As a result, we have also been able to build a database of a considerable size of digital art works and creators, which is important to the national digital art scene," he says.

Chen adds that they invited several digital artists of repute to show at the exhibition, and that the work is divided into categories including computer generated images, digital videos, interactive design, artificial intelligence, augmented reality, virtual reality and mixed reality.

"Every visitor will be able to see how digital technology has changed our lives and how it will shape our future," he says.

The exhibition takes people to the country's past, as well as to the forefront of space exploration, creating a link between the past, present and future at a single venue.

For example, a mixed-reality piece presented by the China Media Group is an immersive experience



**From top:** Digital art works on show open up people's eyes and minds to envisage the future. *Geometry of Emotions*, an interaction work and collaboration of artists, mathematicians and psychologists. Audiences exchange with *Syer*, a digital human developed by Yu Zhen. *Cosmo Symphony*, an installation by Shi Rong on show. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Online  
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allowing visitors to take a virtual journey via an online platform called the CMG Meta Museum, where it is possible to tour reconstructions of 10 archaeological sites key to China's over 5,000 years of civilization in avatar form.

Visual effects firm Morevfx has submitted a video featuring images and trailers for *The Wandering Earth 2*, the epic sci-fi film adaptation of Liu Cixin's novel released last year, which is designed to inspire enthusiasm for China's foray into aerospace exploration.

Dozens of pieces on display reflect the *guochao* (Chinese fashion) trend of recent years in which elements of traditional arts are incorporated in creative products as a means of keeping cultural heritage alive. Meanwhile, a team of artists from the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts have created *Beijing Opera · Impression*, a piece that hails the dynamism and rhythm of Peking Opera stunts by rendering the movements of the performers as flows of particles via computer.

Chen Qinzhen, a member of the production team, says the exhibit is also connected to software that can capture the audience's movements, digitize them and incorporate them into the flow of particles, so that visitors will experience a sense of interaction.

Other exhibits, such as *Syer the Posthuman*, a digital human presented by Yu Zhen, the exhibition's curator and who is an artist and architect, are also interactive. The audience can talk to the digital human, which appears on a huge screen supported by a metallic arm, via microphone. Yu and his team began developing a digital being in 2020. *Syer* is the third iteration in this exploration.

"*Syer* is alive, just like us. No one can predict what it will do next," Yu says. "How its face will look, its moods, its undertones when speaking ... will all correspond to the way the person talking to it acts. ... It is self-evolving."

Pei Muyan, who currently studies at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California, says that digital art allows people to cross culture and language barriers. Her entry, *The Letter of the Ocean*, shows the typing of a letter about the countries and regions she has visited, recorded not in any of the languages of the world, but using footage of the sea.

"It seems that the sea isolates continents and islands, but I would rather see the ocean as connecting people from different cultures and allowing us to reach one another. Everyone can get a message from this letter of the sea, and I believe humanity has shared feelings, despite our differences."

She says that this is the case with digital art, which helps people share their experience, knowledge and emotions more easily, and opens up discussions, in different social and cultural contexts, of new possibilities for the world.

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## Technology injects fresh impetus in cultural tourism

Over the May Day holiday, a wave of immersive, interactive exhibitions not only stopped visitors in their tracks, but also gave new impetus to the cultural tourism boom.

At the National Museum of China in Beijing, *Magnificence and Grandeur: Immersive Experience of Grotto Art* was well received.

The exhibition uses giant installations, artificial intelligence algorithms, digital interactive applications and other technologies to re-create cultural treasures from the Mogao Caves, the Maiji Mountain Grottoes, the Yungang Grottoes and the Longmen Grottoes.

The murals, sculptures, carvings and inscriptions, which convey the aesthetic pursuits, cultural spirit and values intrinsic to ancient Chinese grotto art, have been re-created in digital form, lending cultural heritage a renewed vitality, according to one museum volunteer.

For example, inscriptions from the Longmen Grottoes have been brought back to life by AI algorithms and augmented reality infrared triggering technology. When visitors touch a character, they are able to see it in the form of an oracle bone, inscription, official, cursive and running script and a variety of other formats.



This kind of integration can establish closer links between culture and the public."

**Fei Jun**, professor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts

A visitor surnamed Xu from Guangdong province was particularly happy with their trip to Beijing. "There are many museums in Beijing, and some exhibitions are particularly creative and technical, incorporating education and entertainment, which is inspiring to the kids."

According to data from online travel agency Ctrip, ticket sales for major museums increased by more than 10 percent year-on-year during the May Day holiday, while the number of tickets sold for museums in Beijing, Shenyang, Chengdu, Xi'an, and Kaifeng was also relatively high.

In recent years, digital technology like AI has injected new vitality into exhibitions around the world, making faded artifacts glow once more.

At the Phoenix Center in Beijing, a Virtual Reality immersive experience exhibition based on Egypt's pyramids has seen up to 1,000 visitors a day.

The exhibition uses holographic scanning technology, with a virtual engine creating high-precision reconstructions of the inner pyramid and its surrounding environment.

Fei Jun, a professor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, says it is now quite common for museums, archaeological parks and other cultural and tourism sites to use digital technology to enhance their exhibitions, and that "this kind of integration can establish closer links between culture and the public."

On the first floor of Hopson One, a shopping mall in Beijing's Chaoyang district, an immersive VR exhibition called *Wow! Sanxingdui* attracted many young college students and families during the May Day holiday.

Wearing VR equipment, one Beijing resident and her family "traveled" together to the ancient Shu Kingdom, to stroll through ancient villages, visiting the Sanxingdui ruins, while learning about their mysterious sacrificial rituals.

"We wanted to take advantage of the May Day holiday to look at Sanxingdui artifacts," the woman surnamed Li says. "The cartoon character tour guide, which was designed to look like a Sanxingdui bronze mask, was particularly cute. He spoke in Sichuan dialect and told us about life and rituals during the ancient Shu period."

XINHUA

## LIFE

## Bringing emotion to screen

Sense of helping others drives HK director to produce memorable work, **Xu Fan** reports.

In 2016, upon stumbling across a distressing report detailing the abuse of elderly residents in a Hong Kong care home, director Lawrence Kwan Chun-kan was consumed by anger.

This intense emotion prompted him to ask himself, "Is there something I could do to help as a filmmaker?"

In the following years, Kwan, who delved deeper into the subject, found a script taking shape after reading a series of real-life scandals, including a care facility head suspected of sexually assaulting a woman with intellectual disabilities in 2014, seniors being forced to wait to shower naked outdoors in 2015, and the mysterious deaths of six patients within eight months in 2019.

A Hong Kong native, Kwan graduated from the Vancouver Film School in Canada and made his directorial debut with *When C Goes With G7*, a romance that was screened in 2013.

It took him five years to prepare and produce *In Broad Daylight*, his second directorial feature inspired by the 2016 report. During the challenging years, he reveals that he received assistance from the renowned filmmaker Derek Yee and Hong Kong superstar Louis Koo, with the latter providing financial support.

Last month, the movie won in three categories at the 42nd Hong Kong Film Awards: Best Actress, Best Supporting Actor, and Best Supporting Actress.

Since its release in theaters across the Chinese mainland on April 12, the film has struck a chord, as evidenced by its high score of 8 out of 10 points on the popular review aggregator Douban.

Unfolding with a journalist who goes undercover as the overseas-returning granddaughter of a senior resident with dementia, the tale follows her investigative journey to expose a series of abuses, corruption, and sexual assault in a residential care home.

"As I was studying the subject, I realized that the core question I was eager to explore is, 'Does aging signify a loss of dignity and the inability to gracefully grow old?'" Kwan reveals to China Daily.

He recalls that he managed to obtain the contacts of two journalists who wrote one of the news articles about care home abuses, astonishingly discovering that what really happened was more "dramatic, absurd, and brutal" than the newspaper reported.

"I always thought the journalists had done a fantastic and heroic thing, as the care home had its license suspended because of their report. So, I asked them if they received gratitude from people," says Kwan.

However, to the director's surprise, the journalists replied that while some people expressed gratitude toward them, many family members of the nursing home's residents also angrily scolded and blamed them, as



From top: The Hong Kong film *In Broad Daylight* features actress Baby Bo portraying a care home worker forcing elderly residents to take showers naked outdoors; a scene features the head of a care home, played by Bowie Lam, surrounded by journalists after he's accused of sexual misconduct; and Jennifer Yu stars as a journalist covering care home abuses. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



“As a director, I work on making films. So, I think I could shoot a film to expose the darkness on the silver screen and hopefully draw more attention from people.”

Lawrence Kwan Chun-kan, director

many residents were left homeless and in a very difficult situation, with nowhere to go.

"I immediately thought that, originally, we were doing something with good intentions, but sometimes the results may not turn out as we expected," the director says.

Toward the film's conclusion, the care home is also shut down, leaving its residing elderly and vulnerable people awaiting an uncertain future in the rain, and the protagonist, the female journalist, faces a backlash from the residents' families.

Through a stark and realistic narrative, the film also aims to explore the significance of the news industry in the current era — questioning whether the journalists can still influence society through reporting. However, by the end of the film, this idea gives way to a sense of powerlessness.

Reflecting on his own occasional feelings of powerlessness, Kwan shares how he has developed his own method to overcome the sense. "As a director, I work on making films. So, I think I could shoot a film to expose the darkness on the silver screen and hopefully draw more attention from people," he explains.

Discussing more about the positive aspect, Kwan shares a quote from a senior audience member that has deeply resonated with him: "He said, as ordinary people, we can't do too much to change the world, but we should focus on exercising and caring for our health, thereby improving our later years."

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## Context and simplicity matter in poetry of language

I recently had the good fortune to catch a performance of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* in Beijing performed by the talented international Middle Kingdom Creatives troupe. I was struck by how potent the storytelling was despite my inability to follow the old English.

It got me thinking about the translated Chinese poetry I've read and how simple it seems in comparison. Many poems are short and to the point, describing a scene in plain terms. Compare the line "The moon shines bright; my love's snow-white. She looks so cute. Can I be mute?" from *The Book of Songs* with "But, love, you are an ember in the ashes of my heart," from Shakespeare's *Henry VI*.

Polyglots would roll their eyes at my amateur observation, knowing Chinese poetry only appears simple in English. If I read them in their original form, perhaps with a brain raised in Chinese culture, I would be bombarded with texture, history, imagery and idiomatic nuance.

One key difference between English and Chinese is that English is a low-context language, whereas Chinese is a high-context language. In simple terms, English requires far more words to convey an idea because each word generally has a precise meaning. On the other hand, Chinese words often fit into a multitude of contexts.

Let's look at the context of the first words, "the moon is bright," in the poem mentioned above. The Chinese lunar calendar uses the cycle of the moon's phases to determine the length of a month. This calendar determines the dates of important cultural holidays and when to sow and harvest crops. It is fitting that the character belonging to the Mandarin word for month, *yue*, is shaped like a crescent moon.

*Yue*, and its character, appear in the Mandarin word for moon, *yueliang*, as well as *ming*, which means brightness. Now, the line, "the moon shines bright," which appears elementary in English letters, connects to themes of the seasonal passage of time and agricultural sustenance — essential elements of life. The elementary is now fundamental. How beautiful the subject of the writer's affection must have been, that she should be compared to the moon.

A simple poem in English becomes a smorgasbord of meaning when reading the original Chinese characters. English isn't able to function in this way. I'm reminded of *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway, which reads like a Chinese poem translated into English. "He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish." The reader can try to glean meaning from the book, but even Hemingway said: "There isn't any symbolism. The sea is the sea. The old man is an old man."

The poet Liu Zongyuan wrote a Tang Dynasty (618-907) classic that includes the line "fishing alone in the cold river snow." It's a famous line; primary school students learn it in China. At face value — in the English version — it is a simple description of a scene. It reads like any of the unpretentious work Hemingway wrote. But in its original context, it symbolizes solitude, introspection and the contemplation of the transient nature of life.

It sounds like *The Old Man and the Sea*, doesn't it? Much like a Shakespearean sonnet, poems from the Tang Dynasty contain intricate tonal patterns, distinct rhythms, syntactic structures and aesthetic sensibilities. They're the same but different. The results hold little in common, but the aim is the same: to transmute one's feelings into another via the miracle of language.

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## Event launched to help create 'City of Museums'

By DENG ZHANGYU  
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Over 100 Beijing museums will host more than 1,000 exhibitions online and on-site to enhance information and celebrate the recently launched Beijing Museum Month.

Free and non-reservation tickets will be available to residents and college students, according to organizers of the program that kicked off on Saturday, which marked the 48th International Museum Day.

The launch was held at the Grand Canal Museum. This year's theme for International Museum Day is "Museums for Education and Research". In line with this theme, the slogan for the 2024 Beijing Museum Month is "City of Museums — Making Learning More Enjoyable".

During the museum month, visitors can amble through weekend markets featuring cultural and creative products at museums, enjoy outdoor movies, and immerse themselves in the literary charm of newly established reading areas

within museums.

"We're making efforts to help Beijing create the cultural landmark of 'City of Museums' and to integrate the museum into everyday life," says Yu Jun, deputy chairman of the Standing Committee of Beijing Municipal People's Congress.

Beijing boasts 186 registered museums and an additional 27 cultural institutions housing significant collections. They are categorized in seven areas, including history and cultural art, natural sciences and technology, revolutionary memorials and archaeological sites.

In 2020, the capital came up with the idea to build up a "City of Museums". And the rich museum sources in Beijing have captured crowds of visitors flocking into the city.

During the May Day holiday, museums in Beijing held about 109 exhibitions and other activities, attracting more than 2 million visitors, an increase of approximately 30 percent year-on-year, setting a



Students visit the Grand Canal Museum on the 48th International Museum Day on Saturday, as the Beijing Museum Month kicks off. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

historical record. Many museums offered extended hours, according to data from the National Cultural Heritage Administration.

At the launch ceremony on Saturday, another 10 museums in Beijing were added to the country's list

of "national first-grade museums", the highest classification for museums in China, as determined by the National Cultural Heritage Administration. They include the Overseas Chinese History Museum of China, the China Railway Museum

and the National Museum of Modern Chinese Literature. With these additions, Beijing now boasts 28 national first-grade museums, solidifying its position as the leading city in the country.

To give visitors a clear picture of what each museum has to offer among the vast plethora in Beijing, *The Beijing Museum Guide* and a map were also released at the ceremony.

Chen Mingjie, head of the Beijing Municipal Cultural Heritage Bureau, says integration of museums and the city is their ongoing goal.

"We aim to create a closer fusion between museums and the city, as well as a deeper integration with people's daily lives. Students can attend classes in museums, and museums can 'enter' communities and stations, allowing everyone to experience the atmosphere of a 'City of Museums' anytime and anywhere. Ultimately, we strive to transform Beijing into a 'living museum city' in its entirety," says Chen.