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CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中國日報 TUESDAY, JUNE 4, 2024

China to boost policy support for smart cars

Vehicles to get mobile phone numbers, drive multibillion-dollar opportunities

By MA SI masti@chinadaily.com.cn

China will enhance its policy support to accelerate the development of emerging industries such as smart connected vehicles, as the nation has huge potential to become the world's largest market for self-driving cars, according to an official and experts.

This could create multibillion-dollar opportunities for domestic as well as international companies, they added.

To support the high-quality development of the intelligent vehicle industry, cars in China are expected to get their own "phone numbers".

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology said it plans to allocate a total of 100 million 11-digit mobile network numbers dedicated to facilitating communication among vehicles, and between vehicles and the back-end management systems of carmakers.

The ministry did not provide a specific timeframe for the implementation of the plan, but experts said the move will give the development of internet-connected vehicles a big boost.

Yang Zongyi, an auto expert at Chinese car manufacturer BAIC Motor Corp, said: "With the support of connectivity technologies, vehicles are no longer just a means of transportation, but rather a mobile intelligent device. Traffic lights, parking lots and even roads can all interact with our connected cars, providing our users with a more intelligent and convenient travel experience."

For instance, two connected vehicles can "talk to each other" and the drivers can see each other's location, route and fuel consumption on a large screen, Yang said.

Huang Hexian, a telecom expert at the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, said that compared with smartphones, internet-connected vehicles have stricter requirements for network bandwidth, network response time, security, manageability and controllability of communication services.

This is why the ministry plans to allocate 100 million network numbers to vehicles, which will give the development of internet-connected vehicles a big boost, she said.

In an article published on Saturday in Qiushi Journal, the flagship magazine of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, Minister of Industry and Information Technology Jin Zhuanglong said that more efforts will be made to accelerate the development of smart connected vehicles.

"By proactively adapting to and leading the new wave of technological revolution and industrial transformation, we can ensure that technological innovation truly contributes to industrial development," he said.

China will make good use of its large domestic market and diverse application scenarios, and systematically advance technological innovation, in order to drive the healthy and orderly development of emerging industries such as 5G networks and smart connected vehicles, Jin added.

Fu Bingfeng, executive vice-president and secretary-general of the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers, said, "Autonomous vehicles will become popular in China at a faster pace than in other countries, as local consumers are very enthusiastic and curious about such functions."

Consulting firm McKinsey & Co has predicted that China will become the world's largest market for autonomous vehicles, with revenue from such vehicles and mobility services exceeding \$500 billion by 2030.

Total autonomous vehicle sales are expected to hit \$230 billion, while autonomous vehicle-based services are likely to generate around \$260 billion by the end of the decade, it said.

According to Fu, China is likely to roll out more measures, such as optimizing its legal framework and boosting vehicle-and-road coordination, to fuel further development of autonomous vehicles.

Cui Dongshu, secretary-general of the China Passenger Car Association, said that traditional ways of managing cars are no longer feasible, and more efforts are needed to ensure automotive data security and privacy.

"How to strike a balance between encouraging industrial innovation and ensuring safety is the top question for us to answer before really stepping into the era of autonomous vehicles," he added.

Making history



Former energy scientist Claudia Sheinbaum celebrates her landslide victory in Mexico's presidential election on Monday in Mexico City. The 61-year-old is going to be the country's first woman president. Sheinbaum was earlier the mayor of Mexico City. LI MENGXIN / XINHUA See more, page 7

WORLD WATCH By Aabis Saykhum

Xizang marching on path of stability, prosperity

In the rugged highlands of Southwest China's Xizang autonomous region, a remarkable transformation has been taking place ever since its peaceful liberation on May 23, 1951. The ancient land, once synonymous with mysticism and isolation, is embracing the dynamism of urbanization thanks to its gradual and fruitful social and economic revolution from feudal serfdom to modern communities.

But as the region has evolved, it has faced unwarranted criticism from certain Western quarters. The ulterior motive is clear: hinder China's development by projecting the colonialist past of the Western forces onto today's China.

Through a biased lens, they discredit Xizang's urbanization process, failing to see the realistic picture of the lives of Tibetans thriving due to the region's development.

A recent report by the so-called international human rights organization, Human Rights Watch, accuses the Chinese government of using extreme pressure to coerce Tibetans into relocating from their long-established villages. The term "forced urbanization" has been bandied about by several US media outlets. But such labels miss the mark.

Urbanization is a global phenomenon, an inexorable force shaping human history and society. Urbanization has brought tangible advantages to the Tibetan people. Through urbanization, the productive forces of the region have blossomed. Tibetans have not only improved their material standards of living, but also gained educational and employment opportunities comparable to those in more developed regions.

Seventy-three years since its peaceful liberation, Xizang has emerged from the shadows of history. Democratic reforms, economic growth and social advancements have propelled the region forward. The people of Xizang now shape their own destiny.

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Chinese Malaysian student acts as messenger of mutual friendship

By ZHOU JIN in Beijing and YANG CHENG in Tianjin

For Malaysian student Cheok Xuan Yu, the decision to study in China was driven by a sense of connection and nostalgia.

She grew up in a Chinese migrant family, she speaks Chinese and learned about China's rich history and culture, and she seized the opportunity three years ago to return to the land of her ancestors.

The 21-year-old, who is studying at Tianjin University, said her great-grandfather migrated to Malaysia from South China's Hainan province, and her family's visits to ancestral graves in China during Qingming Festival, also known as Tomb Sweeping Day, have further deepened her bond with the country.

"My family puts a strong emphasis on carrying on the tradition," she said, recalling a childhood visit to Hainan and saying that she had always wanted to return to China to witness its current development.

Cheok was one of the 87 students at the university who jointly wrote a letter to President Xi Jinping in March to express their feelings about China's development and the Chinese people's friendliness.

In the letter, the students said they are determined to act as messengers and promoters of Chinese-Malaysian



Cheok Xuan Yu

friendship.

Cheok had not expected that their letter would be mentioned by Xi during his exchange of congratulatory messages on Friday with Malaysia's King Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

In the message, Xi said he is glad to see that the friendship between China and Malaysia will be passed down for generations.

Cheok said, "The 50th anniversary is a milestone for China-Malaysia relations, symbolizing the path our two countries are taking toward a brighter future."

Cheok also said she is a beneficiary of the Belt and Road Initiative, and she expressed her gratitude to Xi for offering her a chance to study in China and witness the country's rapid progress.

Under the framework of Belt and Road cooperation, Tianjin University has expanded enrollment of students from Malaysia and other member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, with nearly 600 Malaysian students

at the university in 2023.

Cheok said she is impressed by the country's technological innovations and development, especially the shared bicycles, which are convenient, efficient and environmentally friendly.

Cheok's stay in China has also allowed her to deepen exchanges with her Chinese peers. "We take class and do experiments together, and I never feel isolated."

She said that all the students on the campus, whether they are from China or abroad, treat each other as equals, regardless of background.

Furthermore, events such as the international cultural festival have provided Cheok with opportunities to introduce Malaysian culture to Chinese and international students.

"The strength of an individual might be limited, but working together we can better promote exchanges and friendship between our two countries," she said.

She added that she hopes Malaysian students will act as goodwill ambassadors and help to promote even closer relations between the two countries.

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PATH TO MODERNIZATION

GUANGDONG FLOURISHES ON HIGH-TECH ROAD TO GROWTH

Province embraces Xi's vision for new quality productive forces to unleash innovation potential

By WANG XU and ZHOU MO in Shenzhen, Guangdong

After studying President Xi Jinping's theory on new quality productive forces, Liu Yulong, head of Midea Group's Shunde factory in Poshan, Guangdong province, said he realized that "higher thoughts lead to a higher life".

"It holds major theoretical and practical significance. It is actually what we are doing right now — we anticipate a significant transformation in our factory, aiming to set a new benchmark for manufacturing



and industrial efficiency in the industry," Liu told China Daily, as he proudly walked amid the bustling production lines.

He has every reason to be proud of the company's achievements. In his factory, a dishwasher is produced every 18 seconds, requiring over 100 steps to turn a roll of stainless steel into a finished product. This efficiency allows the factory to

produce 7 million dishwashers a year for sale in 145 countries and regions, making it the top producer of the white good in Asia for several consecutive years.

"Our factories used to heavily rely on the skill level of workers, but that's no longer sufficient for large-scale production," said Liu, adding that the Midea Group has been undertaking initiatives to make its operations leaner, and since 2011 it has integrated industrial robots into its production lines to achieve greater output with fewer workers.

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Birthday special



Giant panda Tian Bao chews on bamboo at the Pairi Daiza Zoo in Brugelette, Belgium, on Sunday, his eighth birthday. A series of activities was held for visitors who came to see Tian Bao, the first giant panda born in Belgium, before he leaves for China with two other pandas in the autumn. ZHAO DINGZHE / XINHUA



INSIDE Grouping should promote greater cooperation Global Views, page 13

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PAGE TWO

Guangdong: A pioneer in transformation

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"Nowadays, with the integration of AI (artificial intelligence), 5G, big data, and other technologies, we're taking industrial robot operations to the next level, enhancing their quality and efficiency, and moving toward a more refined approach to manufacturing," Liu added.

As a result, Liu's factory was recognized as a lighthouse factory by the World Economic Forum in 2022 due to its performance in production efficiency, technological innovation, product quality, and sustainability. However, the factory is merely the tip of the manufacturing iceberg in Guangdong where promoting high-quality development by accelerating the development of new quality productive forces has been made a top priority, emphasizing innovation, the fostering of emerging industries, and the modernization of traditional sectors.

Significant milestone

Since its initial introduction during a tour by President Xi to Heilongjiang province last year, the concept of new quality productive forces has gained momentum in Guangdong.

On Jan 31, Xi delivered a speech on the essence and significance of new quality productive forces while chairing the 11th group study session of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee. In his speech, Xi emphasized the crucial role of these forces in achieving high-quality development and outlined clear requirements for their development.

"The speech marked a significant milestone in the theoretical and practical understanding of new quality productive forces," said Ding Minglei, an analyst at the Chinese Academy of Science and Technology for Development in Beijing, adding that to grab the momentum, a new task for government officials, decision-makers and scholars, is to deepen understanding of new quality productive forces from a theoretical standpoint.

In fact, throughout the history of the People's Republic of China, promoting the development of productive forces has been a fundamental goal.

Mao Zedong emphasized the liberation of productive forces, while Deng Xiaoping stressed the importance of developing them during the socialist stage. Under Xi's leadership, China entered a new era in 2012, focusing on high-quality development. This has led to significant improvements in the country's productive forces, setting the stage for the emergence of new quality productive forces.

"In summary, new quality productive forces represent a new type of advanced productivity that is compatible with the new development philosophy. Granting a leading role to innovation, they mark a break with traditional economic growth models and development pathways for productive forces and feature a high level of technology, efficiency, and quality," Xi said in his explanation of new quality productive forces.

According to Ding, to understand new quality productive forces and their role in high-quality development, one should first have a clear understanding that challenges remain in China's development, including reliance on foreign technologies, insufficient industrial strength, and pressure to transition to green production methods.

"To overcome these challenges, China must foster new industries, models, and growth drivers while ensuring control over key technologies, and that all demands a profound comprehension of the dynamics of new quality productive forces and their contribution to the pursuit of high-quality development," Ding added.

Xi said new quality productive forces represent advanced productivity driven by innovation, which means they break away from traditional economic models and emphasize technology, efficiency, and quality. Because these forces are born from revolutionary technological breakthroughs, innovative resource allocation, and industrial transformation, they prioritize total factor productivity and innovation, ultimately leading to qualitative and innovation-driven growth.



Staff work at a factory of domestic cellphone-maker Oppo in Dongguan, Guangdong province, on May 18. XU JIAYI / XINHUA



Clockwise from above left: Employees work on the production line of WeView's Gigawatt-class zinc-iron flow battery "Super G Factory" in Zhuhai, Guangdong, on May 19. LI RENZI / XINHUA A technician works at Yuntao Hydrogen Technology Co in Guangzhou, Guangdong; an employee conducts tests in a workshop of the flying car developer Xpeng Aeroht in Guangzhou. PARKER ZHENG / CHINA DAILY



Digital revolution

To accelerate the development of new quality productive forces, Guangdong, as a powerhouse in textiles, is spreading a digital revolution that promises to transform the industry as it grapples with limitations in global high-end value and supply chains, while having little say in setting the industry's international rules and standards.

"There are some 530 ISO (International Organization for Standardization) standards in the textile industry worldwide, of which only 37 are led by China," said Li Ling-shen, vice-president of the China Textile Industry Federation.

"This means that in terms of ISO standards, we are responsible for only 7 percent, showing that we don't have much of a say in the formulation of international rules."

Facing such a disparity, Guangdong is committed to bridging the gap through technological prowess. This resolve has sparked a wave of digital initiatives aimed at revolutionizing industrial processes and organizational frameworks.

At the forefront of this digital revolution is Guangzhou Zhijing Information Technology Co, a pioneering force in harnessing digital technologies to streamline textile operations. "From smart clothing design platforms

"The vision is clear. We must not only serve upstream and downstream enterprises, but also bridge them together, creating a more resilient and competitive industrial chain."

Wei Jianzhang, vice-president of the Belt and Road Initiative's International Cooperation and Development Research Institute in Shenzhen

that slash design times from weeks to minutes to fully automated fabric inspection systems that ensure unparalleled quality, our company aims to empower small and medium-sized enterprises to embrace digitalization and drive efficiency across the textile and garment production industry," said Li Yaping, co-founder and senior vice-president of GZIT. Utilizing technologies, the company has developed multiple smart cloud platforms covering the entire chain of textile and garment production, procurement, design and sales.

"The days of navigating fabric markets for days on end are a thing of the past thanks to the smart fabric sourcing platform developed by GZIT," said Shi Daqing, general manager of Guangdong Gongying Clothing Co. "With this new technology, fabric selection has been streamlined to a matter of minutes."

In fact, the impact of this digital transformation extends far beyond the province's borders. Data from GZIT shows that since its establishment, the company has provided digital empowerment services to over 50,000 textile and garment enterprises nationwide, driving the integration of manufacturing and the internet and propelling industries into the future.

Impressed by the digital monitors supplied by GZIT, Chen Kai, general manager of Foshan Xinwei Knitting Co, said, "The operation of equipment in real time can reduce abnormal downtime of factory equipment by 35 percent and improve overall efficiency by 30 percent."

Wei Jianzhang, vice-president of the Belt and Road Initiative's International Cooperation and Development Research Institute in Shenzhen said the changes in the textile industry are just part of Guangdong's broad-

er efforts to forge ahead with its digital agenda and cultivate a thriving ecosystem of industrial internet platform companies and service providers.

"The vision is clear. We must not only serve upstream and downstream enterprises, but also bridge them together, creating a more resilient and competitive industrial chain," Wei said. In an era defined by technological innovation, "Guangdong's digital transformation is not just a step forward — it's a leap into a brighter, more connected future."

Ideas thrive

The tale of Guangdong's digital revolution in traditional industries is a familiar one, championed by companies in Foshan and Guangzhou. However, the province's vibrant tech haven of Shenzhen is the real epicenter of strategic emerging sectors, where bold ideas take root and flourish.

In February, ZTE Corporation, headquartered in Shenzhen, made waves with its announcement of a slew of 5G-Advanced products and plans for their commercial deployment at the Mobile World Congress 2024 in Barcelona, Spain.

"This year marks the starting year for the commercial use of 5G-A technology," said Tang Xue, vice president of ZTE.

Compared to 5G, 5G-A technology offers users a blazing-fast 10 Gbps experience, boasting a connectivity increase of tenfold and delivering speeds and coverage that are ten times superior.

"But 5G-A isn't just about faster internet; it represents a paradigm shift in the way we live, work, and play," said Tang, emphasizing its potential to revolutionize industries, from express logistics to emergency rescue, by enabling two-way low-latency communication, it is crucial for managing unmanned aerial vehicles effectively.

Although the burgeoning significance of 5G-A extends beyond mere speed enhancements, as Tang highlighted, the findings from market research firm Custom Market Insights highlight the monumental growth trajectory anticipated for the global 5G services market. This growth also signifies a profound shift in the telecommunications landscape and its imminent impact on various sectors worldwide.

The report from the market research firm revealed that the global 5G services market's value reached \$28.9 billion last year and is forecast to skyrocket to \$250.2 billion by 2032, a remarkable compound annual growth rate of 26.5 percent.

The information technology and telecom sectors reigned supreme in the market in 2022, claiming a substantial 35 percent share, closely trailed by the banking and healthcare industries. Projections indicate that the IT and telecom sector will maintain its dominance through 2032, as per the report.

Technological advancements have paved the way for innovative services like autonomous driving, augmented reality, and virtual reality, all of which rely heavily on network efficiency enhancements and drive the demand for robust 5G infrastructure, according to the report.

"Like things happened in Guangdong, the development of new quality productive forces needs concerted effort across various domains, which includes prioritizing innovation in science and technology, fostering the application of these innovations in industries, promoting green development models, and reforming production relations to align with the requirements of modern productivity," Ding from the Chinese Academy of Science and Technology for Development said.

Talent development is also crucial, with a focus on education, innovation, and talent mobility, he added.

"By establishing robust mechanisms for talent management and fostering an environment conducive to innovation, Guangdong's high-quality development is more than a local success story. From intelligent manufacturing in Foshan and Guangzhou to technological breakthroughs in Shenzhen, it's a model of modernization and innovation much anticipated by China," Ding said.

Li Yihui in Guangzhou contributed to this story.

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Left and center: Staff work at the factory of Midea dishwashers in Shunde, Guangdong, on May 16; Right: Employees work at the shore-based command center of Yunzhou Tech, a developer of unmanned surface vehicles, in Zhuhai, Guangdong, on May 20. PHOTOS BY LI RENZI / XINHUA

TOP NEWS

Take it easy



A man sits inside his flooded shop on Sunday after heavy rains lashed Malwana on the outskirts of Sri Lanka's capital Colombo. Flash floods, mudslides and falling trees have killed at least 14 people after the island nation was battered by monsoon storms. ISHARA S. KODIKARA / AFP

Married couple accused of spying for UK arrested

By YANG ZEKUN
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China recently cracked an espionage case involving the United Kingdom's secret intelligence service, the MI6, which had recruited two Chinese central government employees to spy for it, the Ministry of State Security announced on Monday.

A post on the ministry's WeChat account revealed that the two people who were recruited by MI6 are a married couple who held important positions in central government departments prior to their arrest.

The ministry said that in 2015, a man surnamed Wang, who had "access to core confidential information" as an employee of a central government department, applied

to study in the UK as part of a China-UK exchange program.

When the British intelligence service realized the sensitive position Wang held in China, it quickly facilitated the approval of his application.

Upon his arrival in the UK, the intelligence agency arranged for personnel to provide Wang with special attention, inviting him to meals, social gatherings and sight-seeing tours to understand his weaknesses and preferences.

After discovering Wang's strong desire for money, MI6 dispatched an agent to approach him under the guise of a fellow alumnus on campus, offering him part-time consulting opportunities with high remuneration. Tempted by the financial incentive, Wang agreed to engage in paid consulting.

The MI6 initially involved Wang in open research projects, gradually moving to gather core internal information about China's central government agencies, paying him significantly more than typical consulting fees. Although Wang tried to be cautious, he continued to provide "consulting" services to the UK, lured by the substantial payments involved.

After assessing the conditions over a period of time, the MI6 got its personnel to reveal their true identity to Wang, asking him outright to serve the UK government with promises of bigger rewards and guarantee of security.

Driven by the promise of greater rewards, Wang agreed. The MI6 provided him with professional espionage training, instructing him to return to China, go under-

cover and gather intelligence.

Wang's wife, surnamed Zhou, also worked in a critical position in the Chinese central government. Convinced that they had Wang in control, the MI6 repeatedly pressured him to involve his wife in espionage activities. The intelligence agency also promised to double his remuneration.

Despite initial hesitations, Wang eventually succumbed to the repeated persuasions, inducements and even threats from the MI6. Working under Wang's influence, Zhou also agreed to gather intelligence for the UK.

National security officers recently detained the couple after meticulous investigations and evidence collection. The case is currently under investigation, according to the ministry.

Exchanges: Visa-free policy boosts tourism recovery

From page 1

Cheok's views were echoed by Tan Pei Wei, who studies at Tianjin University.

"Educational cooperation provides us international students with a more global perspective, allowing us to experience the customs and cultures of another country," Tan said.

"At the same time, it enables us to introduce Malaysia to more Chinese students who may not be familiar with my country.

"I also hope to introduce China to the youths of Malaysia," she added, stressing the importance of people-to-people exchanges in

deepening mutual understanding and promoting bilateral cooperation in various fields such as trade.

Bilateral trade volume has surged from less than \$200 million half a century ago to \$190.24 billion last year, a 950-fold increase, according to Chinese Ambassador to Malaysia Ouyang Yujing.

China has been Malaysia's largest trading partner for 15 consecutive years and a major source of investment.

Meanwhile, the mutual visa exemption between China and Malaysia, which took effect in December, has facilitated travel between the two countries.

Tan, the student, highlighted her family's recent visit to Chengdu, Sichuan province, as evidence that the visa-free policy will attract more Malaysians to explore China.

Malaysian statistics showed that the number of Chinese tourists visiting Malaysia in 2023 exceeded 1.47 million, making China the largest source of tourists for Malaysia outside of ASEAN.

Since the beginning of the year, more than 275,000 Chinese tourists have visited Malaysia each month, according to the Chinese ambassador.

This fully demonstrates that the mutual visa-free policy has met the needs of the two peoples

for frequent exchanges, enabling Chinese and Malaysian tourists to embark on a journey anytime without planning, Ouyang said in a recent interview with China Central Television.

The mutual visa exemption has also promoted the recovery and growth of the airline business and tourism between China and Malaysia, he said, adding that it will undoubtedly further promote people-to-people exchanges, enhance the economic benefits of related industries, and facilitate all-around practical cooperation.

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Beijing refutes Manila's claims over islands

China holds indisputable sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao, foreign ministry stresses

By ZHOU JIN
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China reiterated on Monday its indisputable sovereignty over Nanhai Zhudao (South China Sea islands), dismissing Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr's speech at the recent Shangri-La Dialogue concerning the South China Sea issue.

The Philippine president said in a keynote address at the dialogue on Friday in Singapore that the Philippines' territorial claims are backed by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the South China Sea "arbitral award" made in 2016, according to a transcript published by the Philippine Presidential Communications Office.

In response, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson said in an online statement that China, which was the first to have discovered, named, explored and utilized the South China Sea islands and relevant waters, has indisputable sovereignty over the islands and sovereign rights and jurisdiction over relevant waters.

The Philippine president's remarks disregard history and facts and are intended to amplify Manila's wrongful position on the South China Sea, the statement said.

Philippine territory is defined by a series of international treaties that do not include China's Nansha Islands and Huangyan Island, the statement said.

China opposes the Philippines' occupying by force some islands and reefs of China's Nansha Islands, which seriously violates its sovereignty, sovereign rights and international law, the statement quoted the spokesperson as saying.

The spokesperson reiterated that the "arbitral award" on the South China Sea is "illegal, null and void", saying that China's territorial sover-

eignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea will not be affected by the so-called award.

It is the Philippines that bears responsibility for the escalation of the situation, the spokesperson noted.

The Philippines has breached its commitments and common understandings with China, frequently made provocations at sea and solicited external support to flex its muscles, and spread disinformation to vilify China and mislead the international community, the spokesperson said.

The spokesperson also blasted the United States for its support and assistance to the Philippines in infringing on China's sovereignty and exploiting the South China Sea issue to drive a wedge between China and other countries in the region.

It is clear to see exactly whom Philippine foreign policy serves and whose bidding the Philippines is doing with all these maritime actions, the spokesperson added.

The spokesperson noted that the situation in the South China Sea is generally stable, and there has been no issue at all regarding the freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea that countries enjoy in accordance with law.

China will continue to firmly defend its territorial sovereignty and maritime interests and rights, and it remains committed to properly handling maritime disputes and differences through negotiation and consultation with countries directly concerned, the spokesperson said.

The spokesperson also urged Manila to return to the right track of handling maritime disputes and differences properly, through dialogue and consultation, as soon as possible.

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Advertising: 212-537-8916

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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.

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Development: Xizang's urbanization felt across various spheres

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Yet, despite these achievements, a cloud of misinformation hangs over Xizang. The United States and certain Western nations wield powerful public opinion machines, weaving a web of falsehoods. The West's portrayal of Xizang as an "oppressed land" ignores the strides made in preserving local language, culture and religious freedom. It disregards the flourishing monasteries, the vibrant festivals and the resilience of a people who have weathered centuries of change.

Xizang's journey is one of progress, not subjugation, like the rest of the country. China's commitment to education, infrastructure and human rights deserves acknowledgment, not distortion. For Xizang, like any other land, it

deserves to be seen through a lens of understanding, not prejudice.

Xizang's urbanization is a key component of its overall development strategy. The impact of Xizang's urbanization can be felt across various spheres. Over the past 73 years, China's central government has introduced numerous favorable policies for the Xizang region, focusing on tax incentives, infrastructure, industrial development, education, healthcare, cultural preservation and environmental protection. Each year, fiscal transfers to Xizang increase, supporting major projects that enhance long-term development and improve living standards.

Consequently, the local population enjoys better working and living conditions, with a growing sense of gain, happiness, and secu-

urity, especially among the ethnic groups. Between 1994 and 2020, provincial-level regions, central government departments and centrally administered State-owned enterprises provided substantial support to Xizang.

Through 6,330 projects and an investment of 52.7 billion Chinese yuan (\$7.43 billion), they have bolstered regional development. Additionally, the period saw 9,682 cadres dispatched to the area, further contributing to the region's progress. These efforts underscore China's commitment to fostering a thriving, secure and contented Xizang, ensuring its sustainable growth and prosperity for future generations.

In 1951, Xizang's GDP was a modest 129 million yuan. By 2023, this figure soared to over 239 billion

yuan (\$33.67 billion), marking an extraordinary increase of more than 1,855 times. This remarkable growth has led to significant improvements in the region's economic structure. By the end of 2019, the region had lifted 628,000 registered poor residents out of poverty. Seventy-four counties and districts saw remarkable improvements. Compulsory education had reached 97.78 percent of the population by the end of 2023. Xizang boasts a comprehensive public healthcare system, covering basic medical services, maternity care, disease prevention, and traditional Tibetan medicine.

The establishment of the Xizang autonomous region and the embracing of a socialist system have laid a robust foundation for ethnic equality, solidarity and

mutual progress. These historic changes ensure that all ethnic groups in Xizang can equally partake in regional and national governance. This institutional framework has been pivotal for Xizang's alignment with China's broader development trajectory.

Under the astute leadership of the central government and the unwavering support from across China, coupled with the dedicated efforts of Xizang's diverse populace, the region is experiencing remarkable socioeconomic growth. This progress reflects in improved opportunities and a promising potential that rivals other parts of the nation. The harmonious blend of local endeavor and national backing is propelling Xizang toward a prosperous future, embodying the spirit of unity and

shared advancement that defines modern China's vision.

In the highlands of Xizang, where prayer flags flutter and ancient monasteries cling to cliffs, the quietly unfolding revolution progresses for people's benefits. China's advancements in human rights are palpable. The Tibetan people, their voices amplified, hold the reins of change. The US, with its magnifying glass, should take heed. Xizang's journey is not theirs to dictate. Instead, let them turn inward. Let them address their own demons — the racial inequities, the surveillance state, the erosion of trust. For in this grand theater of nations, hypocrisy is the villain that knows no borders. And perhaps, just perhaps, humility can be the hero that bridges divides.

The author is a geostrategist and political analyst based in Lahore, Pakistan. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Retired educators from Shandong pass on their knowledge in western China

National program aims to deploy teaching staff across country more evenly

By ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan
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Ma Baohua is relishing a second wind in his career after choosing to come out of retirement to inspire the next generation of educators in the workforce.

The professor from Shandong University is one of a raft of retirees taking part in the National "Silver Age" Teacher Action Plan, launched by the Ministry of Education and nine other departments in July last year, with the aim of recruiting around 120,000 retired teachers during the three-year plan period to teach in institutions such as primary and vocational schools and universities.

The particular initiative that Ma is involved with encompasses utilizing these retired professionals to supplement the teaching resources in China's western region, which have been in short supply for a long time.

Ma, who has relocated to teach at Kashi University in Kashgar, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, said he is delighted to witness the progress of the young teachers he has been mentoring for the past few months.

Specializing in histology and embryology — branches of biology dealing with tissues, organs and embryos — Ma's mentee has begun giving lectures independently for the first time this semester, and they've received praise from both the students and faculty.

"How to make the teaching of histology and embryology simple enough so students can understand is challenging for many teachers," he said, adding this requires teachers to possess a comprehensive understanding of the subject and be good communicators.

Contributing to the development of Xinjiang has been a dream of Ma's since childhood after he was inspired by a movie depicting the courageous efforts of Chinese soldiers defending the country's borders on the Pamir Plateau, with its snow-capped mountains and majestic glaciers.

Ma is not alone, with retired teachers from dozens of universities across China having joined the same program since 2020. Among them, teachers from Shandong University have played an important role in building scientific research platforms, conducting research and mentoring young teachers across various disciplines, including medicine, mathematics, computer science, journalism, art, design and English.

"We expect our professors to contribute to the sustainable develop-



Clockwise from top: Wu Jun, a retired professor from Shandong University, teaches an English class at Qinghai Normal University in Xining, Qinghai province, in October last year. Ma Baohua demonstrates the use of a microscope at Kashi University in Kashgar, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, in February. Wu takes a photo with her students at Qinghai Normal University. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ment of teaching, scientific research and innovation in higher education in the western regions and provinces," Ren Youqun, Party secretary of Shandong University, said at a meeting with professors leaving for schools in Xinjiang and Qinghai in March.

Dream realized

After learning of the education support program in 2022, Ma applied to teach in Kashgar despite initial concerns from his wife regarding what his life would be like in the region.

"I told my family that this chance could probably be the last for me to realize my young dream of doing something for the region," he said.

He eventually won over his wife, with the support of his daughter,

and embarked on his journey in February last year to teach histology and embryology at the School of Medicine of Kashi University, a school only established in 2022 and in dire need of experienced teachers.

Ma embraced his new role, infusing the university's medical education with his expertise in teaching and research. He has also contributed to the university's digital transformation.

This semester, digital methods have been integrated into medical education, including the use of digital slicing.

"Digital slicing enhances the depth and breadth of medical education by providing interactive and dynamic tools for learning, analysis and visualization," said Ma.

He's even introduced bilingual instruction, combining Chinese and English.

"Learning some English will not only facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter but equip students with a global perspective that is essential for future international engagements," he said.

To expand the channel of academic exchange, Ma has introduced experts and scholars from across the country to attend meetings at the university.

Amid his busy schedule, he's found solace in the warmth and care given by the faculty of the university.

He has experienced firsthand the familial embrace and rich cultural heritage of the region, being invited

by a couple to celebrate with them the traditional Corban Festival, also known as Eid al-Adha.

"I experienced local customs and tried local food and fruits. It was such an enjoyable festival, it was like I was with my own family," said Ma.

He even visited the Pamir Plateau in his time off, the place that had left an indelible mark on his young heart.

"Great changes have taken place in the region compared with the scenes in the movie. The roads are now flat, and camel-driven transport has been replaced with vehicles," he said.

Childhood connection

Hu Heqin and Wu Jun, husband and wife and also retired profes-

sors from Shandong University, began their new chapter at Qinghai Normal University in Xining, Qinghai province, in November 2021, also via the education support program.

Wu, 68, teaches five courses on translation to undergraduate and graduate students at the School of Foreign Languages and Literature. Hu, 69, teaches history at the School of Marxism.

Their connections to the western region run deep.

"When we were young, we lived in neighboring Gansu province, and we lived on the water from the Huangshui River, a river that originates from Qinghai and meets the Yellow River in Gansu province," said Hu.

"We have developed a deep connection to the northwestern land due to our childhood experience," he said.

During the 1950s, the parents of both Wu and Hu responded to the national call for supporting the development of the northwestern region, relocating from Shandong and Zhejiang provinces to Lanzhou, Gansu province. It was in Lanzhou that Wu and Hu spent their early years.

"We are happy that we can do something for the western region, although at this age, we need to overcome some altitude sickness," said Hu, acknowledging the challenges of living at an elevation of 2,200 meters. This adjustment caused Hu to experience altitude sickness, leading to a rash on his legs that only subsided upon his return to Shandong after a semester.

Despite the setbacks, the couple prepares for each class earnestly and their teaching has left a deep impression on their students.

"Professor Wu is both a teacher and a friend. She uses various examples to analyze the cultural differences in Chinese and English vocabulary and idiomatic expressions, and she presents the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western cultures in a clear and understandable manner," said Mai Yarui, one of Wu's students.

Both professors actively mentor young teachers, recognizing the pivotal role of the younger generation in shaping the future of the university.

After a long day, the couple often frequents the school library, a habit that has rubbed off on their students.

"Teaching for decades doesn't mean one is all-knowing or that knowledge is complete. Teaching is an endless pursuit, and as educators, we must continually strive to improve ourselves," said Hu.

"Students flock to the library after school to read there, and locals engage in leisure activities on weekends in the library," said Wu.

"Years may wrinkle the skin, but to give up enthusiasm wrinkles the soul," she said, quoting a verse from the poem *Youth* by United States poet Samuel Ullman.

International education comes to nation's less-developed regions

By ZHAO RUIXUE

In mid-March, with the first light of dawn, Sheng Lin began her day preparing for her 10 am lecture, the first class of the day at Kashi University, located in Kashgar, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

The 66-year-old, a formerly retired associate professor from Shandong University in Jinan, Shandong province, is assisting in teaching in the School of Chinese Language as part of a program encouraging retired professors to contribute to institutions of higher education in China's western regions and provinces.

"Classes begin two hours later than in Shandong province because of the difference in daylight hours, reflecting the vast expanse of our country," said Sheng.

The class she teaches has students hailing from countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Myanmar. It's the first international class at the university.

When she arrived at the university just over two years ago, there were only Chinese students in the department of international Chinese education, she said.

"With the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, Kashgar has transformed from an inland area to an open frontier that plays a role as a pivotal hub for international exchange," she added.

Last September, the first international students started studying at the university. As the second semester unfolds, Sheng has witnessed the remarkable progress of her students, now proficient enough to navigate their studies without the aid of English or Russian as intermediary languages.

"The international Chinese education here is just starting, which is exactly where we retired teachers who come to work in the university need to make efforts," she said.

Beyond her teaching responsibilities, Sheng has engaged in various initiatives, from advising the university on strategic planning



Sheng Lin, a retired associate professor from Shandong University, teaches a Chinese language class at Kashi University in Kashgar, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, in March. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

for international student education to conducting academic lectures.

"Teaching in Kashgar has not only given me an opportunity to contribute to the region's education, but offered me a chance to learn the

local culture and history," she said.

In her pursuit of understanding and embracing the local culture, Sheng has ventured into the heart of Xinjiang, exploring many places, including the ancient streets of Kashgar, the vast expanse of the Tak-

limakan Desert and the rugged beauty of the Pamir Plateau.

"Each experience has deepened my appreciation for the region's unique landscapes and its warm-hearted people," Sheng said.

She attended a language training program held at a local cotton spinning company at the end of last semester, where she was impressed by the employees of various ethnic groups who shared their learning experiences, recited poems, demonstrated calligraphy and showcased paper-cutting artistry.

The language training program was held in collaboration with Kashi University. It began in 2016 when 60 ethnic employees faced difficulties in technical training due to language barriers, hindering their ability to express their needs, said Sheng.

In response, language training in collaboration with the university's Chinese language school was initiated. To date, over 20 training sessions have been held.

Sheng was impressed by the com-

pany's dormitories, cafeteria and factory workshops.

"The workshops are spacious and clean, with modern automated machinery. Apart from our group of visitors, only the occasional worker can be seen adjusting the machines," she said, adding the overall environment was bright and spacious, dispelling her traditional impressions of factory workshops.

"A company employee accompanying us on the tour told me that the company had provided a large number of job opportunities," Sheng said.

"Many couples work together at the company, and their combined monthly income ranges from 6,000 yuan to 10,000 yuan (\$828-\$1,382)," she said.

Reflecting on her journey to teach in Kashgar, Sheng recalled the words of her colleague who assured her upon her arrival that she would grow to love the place.

"I indeed love the campus, the teachers and students here," she said.

CHINA

Senior still fighting to protect fish

Retiree persists in efforts to boost population of Chinese sturgeon

By HOU LIQIANG in Beijing and LIU KUN in Wuhan

Wei Qiwei began working to protect the Chinese sturgeon and trying to restore the endangered species population in the wild because of the country's job-assignment mechanism for university graduates last century.

The 64-year-old, however, has devoted about four decades of his life to the effort despite highly inadequate funding for an extended period of time, and he is determined to forge ahead with his work even after his retirement.

In 1984, when he graduated from Jiangxi University with a biology degree, he was assigned to work with a magazine run by the Yangtze River Fisheries Research Institute in Hubei province, which is affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Fishery Sciences.

At the time, all new graduates needed to undergo training at the institute's testing grounds for one year before they officially assumed their posts.

When Wei finished his training, however, the head of the magazine who recruited him from Jiangxi University was on a business trip and failed to ask him to return to the magazine. He was then asked by the head of another department if he was willing to join a program focused on the protection of Chinese sturgeon, and he took the offer.

He soon encountered difficulties in his work regarding the fish, which is often referred to as a "living fossil" as it has existed for more than 140 million years.

Saving the Chinese sturgeon was once a hot topic in 1981, when a river diversion closure project was completed for the Gezhouba Dam, a sprawling facility for water resources management and hydroelectric power station on the Yangtze's mainstream, as the dam could have had some adverse impact on the habitat and population of the species, according to Wei.

By 1983, however, it was no longer a topic of high concern, he said, because artificial reproduction efforts of the fish were successful, and it was determined that there were new spawning grounds for the species downstream from the dam.

In 1985, the nation suspended funding for the institute's Chinese sturgeon program. Despite the setback, the head of Wei's institute, who then held that it was too early to conclude that the threat from the dam was over, decided to allocate 20,000 yuan (\$2,759) from the institute's budget each year to support the monitoring of the species.

"That was far from enough," he said, adding he had to work without adequate funding for about 10 years.

To find the specific location of the spawning ground of the Chinese sturgeon downstream from

Gezhouba, Wei rented a boat to catch *coreius heterodon*, a species of ray-finned fish, and then dissected them to see if there were Chinese sturgeon eggs in their stomachs.

With approval from the Hubei fishery authority, he was able to raise funds for the program by selling Chinese sturgeons that had been dissected to researchers. He also sold ray-finned fish that he caught.

Chinese sturgeon can grow to as much as 4 meters long and weigh as much as 500 kilograms.

In the 1990s, it was popular for many researchers to apply to study in the United States. Wei was invited to participate in exchange programs with US scientists researching Chinese sturgeon protection, and some offered to take him on as their student.

Wei declined their offers. "If I agreed, I would have had to study in the US for two years without coming back to China. Then who would have done the breeding work in the autumn?" he said, adding that nobody besides him would have been willing to take up the exhausting work.

Wei stressed that breeding Chinese sturgeons, whose life expectancy can reach 40 years, requires long-term persistence.

"Many fish species need only three to five years to reach sexual maturity. Chinese sturgeons, however, need 15 years," he said.

In the early 1990s, the population of Chinese sturgeon decreased significantly due to imbalances in gender and age, proof that protection efforts were still necessary.

China now has about 3,000 first-generation wild Chinese sturgeons. Wei said he believes that about half of them will be able to grow into adult fish, and if they are well nurtured, it's highly possible that they can annually produce millions of fish fry.

He said his team estimates that if at least 1 million juvenile Chinese sturgeons are released into the wild each year, the size of the population needed to ensure adequate natural reproduction will be restored by 2036.

Since China began releasing artificially bred Chinese sturgeons in 1984, nearly 8.4 million juveniles have been released into the Yangtze. But the species did not naturally reproduce for seven straight years, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

Though Wei has retired from the institute, he insists on continuing to contribute to the protection of the Chinese sturgeon. In 2022, he set up a protection center for the species in Wuhan, Hubei's capital.

"For us who are engaged in wildlife protection, we are always racing against the speed of wildlife extinction. If we lose the race, species will go extinct," he said.



A Siberian tiger cub rests at the Siberian Tiger Park in Harbin, Heilongjiang province. ZHENG XUEFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Baby tiger boom hits Heilongjiang

By ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin zhouhuiying@chinadaily.com.cn

As of mid-May, a combined 18 Siberian tiger cubs have been born at the Siberian Tiger Park in Harbin and the Hengdaohezi Siberian Tiger Park in Mudanjiang, both in Heilongjiang province.

The parks are two of three run by the China Hengdaohezi Feline Breeding Center, the world's largest such facility for these rare tigers. The third is located in Shenyang, Liaoning province.

Siberian tigers are among the world's most endangered species. They mainly live in northeastern China and eastern Russia.

Mating season for the big cats usually falls in January and February, and the birthing period runs from early April to late June.

Two weeks after their births at the Hengdaohezi Siberian Tiger Park on May 1, five cubs — three males and two females — were getting stronger.

"Their mothers are three young tigers that have no experience nursing, so the breeders have taken on the task of feeding the cubs," said Zang Yingying, a breeder at the park. "The cubs' body temperatures dropped rapidly because their mothers did not take care of them after giving birth, so they had to be sent to incubators.



A caretaker feeds a Siberian tiger cub at the Hengdaohezi Siberian Tiger Park in Mudanjiang, Heilongjiang. LIU YONGLIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

"They needed to be fed milk every three hours for the first week after birth," she said, noting that the milk was made from a formula powder for tigers. "Now they are fed every four to five hours with milk and eggs."

After days of careful nurturing,

the five cubs were in good health and have been removed from the incubators. "Their average weight climbed from about 1.3 kilograms each when they were born to more than 2 kg on May 16," said Zang. "When the cubs are older, they will be fed chopped meat."

The breeders have also been monitoring their appetites, body temperatures and feces to ensure their health.

At the Siberian Tiger Park in Harbin, six breeders who are responsible for feeding tiger cubs have also become extremely busy, especially after the first Siberian tiger twins of this year were born on Feb 15.

"Every year during birthing season, the breeders take turns working 24-hour shifts to monitor the pregnant tigers, which are moved to separate living quarters in a special area about a month before they give birth," said Li Dapeng, deputy director of the Harbin park's department of breeding and veterinary medicine. "They also pay great attention to the tiger moms, checking their health by monitoring their appetites and daily activities during the 105-to-110-day pregnancy period."

"Every day, the breeders carefully disinfected both the indoor and outdoor living areas," Li said. "In addition, they prepare an ample supply of nutritious food — including milk and eggs, as well as several kinds of vitamin pills — to help the animals maintain their strength."

This year, five tigers gave birth to 13 cubs, including twins and triplets.

"There are now four pregnant tigers awaiting delivery," Li said. "We are expecting the birth of more than 20 tiger cubs this year."

Popularity of ancient Chinese architecture stands strong

TAIYUAN — Lin Guodong's trip from Shanghai to Yuncheng, Shanxi province, over the May Day holiday this year was his third visit to the region known for ancient buildings.

"I have loved history since I was a child. Compared to reading books, a study trip offers a multi-dimensional experience. It allows me to feel history up close and systematically enrich my knowledge," said Lin, 29.

There are some 28,000 ancient buildings in Shanxi, including three Tang Dynasty (618-907) wooden structures and the world's tallest wooden pagoda.

The province also boasts 509 Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) wooden structures, accounting for over 80 percent of such buildings in China. It has more colored sculptures, murals and ancient stages than anywhere else nationwide.

In recent years, an increasing number of young people like Lin have flocked to Shanxi to explore its treasure of ancient buildings, sharing their experiences and travel tips on social media platforms such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu.

"Although my itinerary was already packed, there were still many places I didn't visit. Shanxi is worth multiple visits," wrote Zhou Zhiyu, a 21-year-old student at Beijing Institute of Technology, on Xiaohongshu.

Zhou, who grew up in Zhejiang province, has been to Shanxi twice to explore its ancient buildings.



Tourists visit Jinci Temple, a historical site known for its ancient buildings, in Taiyuan, Shanxi province. WANG XUETAO / XINHUA

She fondly recalls watching a flock of birds fly over the colorful glazed pagoda at Guangsheng Temple in Hongtong county.

"The ancient buildings in Shanxi, with their earthy colors, exude history. I prefer this kind of atmosphere," she said.

Yang Jie, an ancient building enthusiast born in the 1980s, shares Zhou's passion. In 2016, he left his job to pursue his love for history. The following year, he founded Jinxingji research and study center, which specializes in in-depth educational tours focused on history and culture.

"Starting with no participants on our first tour, we now receive

nearly 5,000 visitors a year, 31 percent of whom are under 30. It indicates that an increasing number of young people are interested in ancient buildings, and the demand for professional guides is growing," Yang said.

Yang and his team are devoted to selecting the iconic ancient buildings from across the country and hiring professionals to explain their structures, murals and sculptures, in an effort to perfectly blend tangible heritage with expert knowledge.

The growing enthusiasm for ancient buildings is fueled by the revival of traditional Chinese culture. As more people seek to

understand Chinese history and civilization through these historical sites, the movement for ancient building conservation is also gaining strength.

Wang Kai, an ancient building enthusiast working at the Institute of Atmospheric Physics at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, is dedicated to ancient building protection. Inspired by the works of renowned late architect Liang Sicheng, he followed in Liang's footsteps and began to visit ancient buildings in 2015.

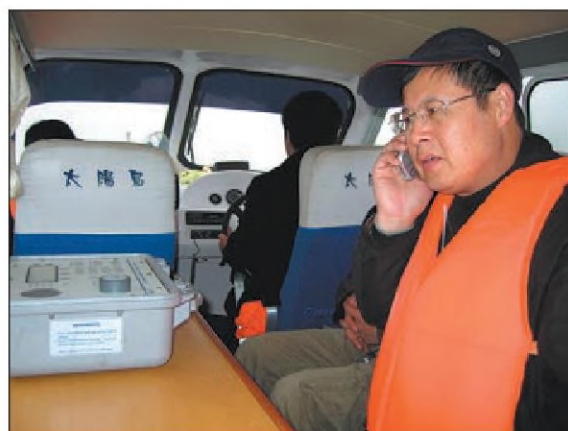
"There are many old photos in the books, and I wanted to see what these ancient buildings look like now. It quickly became an unstoppable passion, and I've since visited hundreds of them," Wang said.

He believes ancient buildings are crucial carriers of traditional Chinese culture, with their sculptures, murals and inscriptions being significant elements.

After visiting many buildings, Wang and other enthusiasts such as He Yanjun from Changzhi city, Shanxi, established a volunteer service center for cultural heritage protection, where they plan to organize voluntary patrols and introductions at ancient buildings.

As an overseas returnee, Wang decided to print his photos into books with English captions to introduce the materials and aesthetics of Chinese traditional architecture to foreign visitors.

XINHUA



Wei Qiwei answers a phone call on a boat during an inspection tour on the Yangtze River. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

WORLD

Deadly heat and deluges ravage S. Asia

Extreme weather events, exacerbated by climate change, claim dozens of lives

NEW DELHI/DHAKA — South Asia has been sweltering in recent months as a confluence of factors has led to a very hot summer, with extreme weather events killing dozens in the region.

Nearly 25,000 people have suffered suspected heatstroke and 56 died amid scorching heat across India between March and May, local media reported citing government data.

May has been a particularly bad month for India, with temperatures in New Delhi and nearby Rajasthan state touching 50 C.

In contrast, parts of the country's east have been reeling from Cyclone Remal. Heavy rain in the northeastern state of Assam has killed 14 people since May 27.

Cities in the southern states of Karnataka and Kerala have also been inundated by heavy rains.

India's tech hub of Bengaluru received 111.1 millimeters of rainfall on Sunday, the highest it has seen in the month of June since 1891.

Local media footage showed vehicles and pedestrians wading through flooded streets in Bengaluru, with fallen trees blocking roads and massive traffic jams clogging major intersections.

In the island country of Sri Lanka, at least 15 people have been killed by flooding and landslides after heavy monsoon rain lashed the region, the country's Disaster Management Centre said on Sunday.

A confluence of factors has led to a very hot summer in South Asia, a trend scientists said has been worsened by human-driven climate change.

At least 33 people, including poll officials on duty in India's just-concluded general election, have died of suspected heatstroke in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the north, and Odisha in the east.

Data from the National Centre of Disease Control showed the sit-

uation was worst in May, with 46 heat-related deaths and 19,189 suspected heatstroke cases, news site ThePrint reported.

Including suspected cases, the total number of deaths in India could be much higher at 80, The Hindu newspaper reported.

More than 5,000 cases of heatstroke were reported in the central state of Madhya Pradesh alone.

The weather office has predicted that heat will be less severe till Wednesday, and an early arrival of monsoon in Kerala last week is expected to bring more relief.

Highest temperature

In Bangladesh, a mild heat wave was sweeping parts of the country, including the capital Dhaka, and it may continue, the country's weather agency said on Sunday.

The country's maximum temperature on Saturday was recorded at 37.4 C in Jashore, some 164 kilometers southwest of Dhaka.

In the capital, the maximum temperature rose to 36.5 C on Sunday.

Because of increasing moisture incursions, experts said the discomfort may increase in Bangladesh, which sits on a massive river delta.

In recent years, natural disasters such as floods and heat waves induced by extreme weather owing to climate change have caused more frequent-than-usual disasters in the country of 165 million people.

Experts said heat waves would likely escalate in the coming years because of erratic rainfall and high temperatures, posing a threat to Bangladesh, one of the biggest victims of global warming.

Dhaka experienced 40.6 C on April 16 last year, the highest in the capital in 58 years.

The country experienced a record-breaking 23 heat wave days in April, the highest in 76 years.

AGENCIES—XINHUA



People in New Delhi brace scorching temperatures on Sunday. ARVIND YADAV VIA GETTY IMAGES

Foreign Ministry stresses impartiality, fairness on Ukraine peace conference

By ZHAO JIA
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The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on Monday that China's position on the peace conference regarding the Ukraine issue is fair and impartial, not targeting any specific party.

Speaking at a daily news briefing, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said that China has repeatedly emphasized that an international peace conference on the Ukraine crisis should be recognized by both Russia and Ukraine, with equal participation of all parties and fair discussion of all peace plans.

China finds it difficult to attend the Ukraine peace conference that will be held in Switzerland later this month, as it believes those crucial elements may not be met in the meeting, Mao said.

China's decision to attend the conference is solely based on its own assessment, she said, and it is believed that parties involved could understand China's position.

China believes that all efforts conducive to a peaceful settlement of the Ukraine crisis should be supported, she said, adding that the country has attached great importance to the Swiss peace conference on Ukraine from the very beginning and maintained close communication with all relevant parties.

'No' to bloc confrontation

Mao underscored that the decision to support peace should not be judged by individual countries or specific conferences, adding that China sincerely hopes the conference would not become a platform for bloc confrontation.

Nonparticipation does not



People in Cakovec, Croatia, interact with Huaju Opera actresses who performed during the "City Day" celebration on Wednesday. A delegation from Cakovec's sister city — Yancheng in Jiangsu province — attended the event. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Huaju Opera wows Croatian, Dutch guests

By CANG WEI in Nanjing
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The echoes of China's Huaju Opera, a tradition spanning more than two centuries, recently graced the stages in Croatia and the Netherlands, where the convergence of Eastern and Western arts unfolds a unique cultural dialogue and fosters a bridge of cultural exchange and friendship.

A delegation from Yancheng, a coastal city in Jiangsu province, attended the "City Day" celebration in Cakovec, Croatia, where Croatian leaders, including President Zoran Milanovic, witnessed the debut performance of Huaju Opera actresses Xia Rong and Xia Shiya on Wednesday.

The performance was well received. Spectators captured the highlights with their phones and cameras. Afterward, the audience members approached the perform-

ers for interactions and photos.

The performance marked Huaju Opera's debut in Croatia, following the establishment of sister-city relations between Yancheng and Cakovec in 2022. Interactions and exchanges between the two cities have been frequent, leading to cooperation in economy, trade and culture.

Friendly exchanges

Chen Weihong, director of the publicity department of Yancheng, shared stories of friendly exchanges between Yancheng and the Netherlands with Dutch guests while introducing Yancheng's cultural and tourism resources at the Yancheng (Netherlands) Cultural Tourism Exchange Conference on Friday.

Guests were treated to on-site presentations detailing Yancheng's ecological wetland culture, sea salt culture, vast marine

resources and vibrant modern trends. One popular presentation highlighted the spoon-billed sandpiper, a bird with a beak shaped like a small spoon living in Yancheng.

Chinese Ambassador to the Netherlands Tan Jian said the Dafeng Holland Flower Sea in Yancheng has become a tourist attraction, drawing thousands of Chinese tourists who wish to visit the Netherlands, and helping promote the sales of Dutch tulips in China.

"Welcome everyone to visit Yancheng, welcome to China," Tan said. "No visa is required."

China has extended the visa exemption policy for citizens of 12 countries, 11 of them in Europe, including the Netherlands.

The policy, which applies to those visiting China for short periods, will last until the end of next year.

Turkiye's ambassador hails shared pursuit of peace and collaboration

By ZHANG YUNBI and JIAO JIE

Turkiye's Ambassador to China Ismail Hakki Musa has hailed the great similarities his country and China share in pursuing peace and rejecting conflicts among different civilizations.

In an interview with China Daily, he said that both China and Turkiye are "heirs of big civilizations."

"They have almost a similar position, similar view, similar opinions on global issues," he said.

"This is a historical responsibility for us to move forward in this spirit, and to explore convenient ways of a larger and deeper cooperation."

In particular, he said both China and Turkiye favor peaceful solutions to any conflict, which "brings us more together."

The ambassador also responded



Ismail Hakki Musa

to some of the widespread ideas of the late United States political scientist Samuel Huntington, who predicted that there will be major clashes among the civilizations, and that conflicts of the future will not be among ideologies, but civilizations.

Moral duty

"In order to avoid, for example, this conflict to be a civilization one, we have this moral duty of suggesting and proposing new ideas, new theories, new concepts," he said.

If there is no flexible solution, it may further lead us to a civilizational conflict, he said.

Musa praised "an effort in that direction" — the initiative pro-

posed by China to build a community with a shared future for mankind.

This is China's desire to prevent humanity from getting involved in a major civilizational tragedy and conflict, he said.

Every country has contributed to the world civilization as a whole, he said.

"The question is that we shouldn't impose, we shouldn't install a kind of hierarchy between civilizational values."

"In order to avoid the theory of Huntington from coming true, we need to deploy more and more efforts at the civilization level."

"And I think that the Chinese initiative is a good step in that direction."

Contact the writers at zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn.

Driving away evil spirits



A man dressed as the "Colacho" (devil) jumps over babies lying on a mattress during the "Salto del Colacho" festival in Castrillo de Murcia, Spain, on Sunday. The annual ritual symbolizes the cleansing of original sin and protects infants from evil spirits and illness. CESAR MANSO / AFP

Joint green efforts by Africa, China key to growth

By RADING GERRO in Nairobi, Kenya
For China Daily

Africa's vast potential for renewable energy, combined with China's technological expertise and investment capacity, presents a unique opportunity for mutual economic growth, experts say.

This collaboration can drive sustainable development, alleviate energy poverty and stimulate economic activities across the African continent, they said.

Speaking during the African Development Bank Group's annual meeting in Kenya's capital Nairobi, which concluded on Friday, Kevin Kariuki, the bank's vice-president for power, energy, climate and green growth, said the continent needs to tap into renewable energy for industrial growth.

"I believe that by investing in Africa's renewable energy infrastructure, China can help build large-scale solar farms, wind farms and hydroelectric plants. These investments can provide reliable and affordable energy, which is crucial for economic growth."

The continent has not fully tapped into its renewable energy sector, according to the State of Africa's Infrastructure Report 2024 published last month by the Africa Finance Corporation.

This has continued to affect its economic growth rate, especially in the manufacturing sector, the report said.

"Our inability to tap into the renewable energy sector continues to slow down our growth rate," African Development Bank Group President Akinwumi Adesina said.

"Today our continent harnesses only a fraction of its renewable energy resources, with 1 percent of its solar potential, 5 percent of gas-to-power, 6 percent of geothermal, 7 percent of wind and 11 percent of hydropower. Hence, we cannot compete with other regions."

Africa should forge renewable collaboration with China to unlock its energy potential, Adesina said.

Expanded investment

In recent years, China has expanded investment in renewable energy in Africa. In Garissa County, Kenya, a Chinese-built solar power plant has contributed to Kenya's energy grid, supporting local industries and communities, while helping reduce more than 43,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions annually, Kenya's Rural Electrification and Renewable Energy Corporation said.

"One of the ways is to share expertise and provide training," Adesina said. "China can help build local capacities to manage and sustain renewable energy projects. This can be done through joint ventures, scholarships for African students in Chinese universities and the establishment of research and development centers in Africa."

In addition to benefiting from Chinese technology, delegates at the meeting also called on African countries to develop renewable energy regulatory frameworks that foster investments and partnerships.

"China can assist by sharing its experiences in creating effective renewable energy policies and regulatory frameworks," Kariuki said. "Collaborative efforts can also focus on developing regional energy markets and grid interconnections, enabling countries to share renewable energy resources more efficiently."

Paul Muthaura, CEO of the Africa Carbon Markets Initiative, identified financing as a major obstacle hindering renewable energy projects in Africa, highlighting China's potential to offer low-interest loans, thus bolstering support for such initiatives across the continent.

Although African countries in general lag behind in renewable energy development, countries such as Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa are implementing ambitious renewable energy development policies.

"It's no doubt that renewable energy has the potential to provide electricity to the 600 million Africans currently deprived of it, create jobs and stimulate industrial revolution in the continent," Muthaura said.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

WORLD

Mexico elects first female president

Experts see continuity of predecessor's govt model under Claudia Sheinbaum

By JIMENA ESTEBAN
in Buenos Aires
For China Daily

In a historic step, Claudia Sheinbaum is set to become Mexico's first female president after an official quick count declared her the winner of an election that featured two women as the front-runners.

Mario Delgado, head of the ruling party Morena, declared Sheinbaum the presumptive winner late on Sunday, ahead of a full count being done over the next few days. Sheinbaum delivered an acceptance speech in the wee hours of Monday morning. Crowds of her supporters gathered to celebrate their victory in Zocalo, Mexico City's main central square.

Mexicans voted for a president and more than 20,000 congressional and local positions across the country, including 128 senate seats, 500 deputy seats, Mexico City mayor, and governors in eight states.

Some 98 million people registered to vote on Sunday in the largest election in the country's history based on the number of positions being decided, with candidates focusing on issues of security, migration and economic reform.

An official quick count gave Sheinbaum an irreversible lead, Mexico's National Electoral Institute, or INE, reported on Sunday night.

The INE's statistical sample gave Sheinbaum between 58.3 percent and 60.7 percent of the vote, well ahead of her closest rival Xochitl Galvez, who was projected to have won between 26.6 and 28.6 percent.

Sheinbaum led the race leading into election day, maintaining a double-digit lead in opinion polls over businesswoman Galvez. However, Galvez had urged her own supporters to wait for the official results.

Sheinbaum will become Mexico's first female president. The climate scientist is a former mayor of Mexico City and an ally of incumbent President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, commonly known as AMLO.

After confirmation, Sheinbaum is scheduled to start her term on Oct 1, taking over from her mentor AMLO, who remains popular but

is constitutionally barred from running for a second term.

"This is a clear continuity of the model of government put in place by Lopez Obrador," Ezequiel Gonzalez Matus, a lawyer and electoral issues expert, said.

"She has said she will continue with AMLO's efforts to limit the power of the judiciary and control legislative power through his party,"

Hector Manuel Diaz, founder of the Association of Business for the Fourth Transformation, said Sheinbaum's win represents "a step beyond patriarchy and machismo often seen in Latin cultures". The group's name references the "fourth transformation" reform promise of AMLO's 2018 election campaign.

'Turning point'

"It is important that my country can have a woman win for the first time because it marks a turning point in history," Diaz said.

This election campaign sparked discussions about the role of women in Mexican politics, though Sheinbaum shied away from the topic, choosing instead to focus on her policies and taking the mantle from AMLO.

Sheinbaum is a "well-prepared and capable woman to carry out a government plan she has already defined and announced on several occasions", Diaz said. "I consider her solid and structured... She has the talent to get things done."

Sheinbaum's main rival, Galvez, is a former senator and top indigenous affairs official. She was backed by a coalition of three parties and also promised to extend social programs.

A third candidate and late entrant in the race, Jorge Alvarez Maynez, made headlines by proposing policies to eliminate the criminalization of some drug possession and end militarization.

Security issues dominated the election campaign, which was marred by violence and underscored the challenges that the country faces battling its high crime rates.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.



Supporters of Claudia Sheinbaum celebrate following her election win at Zocalo Square in Mexico City on Monday. SILVANA FLORES / AFP



Hunter Biden, accompanied by his wife, Melissa Cohen Biden, departs from federal court on Monday in Wilmington, Delaware. MATT ROURKE / AP

Jury picked for federal trial of Hunter Biden in gun case

By AI HEPING in New York
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A jury was chosen on Monday for the trial of President Joe Biden's son Hunter Biden, who is charged with three felonies for illegally owning a gun as a drug user and with lying about his drug use on a government form he filled out when he bought the weapon in 2018.

The son of a sitting president has never before faced a criminal trial.

If convicted, Hunter Biden, 54, could face up to 25 years in prison and \$750,000 in fines, although first-time and nonviolent offenders are often given shorter terms.

Opening statements will begin on Tuesday, and the first witness to provide testimony is an FBI agent who was responsible for investigating the case.

Hunter Biden's trial comes after the collapse of a plea deal with federal investigators last year. He pleaded not guilty last September after being indicted by special counsel David Weiss and has denied the charges.

The collapsed plea deal led to Biden's indictment on three felony gun charges in Delaware and nine tax charges in California, in a trial set for Sept 5 in which he is accused of avoiding paying at least \$1.4 million.

He is facing three felony and six misdemeanor charges connected to the allegations and has pleaded not guilty.

First lady Jill Biden was seated behind Hunter Biden all day, her 73rd birthday. When court was dismissed, Mrs. Biden gave Hunter Biden a hug and a kiss before he walked out hand-in-hand with his wife.

Hunter Biden's wife Melissa Cohen Biden and his sister, Ashley Biden, attended the first day of proceedings.

President Biden said in a

Secret Service retiree, a man whose father was killed by a gun and a number of jurors whose family and friends have suffered from addiction — a central theme in the case against Hunter Biden.

The panel was picked from 250 prospective jurors who arrived Monday morning at the courthouse in Delaware — a small state that Joe Biden represented in the Senate for more than three decades.

In October 2018, Hunter Biden purchased a revolver at a gun store north of Wilmington. People who purchase firearms are required to fill out a standardized form that asks whether they are an unlawful user or are addicted to controlled substances, narcotics and other listed substances.

Biden is accused of answering "no" to that question on the form.

Biden has been open about his longtime struggles with crack cocaine addiction, including in his 2021 memoir, Beautiful Things, and discussed it during a court hearing last year, stating he has been sober since 2019.

Weiss obtained two indictments for gun and tax charges against Hunter Biden after Noreika rejected a plea agreement in July that aimed to resolve the investigation.

Weiss, as US attorney in Delaware, had investigated Biden for years. Biden agreed to plead guilty to two misdemeanors for nonpayment of taxes in 2017 and 2018, and to enter a pretrial program on a gun charge.

Noreika questioned prosecutors and defense lawyers about whether the deal would protect Biden from future charges, and the judge refused to "rubber-stamp" the agreement.

The collapsed plea deal led to Biden's indictment on gun charges in Delaware and the tax charges in California.

The jury has six men and six women. The jurors include

statement issued Monday that he has "boundless love" for his son.

"I am the president, but I am also a dad. Jill and I love our son, and we are so proud of the man he is today. Hunter's resilience in the face of adversity and the strength he has brought to his recovery are inspiring to us," Biden said in the statement as jury selection got underway.

The elder Biden remained in Wilmington, Delaware, until after a jury was empaneled.

Hunter Biden arrived this morning and walked through the front entrance of the J. Caleb Boggs Federal Building, named after J. Caleb Boggs — a former Delaware senator who lost his 1972 reelection bid to Joe Biden.

As Hunter Biden entered the building, he would have passed a photograph of his father, which hangs in every federal courthouse in the country.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters aboard an Air Force One that Hunter Biden's trial would "absolutely not" affect President Biden's work.

US District Judge Maryellen Noreika told jurors they would likely need to be available for the trial through June 14, with the possibility of deliberations stretching into the week of June 17.

Quoting a senior official, Al-Qaheera said Egypt reiterated its demand that "Israel withdraw from the Palestinian side of the Rafah crossing so it can resume operations".

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said Sunday that all 36 of its shelters in Rafah "are now empty" after at least a million people fled the city.

Adding to the region's tension, Israeli airstrikes after midnight Monday killed 12 pro-Iranian militants in Syria's northern province of Aleppo, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The attack hit several sites in the countryside of Aleppo. Several explosions were heard across the area.

Meanwhile, the Maldives government will ban Israelis from the Indi-

an Ocean archipelago, the office of the president said on Sunday, announcing a national rally in "solidarity with Palestine".

Israel's Foreign Ministry said in response that the ministry recom-

mends Israelis avoid any travel to the Maldives, including those with foreign passports, and those currently there to consider leaving.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Trump joins TikTok, an app he tried to ban earlier

By HENG WEILI in New York
hengweili@chinadailyusa.com

Though the United States government is on track to ban TikTok by January, both presidential candidates are now on the app, with former president Donald Trump on Saturday joining President Joe Biden.

Roughly a day since joining TikTok, Trump had attracted 3 million followers on the short-video platform, which is owned by ByteDance in Beijing.

Trump posted a launch video on his account, which has the address @realdonaldtrump, on Saturday night. The video, which had 56.4 million views as of Sunday evening, showed Trump greeting fans at an Ultimate Fighting Championship event at the Prudential Center in Newark, New Jersey.

"The president is now on TikTok," UFC CEO Dana White said, introducing Trump in the video.

"It's my honor," Trump replied.

Biden's election campaign goes by the user name "bidenhq" and has 340,000 followers as of Sunday evening. He signed legislation in April that would ban the app if ByteDance does not sell it.

Saturday's UFC event was Trump's first public outing since a jury in New York found him guilty on Thursday on 34 charges of falsifying business records as part of a plan to influence the 2016 presidential election by covering up hush-money payments.

Trump has maintained he did nothing wrong and plans to appeal the verdict. He faces sentencing on July 11.

Law challenged

ByteDance is legally challenging the law that requires it to sell TikTok by next January or face a ban. The White House said it wants to see China-based ownership ended on purported national security grounds.

TikTok has contended that it will not share US user data with the Chinese government and that it has taken substantial measures to protect the privacy of its users.

Trump attempted to ban TikTok in 2020 when he was president, but was blocked by US courts on First Amendment grounds. But in March this year, although Trump said he agreed with some national security concerns, he also said a ban would hurt some people financially and help Meta Platforms' Facebook, which Trump has regularly criticized.

"Frankly, there are a lot of people on TikTok that love it. There are a lot of young kids on TikTok who will go crazy without it," Trump told CNBC.

Trump has more than 87 million followers on X and over 7 million followers on his own platform, Truth Social, where he posts almost daily.

Biden's campaign joined TikTok during the NFL's Super Bowl Sunday in February.

Both campaigns acknowledge TikTok's wide reach with young users.

A November study by the Pew Research Center found that people in the US aged 18 to 29 are most likely to say they regularly get news on TikTok. About a third of US citizens in that age group said they regularly get news there, a higher share than in years before.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Doubts grow over Gaza truce plan as fighting rages

RAFAH/JERUSALEM — Fresh strikes were reported across the Gaza Strip overnight into Monday, as doubts were growing about a plan for a Gaza cease-fire and hostage release deal outlined by the United States.

US President Joe Biden on Friday presented what he labeled an Israeli three-phase plan that would end the conflict, free all hostages and the reconstruction of the devastated Palestinian territory.

Israeli media have questioned to what extent Biden's speech and some crucial details were coordinated with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's team, including how long any truce would hold and how many captives would be freed when.

Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir accused Netanyahu on Monday of trying to "whitewash"

the deal to wind down the Gaza assault and repeated a threat to quit the government.

Mediators Qatar, Egypt and the United States said they called "on both Hamas and Israel to finalize the agreement".

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said on Sunday that "we have every expectation that if Hamas agrees to the proposal... that Israel would say yes".

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken "commended" Israel on the plan in a phone call with War Cabinet member Benny Gantz and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, the State Department said.

Hamas has said it "views positively" the deal while the Palestinian National Liberation Movement on Sunday expressed its hope that the

proposal will end Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

But the bombardments and combat show no sign of easing, with the conflict soon entering its ninth month.

On Monday, the Israeli military said over the past day its forces had struck "over 50 targets in the Gaza Strip".

Fighting has continued to rock Gaza, with hospitals there reporting at least 19 killed in overnight strikes into Monday morning.

Airstrikes and shelling were reported in Gaza City as well as in Rafah.

Crossing reopening talks

Egyptian state-linked Al-Qaheera News said a Sunday meeting in Cairo with Israeli and US officials to discuss reopening the crossing had ended, without saying whether an agreement was reached.

Quoting a senior official, Al-Qaheera said Egypt reiterated its demand that "Israel withdraw from the Palestinian side of the Rafah crossing so it can resume operations".

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said Sunday that all 36 of its shelters in Rafah "are now empty" after at least a million people fled the city.

Adding to the region's tension, Israeli airstrikes after midnight Monday killed 12 pro-Iranian militants in Syria's northern province of Aleppo, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The attack hit several sites in the countryside of Aleppo. Several explosions were heard across the area.

Meanwhile, the Maldives government will ban Israelis from the Indi-



A medical team conducts health checkups for displaced Palestinians in Deir al-Balah, Gaza, on Sunday. ABED RAHIM KHATIB / GETTY IMAGES

BUSINESS

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Calls arise for a massive property stabilization fund

Experts: Solely relying on demand-side stimulus moves may not fully address challenges

By ZHOU LANXU
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A real estate stabilization fund that could be worth trillions of yuan is likely around the corner in China, as policy advisers and economists called for scaling up government funding support in order to address lingering woes like housing inventory worries and unfinished homes.

Their calls came after the biggest cities in China, including Shanghai and Guangdong province's Guangzhou and Shenzhen, lowered mortgage rate minimums and down payment ratio requirements last week to boost homebuying enthusiasm.

Shanghai and Guangzhou eased homebuying restrictions as well last week, following similar moves in Beijing and Shenzhen, igniting market speculation that China may totally forgo residential property buying restrictions.

Gong Liutang, a professor of applied economics at Peking University's Guanghua School of Management, said that the recent policy announcements to ease homebuying curbs and cut mortgage rates will help boost housing demand to some degree.

Yet, given that households' expectations of home prices have changed, Gong said that solely relying on demand-side stimulus may not fully address the property challenges, and scaling up supply-side funding support would be of great significance.

A real estate stabilization fund should be established, said Gong, who is also a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Con-



Potential homebuyers look at a property model in Huizhou, Guangdong province.
ZHOU NAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

ference, the country's top political advisory body.

The fund should be used to acquire presold unfinished housing projects and unwanted housing inventories before redeveloping them into commercial real estate or affordable housing projects, he said, with the central government providing funding support while attracting social capital.

"Such a fund would be more important than measures such as interest rate cuts in addressing current economic headwinds," Gong added.

"Fundamentally, the country should seize the current time window to formulate a new blueprint for the real estate sector in the coming decades, including determining the necessary proportions of affordable public housing and commercial residential properties," he said.

The Chinese government has stepped up supply-side support for the property sector, yet the funding size is limited compared to the necessary size that some institutions have estimated is required, leaving room for expansion.

On May 17, the People's Bank of

China, the country's central bank, announced the establishment of a 300 billion yuan (\$42.25 billion) re-lending facility, providing funding for State-owned enterprises to buy completed commercial properties for repurposed affordable housing.

The country has also established a "white list" program to encourage commercial banks to provide funding for presold unfinished housing. The approved loan amount under the program had reached 935 billion yuan as of May 16, official data showed.

Sonali Jain-Chandra, China mission chief of the International Monetary Fund's Asia and Pacific Department, said that fiscal support needs to be greater as the volume of presold unfinished housing remains quite substantial.

"We think that if that money is used to get rid of the problem of the property sector, then the future growth will be higher, confidence will be higher and revenues will be higher. So the economy will be on a different path," Jain-Chandra said.

The IMF suggested in a report in February that a central government-

funded housing completion program worth around 5 percent of the GDP is needed to complete taken-over projects or provide partial compensation to affected homebuyers.

Using the figure of 2023, 5 percent of GDP would be equivalent to 6.3 trillion yuan.

Chen Dong, chief Asia strategist and head of Asia research at Pictet Wealth Management, said the PBOC's re-lending program announced on May 17 has represented a positive shift in policy stance.

"But the effectiveness of this initiative largely depends on its implementation and whether there will be further funding support. The scale of funding announced so far is not enough and further financial backing is necessary. Overall, we remain cautiously optimistic (about China's real estate sector)," Chen said.

The National Bureau of Statistics said that in the first four months, real estate development investment fell 9.8 percent year-on-year while sales area of new properties slumped 20.2 percent, compared with 9.5 percent and 19.4 percent falls in the first quarter, respectively.

China keen to resolve EU trade row via talks

By ZHONG NAN
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China is open to holding dialogues with the European Union to resolve trade frictions and will take all necessary measures to safeguard the legitimate interests of Chinese companies, said senior Chinese commerce officials in Europe.

During their meetings with business leaders of Chinese-funded companies in Spain and Greece over the weekend, Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao and Vice-Commerce Minister Ling Ji said that the legitimate concerns of China and the EU should be addressed to prevent further escalation of trade frictions, according to statements released by the Ministry of Commerce on Sunday and Monday, respectively.

Their remarks came in response to the EU's recent intensive investigations into Chinese products like electric vehicles, railway locomotives, and equipment used in photovoltaics, wind power generation, security inspections and healthcare.

These investigations, conducted under false pretexts such as the "China overcapacity" narrative and "unfair competition", involved discriminatory use of trade remedies, international procurement instruments and foreign subsidy regulations, said Wang in Barcelona on Saturday, adding that these actions are escalating the risk of increased trade frictions between China and the EU.

Leaders of France, Germany and the EU have repeatedly vowed to avoid a trade war, expressing support for a rules-based multilateral trade system and an equitable environment for competition, said Wang.

"We hope that the EU will act consistently and refrain from conducting anything that could lead to an uncontrolled escalation of trade frictions," said Ling in Athens on Sunday.

If the EU insists on continuing to suppress Chinese companies, China has the right and sufficient capability to take measures to defend the legitimate interests of its companies, said Ling, who is also deputy China international trade representative.

Chinese companies have positively contributed to the economic and social development of many European countries, and there is significant potential for bilateral cooperation in areas such as logistics, high-end manufacturing, green energy and agricultural trade due to their strong complementarity, said Yang Chengyu, an associate researcher at the Institute of European Studies of the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

However, disregarding the mutually beneficial cooperation between China and EU members, the EU has initiated investigations this year into Chinese investments in Europe and public procurement bids involving Chinese companies, according to information released by the Commerce Ministry.

High-quality and affordable industrial products manufactured in China are exactly what the current European market needs. European companies operating in China have also reaped substantial profits from China-EU trade and China's lucrative market, said Yang.

Echoing the sentiment, Zheng Chunrong, director of the German Studies Center at Tongji University in Shanghai, said that the current state of China-EU trade is characterized by deep interdependence. Many cars exported from China to Germany and the rest of Europe are not solely produced by Chinese companies. Their components come from European manufacturers too.

"If the EU imposes tariffs, it will harm European businesses in China," said Zheng. "Economic and trade issues should be addressed through multilateral mechanisms like the World Trade Organization, resolving disputes through negotiation."

"Compared to the United States, most European countries are more inclined to uphold and adhere to multilateral rules," he said.

China-EU trade amounted to 1.75 trillion yuan (\$241.5 billion) in the first four months of 2024, dropping 1.8 percent year-on-year and accounting for 12.7 percent of China's total foreign trade value during the same period, data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

Experts: New plan will give fillip to renewables

By ZHENG XIN
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China's latest action plan to conserve energy and cut carbon emissions will invigorate the solar and wind power industries, and present unprecedented opportunities for domestic renewable energy companies, executives and experts said.

By targeting a significant increase in nonfossil energy consumption and promoting large-scale renewable energy projects, the plan underscores China's commitment to a sustainable energy transition, promising robust growth and innovation in the clean energy sector, said Zhu Gongshan, chairman of solar power firm GCL Group, in an exclusive interview with China Daily.

"The action plan for energy conservation and carbon reduction has provided a broader space and clearer direction for the development of the new energy industry in the country,

marking a solid step forward in achieving the goals of carbon peak and carbon neutrality," he said.

"The target to raise the proportion of non-fossil energy consumption will bring unprecedented development opportunities for new energy companies, further accelerating technological innovation, advancing clean energy technologies, and reducing costs, and promote the coordinated upgrade of the entire industry chain."

The State Council released an action plan for 2024-25 on Wednesday, aiming to reduce energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP by about 2.5 percent and 3.9 percent, respectively, this year.

Energy consumption per unit of added value for industrial enterprises above a designated size will be cut by around 3.5 percent this year, while the proportion of nonfossil energy consumption will reach

around 18.9 percent in 2024 and 20 percent in 2025, it said.

GCL Group has vowed to continuously invest in solar and wind power, and energy storage, as well as smart grid networks, to further enhance the competitiveness of new energy solutions.

The goals set in the country's action plan are reasonable and achievable, said Zhu Yicong, senior analyst for renewables and power research at Rystad Energy.

"Renewable (capacity) installations in China have maintained a high pace since 2023, and the trend is continuing, supported by a number of under-construction or planned large-scale renewable base projects," she said.

"We've seen that quite a few large-scale renewable base projects have begun operating in recent months, with several starting construction. Pushing renewable base projects will help the country greatly in

achieving its carbon goals," she said.

Longi Green Energy Technology Co Ltd, a leading enterprise in the photovoltaic industry, said the government's commitment to energy conservation and carbon reduction highlights its determination for an energy transition.

Expanding the scale of new energy development will create massive opportunities for the photovoltaic as well as the hydropower and wind power industries, which, in turn, will optimize the power grid, including power generation and transmission, said Kevin Liu, president of China unit at Longi.

During the process of energy transition, China is laying a solid foundation for achieving its goals through meticulous management, providing strong support for high-quality economic development, he said.

According to Liu, China's commitment to a sustainable energy transi-

tion promises robust growth and innovation in the clean energy sector.

The company has been stepping up efforts in research and innovation. It broke the world record in November with a new conversion efficiency of 33.9 percent for silicon-perovskite tandem solar cells. Conversion efficiency is a crucial indicator and benchmark for evaluating the potential of photovoltaic technologies.

According to Zhu from Rystad Energy, along with surging renewable capacity installations, solar and wind curtailment rates are also rising.

This makes the improvement of the grid's ability to adapt renewable generation, strengthening of long-distance transmission networks, as well as development of energy storage crucial in achieving the goal of nonfossil fuel generation, Zhu said.

By the end of the first quarter, China had 52.5 GW of pumped storage capacity and 35.3 GW of new energy storage capacity, with a strong under-construction or planned project pipeline to support near-term capacity growth, she added.

Briefly

Xi'an-Shiyan HSR gets new station

China's State-owned builders such as China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp are enhancing the high-speed railway connecting Xi'an in Shaanxi province and Wuhan in Hubei province. The latest milestone is the launch of a new HSR station in Yunxi county, Hubei province. CR24, a unit of China Railway Construction Corp, said in a project progress report that its workers commenced construction of Yunxi Railway Station in Shiyan, Hubei province. The station will be a key railway transportation hub on the Xi'an-Shiyan High-speed Railway, a vital link in boosting the integrated development of the Yangtze River Economic Zone, CR24 said.

Software, IT services report growth

China's software sector and information technology services reported double-digit year-on-year growth in terms of both revenue and profits in the first four months of 2024, official data showed. Total profits jumped by 14.3 percent year-on-year to 431.4 billion yuan (\$60.69 billion) during this period, while combined revenue rose by 11.6 percent to 3.8 trillion yuan, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. Total revenue of the IT services segment alone increased by 13.2 percent year-on-year to around 2.5 trillion yuan, contributing 65.9 percent of the total revenue of the overall sector.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Wumart, 30, to embrace digital field

By CHENG YU
and WANG ZHUOQIONG

Wumart Group, one of the largest retailers in China that also owns Metro China, said it will fully embrace "digital intelligence" and accelerate overseas expansion of its subsidiary brands, as it celebrated its 30th anniversary recently.

Zhang Wenzhong, founder of Wumart, said in an interview with China Daily that amid a slowdown in the retail industry, companies must improve their efficiency and simplify processes to survive, but should not simply link digitalization with profitability.

"Wumart aims to fully embrace digital intelligence, while returning

to the essence of business by improving supply chain management to offer low-price products with high quality," Zhang said.

He emphasized that Wumart will continue to accelerate the development of Dmall, a cloud-based e-commerce retailer of Wumart. Dmall is known for its operating system that can manage various operations from placing orders, receiving, sorting, delivering and displaying goods, as well as inventory management.

Dmall also provides these services to other retail companies under the software-as-a-service or SaaS retailing cloud model. Zhang said Dmall has already empowered over 600 retailers globally and covered more than 10,000 shopping malls.

Dmall filed for an IPO on the Hong Kong stock exchange recently. In the past, it had planned an IPO in the United States. Its updated prospectus showed that it is planning to enter the Brunei and Indonesia markets this year and plans to hire about 500 research and development personnel with overseas industry experience, to support its overseas development in markets like Southeast Asia.

Zhang said the digitalization process of Metro has been "very fast" as the online business accounts for 30 percent of its total business, up from 1 percent when Wumart acquired Metro's business in China in 2019. "Many retailers are actually losing money from online sales, which is unsustainable. But Metro's online



An employee of Dmall, an e-commerce retailer of Wumart, prepares for a delivery in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

sales are profitable, which will put it in a strong position in the industry in the future," he said.

At a recent news conference, Wumart announced the full implementation of the "everyday low price" strategy, which aims to

phase out traditional promotional discounts through meticulous cost controls and supply chain management.

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BUSINESS



Artificial diamonds are displayed during an exhibition in Zhengzhou, Henan province, in September. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Artificial diamonds shine in Henan

Dazzling lab stones more preferred for industrial use due to cost-effectiveness

By LIU YUKUN in Beijing and SHI BAOYIN in Zhengzhou

SF Diamond has established a lab-grown diamond factory in Henan province that has an annual production capacity of about 700,000 carats, making it the largest chemical vapor deposition (CVD) process-based diamond producer in the country.

Experts said this is a significant breakthrough in Henan's ultra-hard materials industry and will further facilitate the development of emerging sectors like electric vehicles, following self-developed microwave plasma CVD (MPCVD) equipment that has overcome foreign technology blockades.

"CVD technology is a proven method for producing large, high-quality industrial diamonds. The commissioning of this 700,000-carat (production capacity) project addresses a shortfall in our industry," said Fang Haijiang, chairman of SF Diamond.

Sun Zhaoda, secretary-general of the Superhard Material (Industrial Diamond) Association of China

(IDAC), said, "The establishment and commissioning of this factory will further promote MPCVD equipment manufacturing, as well as the diamond production and processing industry chain in the province."

In the 1960s, China's first lab-grown diamond was successfully developed in Zhengzhou, capital of Henan. After six decades of development, Henan has become a major producer of ultra-hard materials.

According to the IDAC, China's lab-grown diamond output accounts for about 95 percent of the global total, with Henan contributing about 80 percent of the national output.

As the hardest natural material, diamonds boast high chemical inertness, high thermal conductivity, low friction coefficient, ultrawide bandgap and high optical transparency. These properties make diamonds essential in various advanced manufacturing fields.

However, natural diamonds are nonrenewable, expensive to mine, limited in supply and have uncontrollable impurities, making them unsuit-

able for widespread industrial use.

Consequently, lab-grown diamonds that have identical physical and chemical properties to natural diamonds are preferred for industrial applications as they are more cost-effective and easier to access. Experts said lab-grown diamonds are becoming critical in fields like quantum computing, quantum communication and quantum precision measurement.

Compared with the high-pressure high-temperature (HPHT) method, which is more common in Chinese factories for growing diamonds, CVD, a method being adopted by an increasing number of companies, is considered less expensive and quicker to produce diamonds.

Li Hongli, deputy general manager of SF Diamond's subsidiary for manufacturing CVD diamonds, said it takes about a month and a half for a 5-carat diamond to grow in the new factory.

SF Diamond said that among various CVD methods, MPCVD is currently among the most popular for producing electronic-grade diamonds. In electronics, these diamonds are used for heat sinks, high-frequency devices and laser diodes.

MPCVD is also considered an optimal process for diamond semiconductor materials for applications in high-power electronics that require precise control and efficiency, like those in electric vehicles, the company said.

In 2022, the US limited exports of technologies that support the production of advanced semiconductors. These include gallium oxide and diamond-based substrates of ultrawide bandgap semiconductors.

This made self-developed MPCVD essential for China's ultrahard materials sector and emerging industries, SF Diamond said.

In recent years, SF Diamond has increased investments in research and development of MPCVD technology, and completed the development and verification of MPCVD equipment.

The company's efforts have echoed calls by the Henan provincial government to develop ultrahard materials epitomized by lab-grown diamonds.

Qi Xin in Zhengzhou contributed to this story.

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Apparel makers cutting carbon emissions in green push

By ZHU WENQIAN in Zhengzhou

China's textile and apparel makers have stepped up efforts to cut carbon emissions during manufacturing and processing, and have accelerated the industry's green transformation.

China has targeted to peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.

China's textile and apparel industry emits around 230 million metric tons of CO₂ annually, accounting for 2.8 percent of national industrial emissions, according to the China National Textile and Apparel Council.

Erdos Group, a Chinese cashmere manufacturer based in Ordos, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, has set up four labs and collaborates with colleges and scientific institutions to monitor the climate of the grassland and conditions of grass seeds and soil.

"For the source of the cashmere industry, we aim to build a more scientific and sustainable way of cultivation, and explore a path to protect the natural ecology of goat breeding," said Dai Tana, general manager of Erdos Cashmere Group.

In the production and processing area, Erdos has strengthened research and development of new technologies in dyeing and knitting to further reduce carbon emissions.

Last year, the production of each cashmere sweater reduced carbon emissions by 2.16 kilograms throughout its lifecycle compared with 2022.

"The textile industry is an important livelihood industry and an environmentally sensitive one," said Zheng Yan, deputy director of the consumer products department at the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

"Promoting green, low-carbon, circular and sustainable development

of the textile industry is of great significance to foster new quality productive forces and achieve harmonious coexistence between humans and nature," Zheng said.

Meanwhile, Jinjiang, Fujian province-based domestic sportswear giant Anta Sports Products Ltd, whose sales revenue has ranked tops among Chinese sportswear product makers for 11 straight years, said the company aims to achieve carbon neutrality before 2050.

Before 2030, Anta aims to achieve net-zero carbon emissions and zero use of native plastics from its self-owned facilities. It also plans to achieve zero landfill of waste from its production processes, and raise the proportion of sustainable products to 50 percent of the total before 2030.

Advance Denim, a Guangdong province-based denim producer and the oldest denim mill in China, supplies the fabric to more than 400

brands globally, including plant-based denim to Levi Strauss.

"We would like to make denim one of the most environmentally friendly fabrics. We purchased sustainable and environmentally friendly fibers to develop and innovate denim fabric," said Wang Zongwen, managing director of Advance Denim.

Jiangsu Dasheng Group Co Ltd, founded in 1895 as a cotton mill, has introduced zero-carbon fiber raw materials, and is expected to build China's first green, carbon-neutral spinning factory by 2025, with an annual capacity of more than 6,000 tons.

The company, which exports its textile products to nearly 50 countries and regions, has the highest market share in the domestic home textile market, with its high-quality yarn production capacity ranking among the top three in the country.

More firms embracing generative AI tools

By FAN FEIFEI in Beijing

About 85 percent of Chinese business leaders plan to increase investments in generative artificial intelligence in 2024, as AI and other disruptive technologies evolve to be more human-centric and drive greater capabilities for people to amplify their potential and reinvent commerce, according to global consultancy Accenture.

Accenture said in a new survey that 73 percent of Chinese company executives are prioritizing investments in strengthening their organizations' digital core capacities including cloud, AI, platforms and security.

Generative AI refers to computer algorithms trained with huge amounts of data capable of generating content such as images, text, audio and video. It is the key technology underpinning US-based research firm OpenAI's ChatGPT.

The findings stated that 93 percent of surveyed executives in China agree that the way they interact with data will change, from searching for information to asking questions and receiving direct advice and responses.

However, just 13 percent of business leaders in China are "extremely confident" that they have the right data strategy and core digital capabilities in place to effectively leverage generative AI to their maximum benefit.

To enhance employee productivity and drive growth, 70 percent of organizations in China are incorporating cutting-edge tools like generative AI, but less than a third of these businesses are actively reskilling their employees to harness such technologies, it added.

This indicates that while surveyed business leaders recognize the importance of generative AI on a personal level, there is a noticeable lag in commitment to workforce training. The research surveyed 2,800 company executives, with 225 from China, between February and March 2024.

Accenture also found that the world is in the midst of a massive technology shift, as AI and other disruptive technologies become "human by design" — much more humanlike and intuitive — and usher in a new era of unprecedented productivity and creativity.

It noted that as much as 40 percent of all working hours will be supported or augmented by language-based AI, and generative AI has the potential to enable productivity enhancements across 900 different types of jobs.

Yu Yi, technology lead at Accenture Greater China, said the important seismic shift in the way

people work, live and learn will accelerate a wave of unprecedented change across industries, from retail and entertainment to medicine and manufacturing.

"Human-centered technologies like generative AI are poised to unleash human potential and deliver a staggering array of business and societal benefits, but only if we take a balanced, 'human by design' approach that ensures these technologies are used fairly and responsibly," Yu said.

About 93 percent of executives in China agree that with rapid technological advancements, it is more important than ever for organizations to innovate with purpose, according to Accenture.

Joyce Yi, managing director and operations delivery lead of Accenture Greater China, said Chinese enterprises are more willing to spend money on sales and product development in the process of AI applications, while their investments in enterprise operations are relatively less.

For businesses to maximize generative AI benefits and drive growth, company executives must extend their focus beyond immediate tasks and embrace a long-term and people-centric approach to adopt generative AI, said Zhang Xun, managing director from strategy and consulting at Accenture Greater China.

"Enterprises need to invest in transforming work, workflows and their workforces so they can reinvent themselves for success in the age of AI," Zhang said.

Industry experts said generative AI has become a major driving force for bolstering the innovative development of the digital economy, and its integration with the real economy is speeding up, which will promote the digital transformation of industries and the industrialization of digital technologies.

Major Chinese tech heavyweights, including Alibaba Group Holding Ltd, Baidu Inc, Tencent Holdings Ltd and iFlytek, have ramped up efforts to develop their own AI-powered large language models.

"China's major advantages in developing AI lie in abundant data resources and diversified industrial application scenarios, while the US has taken the lead in basic AI research, chips, algorithms and other crucial technologies, as well as a sound innovation ecosystem," said Wang Peng, a researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences.

Chinese enterprises should pool more resources into improving the quality of data that satisfy the training of LLMs, optimizing algorithms, cultivating talent specialized in the field of AI and expanding cooperation with leading international AI companies, Wang said.



Visitors check out large language models during a high-tech expo in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, on May 23.

CAI MINJIE / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Zhoukou farmers get help to develop unique industries

By ZHUANG QIANGE and PANG BO in Zhengzhou

In Shangshui county under the prefecture-level city of Zhoukou, Henan province, Zhai Guangshun was overjoyed with his grape harvest in his home village of Zhailou.

With help from the local unit of State Grid Power Corp, he grew from a poverty-stricken villager into a well-known farmer, greatly improving his lot in life by planting grapes, earning over 60,000 yuan (\$8,426) each year from the undertaking.

His grapes are sold out as soon as they ripen each year, so he has registered his own trademark — Guangshun Grapes — and intends to expand his cultivation.

The aid for him came as State Grid Zhoukou Power Supply Co launched a campaign over the past few years to help spur local rural revitalization, such as offering funds to help farmers learn cultivation technologies and develop their own unique industries.

Staff members from State Grid Zhoukou decided to offer further aid to Zhailou, donating 280,000 yuan in 2022 to help villagers construct

greenhouses to grow organic fruits and vegetables amid the "State Grid Rural Empowerment Project" campaign.

With a solid foundation, villagers in Zhailou have cultivated fast-selling branded agricultural products, such as Guobin Lotus Roots, Erxia Tomatoes and Mashali Sweet Potatoes, and competed to develop their own suitable industries.

Hou Chunzhi, Party secretary of Zhailou, said: "With genuine help from the local power workers, the motivation of our villagers to start a business has been stimulated."

Hou said the village could also receive a rental subsidy of 30,000 yuan from the 10 greenhouses donated by State Grid, and use the funds to renovate the village or distribute cash among villagers to help them upgrade their business endeavors.

In the city's Fugou county, power worker Yang Rui, who serves as the first resident secretary in Yuanzhuang village, is busy seeking donations of 390,000 yuan this year from State Grid Fugou Power Supply Co to build more greenhouses in the village to grow *Morchella esculenta*, an edible mushroom which is

also a traditional Chinese medicine fungus.

As a typical agricultural village relying on single agricultural products with low added value, Yuanzhuang has a weak foundation to develop other industries. So Yang and other village cadres decided to start cultivating Morchella as a unique industry in a bid to design a layout of "one unique product for each village".

Lacking startup funds in the early stages of the venture, State Grid Zhoukou helped in applying for funds, eventually landing 150,000 yuan in 2023 from donations by staff members at State Grid Henan Electric Power Co.

The funds were used to build greenhouses, help villagers learn

related technologies and select good varieties. Through hard work, the first harvest came in March this year, achieving an increase of more than 300,000 yuan per hectare.

As the farmers became more motivated after such initial successes, the village management body decided to expand the planting area this year, Yang said.

Between 2021 and 2024, employees from State Grid Zhoukou have donated more than 2 million yuan to help farmers develop characteristic agriculture, helping transform rural industries and local farmers learn more farming techniques.

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BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

Cosmetics sitting pretty in consumption growth

Generation Z driving force behind feel-good buying boom

By ZHENG YIRAN
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With the gradual recovery of the economy, China's cosmetics consumption is expected to maintain growth momentum. With Generation Z becoming an increasingly important driving force, the sector is expected to witness robust growth.

Gen Z refers to those born in the late 1990s or early 2000s. Starting this year, consumers in this demographic have become an increasingly strong driving force for feel-good consumption — buying of goods and services that brings a variety of senses, emotions and pleasure while boosting one's sense of self-worth.

May 20 is seen as one of the Chinese versions of Valentine's Day, as the Chinese pronunciation of "520" resembles that of the phrase for "I love you".

On May 19, cosmetics stores in SKP Beijing, a shopping mall in the capital's Chaoyang district, were bustling. Yang Ziying, a 24-year-old new graduate, was in a perfume store to pick up holiday presents for her and her bestie.

"As Valentine's Day draws close, I would like to take the opportunity to purchase some beauty products as a gift for myself and my best friend. We both lead fast-paced lives every day. In this day of love celebration, I would like to take the opportunity to love myself more, as well as my loved ones," Yang said.

She chose two bottles of perfume as gifts for herself and her friend. For her friend's perfume bottle, she asked the shop assistant to wrap it up in a gift box, and to attach a greeting card. The card reads: "Happy Valentine's Day! Whether you are in a relationship or not, you are always my beloved princess."

According to a study by bjnews.com.cn, during this year's May 20 holiday, among the 3,000 surveyed interviewees, around 40 percent celebrated the special day, which fell on a Monday — a typically busy workday for working folks nationwide.

The survey was conducted among interviewees between the ages of 25 and 45, and over half of them were from first-tier, new first-tier or provincial capital cities.

Specifically, on the special day, they choose to prepare an exclusive gift for their loved ones, and most of them hold that instead of flowery words, a concrete practical gift is more enchanting, said the result.

In addition, for both men and women, perfume ranks among the top three most popular gifts for the love-themed holiday, the investigation showed.

France-based cosmetics giant L'Oréal said that for this year's May 20, in the Chinese market, its brands — including YSL, Prada, Kiehl's, Helena Rubinstein and Biotherm — had launched a series of gift boxes.



Italian craftsmen fabricate leather perfume cases at an Acqua di Parma store in Milan, Italy, in May. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A Biotherm booth is seen at a shopping mall in Shanghai in March 2021. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"Consumers drop by to buy Valentine's Day special-edition gift boxes containing cleansers, gels and lotions. They also buy classic products, such as anti-wrinkle lotions and hydrating serum," said a shop assistant surnamed Zhang from the Biotherm outlet at shopping mall SKP Beijing.

"We are witnessing an increasing number of consumers that come to the store to buy things just to make them feel good, in order to boost sentiments of self-worth. A large number of them are generous givers. In Valentine's Days in the past

years, people bought beauty products as gifts between husband and wife, dad and daughter, as well as best friends. Now, many of them simply take advantage of this special occasion to purchase something nice for themselves and the ages of consumers typically vary from 22 to 60," Zhang said.

He Tang, a post-85s white-collar worker in Shanghai, said he spends an average of 400 yuan (\$55.2) per month on skincare and cosmetics products.

"There is a comprehensive shopping mall next to the building where

I work. I visit the shopping mall every two days. In terms of beauty products, basically, I purchase perfumes, fragrances, shower gel, toothpaste, face washes, lotions, aftershave and facial masks," he said.

"Apart from buying these for myself, I also select gifts for my friends in these subcategories. My favorite brands include Lab Series, a skincare company exclusive for men, Japanese toothpaste brand Lion, and Acqua di Parma, an Italian perfume and fragrance manufacturer."

Zhan Junhao, founder of Fujian Huace Brand Positioning Consult-

ing, said: "The beauty consumption trends of China's post-80s to post-00s generations demonstrate obvious generational characteristics, and each generation plays a unique role in the beauty market."

For those born in the late 1980s and 1990s who were exposed to international brands at a relatively early age, their pursuit of product quality and brand value is more mature, and their consumption is more rational. As a result, they tend to invest in efficient and high-end products, he said.

As natives of the digital age, this demographic of consumers pays more attention to personalization, freshness and the social attributes of beauty products, and are willing to pay a premium for products that meet their needs for self-expression, he added.

Alan Zhong, a market observer for over 20 years and also executive vice-president of Chinese markets at Clarins, said: "Among young consumers, post-00s shoppers — born and raised in the internet era — get access to information in a more convenient manner. Therefore, their consumption concepts turn out to be more open and avant-garde. They value individual expression and are willing to pay for high-quality, innovative beauty products. As post-00s consumers gradually enter the workplace, their spending power is expected to further grow. The group will undoubtedly become a consumption force that cannot be ignored in the market. We will continue to pay attention to the needs and changes of this consumer group, providing them with skin-

care and cosmetics products that are more in line with their values and aesthetic needs."

A recent report by Beijing-based online financial platform Jianpu.ai showed that compared to the post-70s and the post-80s generations, Gen Z consumers are more willing to pay for ostentation, attaching importance to personality and connotation while making purchases, and are found more willing to buy gifts for others than consumer groups of other ages.

The Q2 consumption industry report, jointly issued by Wanlian Securities and Huibo Research, showed that starting this year, with the stable growth of the national economy, consumption demand is being further released, among which cosmetics consumption demand is seen gradually reviving.

"Between January and April, month-on-month growth rates of the retail sales of cosmetics enterprises above a designated size started to recover. During promotional seasons, such as the March 8 online shopping festival, enterprises' retail sales experienced steady growth, and in some subcategories, domestic beauty brands outperformed multinational corporations," said the report.

In the future, with the gradual improvement of the economy, plus the decline in the unemployment rate of young people, the spending power of important beauty consumer groups is expected to be further repaired, which will release even greater cosmetics demand, said the report from Wanlian and Huibo.

Clarins sanguine on China's vast beauty market

By ZHENG YIRAN

For Alan Zhong, executive vice-president of Chinese markets at Clarins, during the Chinese-version Valentine's Day gift season — two weeks around this year's May 20 — the company's growth was invigorated by Cupid's arrow.

In the past month, he and his team were busy tapping soaring demand generated by China's feel-good driven beauty-savvy consumers, who are fond of pampering themselves by purchasing skincare and cosmetics products and services.

With the help of the winged cherub, the company's sales in China, both online and offline, had been growing steadily, and so had its market share.

"For this year's May 20 gift season, we launched a limited-edition gift box, containing our hot-selling skincare suit, liquid foundation and lip

oil. Between May 13 and May 20, consumers dropped by our stores constantly, hoping to get gifts for loved ones, or just themselves," said Zhong, who leads the Chinese arm of French skincare and makeup company Clarins Group.

Speaking of China's current cosmetics consumption backbone, Zhong said: "In China's beauty consumption sector, we are witnessing an increase in the ratio of post-95s and post-00s consumers-to-consumers as a whole. They pay special attention to ingredients, effects and brand value, demonstrating their strong interest and purchase power of high-quality beauty products."

Zhan Junhao, founder of Fujian Huace Brand Positioning Consulting, said: "At present, the post-95s and post-00s generations, or Generation Z, are gradually becoming the main force in beauty consumption. They have an open con-

sumption concept and are willing to try out new things.

"Driven by social media, they themselves can quickly form hot spots of public opinion and trends, boosting the development of the beauty consumption market. In the future, with their strong consumption power and sensitivity to trendy culture, the post-00s generation will undoubtedly continue to strengthen their dominant position in the field," Zhan said.

Tang Jiansheng, deputy secretary-general of Shanghai Consumer Council, said that while pursuing cost-effectiveness, Gen Z spends handsomely on consumption that optimizes their notions of fun and joy. Facing consumer goods and services that both contain practical and feel-good values, they tend to spend money decisively.

The post-00s generation is gradually taking the place of the post-90s, becoming a main buying driver of

China's beauty consumption sector, said a report from the council.

Multinational skincare and cosmetics corporations have sensed the trend, and taken concrete actions.

"We are expanding to more second and third-tier cities. By continuously expanding our store network, we hope to provide more Chinese consumers with professional and considerate beauty and skincare experiences," said Zhong from Clarins.

"Eyeing mounting business opportunities brought by China's young consumption power, we are upbeat about the market, and will remain investing," he added.

This year, Clarins Group celebrates its 70th anniversary. Back in 1954, Jacques Courtin-Clarins opened his first beauty institute in Paris. The institute offered a place for physiotherapists and beauty therapists to practice innovative massage methods.



A consumer (center) seeks advice from a beauty consultant at a Clarins boutique in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, in May. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In 1968, Clarins included client cards in the packaging of Clarins' skincare products, marking the start of the group's commercialization journey.

As of May, Clarins operates in 150 countries and regions. In the China

market, it has opened over 200 retail stores in major cities. It has also established two spa centers — mainly providing facial and body spa services in Beijing and Shanghai, data from the company showed.

COMMENT

Editorials

EU's protectionist moves compliance with decoupling design of Washington

Of the top 25 auto brands, all but three are European. The leading European auto companies are recognized as flag-bearers for European innovation and craftsmanship, and the automotive industry has long been a key driver of Europe's growth, innovation and prosperity.

Yet with the auto industry undergoing a seismic disruption with the transition from internal combustion engines to electrified powertrains and brand differentiation via smartware, new industry entrants are challenging the old guard, with new brands, notably from China, leading the wave of change. In 2022, China reportedly surpassed Germany, Europe's industry leader, in light-vehicle exports for the first time, with exports of about 3 million vehicles, in contrast to Germany's 2.6 million.

It might therefore seem reasonable that European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen should have announced last September the launch of an anti-subsidy investigation into Chinese-made EVs exported to Europe, on the grounds that with the support of state subsidies China has been flooding the continent with its "overcapacity".

That the probe was instigated on the commission's own initiative, rather than based on a formal request by the European car industry indicates the investigation has been politically motivated from the very beginning. Some politicians in the European Union are trying to take protectionist measures against China intending to push forward decoupling at the expense of a rules-based multilateral trade system. This has prompted warnings from some clearheaded politicians in the EU about the negative consequences that any discriminatory trade policies will have on the EU's economy.

Germany's Federal Minister for Digital and Transport Volker Wissing said he was "puzzled that some people are now calling for competition to be restricted by the state", adding that "this has absolutely nothing to do with a market economy". Robert Habeck, Germany's economics minister and vice-chancellor, also warned of the potential damage to the EU's interests should the bloc slap high tariffs on Chinese EVs, saying Europe needs to think about policies that will be beneficial "in the medium and long term".

China has become a major player in the global EV market in recent years mainly due to consistent technological innovations by the country's car producers, a well-established supply chain and full market competition. It has nothing to do with state subsidies as the anti-China axe grinders claim. Yet despite that, the EU has opened a slew of trade probes against China on the grounds of anti-dumping and unfair subsidies, especially in the clean-technology sector, which has markedly increased the risks of escalating China-EU trade frictions.

Given that such investigations are being conducted under false pretexts such as Chinese overcapacity and unfair competition, Commerce Minister Wang Wentao, during a visit to Barcelona, Spain, on Saturday, warned that China will take all necessary measures to defend the legitimate interests of Chinese companies. That some in Europe are rushing ahead with restrictive moves that threaten to derail China-EU economic relations, despite repeated calls from China for dialogue to resolve the differences, sheds some light on the motivating factor for these actions.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, during a recent visit to Europe, put this in the spotlight when she called on the EU to respond to China's so-called industrial overcapacity in a "strategic and united way".

That China is flooding the European market with EVs is a myth. Chinese automakers account for only 8.4 percent of the EU market, and 50 percent of electric car imports from China come from Western brands that produce cars there. The European automotive industry can only carry forward its brand value by competing in the new context of software-defined electric vehicles, not through the protection of a now redundant legacy status.

It will only bring misfortune on the EU if it falls into Washington's trap by imposing high tariffs on imports of Chinese EVs and other green products, as that will only harm its long-term mutually beneficial relations with its major trading partner.

Region draws strength from Asian values

Instead of serving to strengthen the solidarity of the Asia-Pacific in the security realm by promoting exchanges among relevant stakeholders, the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on the weekend has only exposed how divided the region has become.

As was evident at the gathering, it is the friction caused by the United States' confrontational approach to competition with China that has created the division, as the US tolerates little space for cooperation.

US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, Japanese Minister of Defense Minoru Kihara, and Republic of Korea Minister of National Defense Shin Won-sik convened a trilateral meeting on the sidelines of the forum on Sunday to discuss ways to counter the "dangerous and aggressive behavior" of China in support of "unlawful maritime claims" in the South China Sea.

In their team-building meeting, they agreed to execute the first iteration of the new, multi-domain trilateral exercise, Freedom Edge, this summer to defend the Washington-defined "rules-based order" and safeguard "freedom of navigation".

Portraying themselves as guardians of peace and stability, they called for a peaceful resolution to the Taiwan question, pretending to be ignorant of the fact that it is their flouting of the one-China principle that is undermining the foundation for peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, a direct cause of such a resolution looking increasingly unlikely.

These moves, along with the ongoing crises in the Middle East and Ukraine, both orchestrated by Washington, should prompt third-party countries in the Asia-Pacific and beyond to see clearly the essentially aggressive nature of the US' approach to security which is single-mindedly purposed to maintain its hegemony.

As expounded in the Global Security Initiative it has proposed, China prioritizes cooperation and communication to address security issues and concerns.

And as Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun said in Singapore, the values that prevail in Asia are harmony and peace. People in the region have always supported each other through thick and thin. They do not want hegemonism and power politics to undermine the interests of regional countries. They do not want geopolitical conflicts or wars, whether hot or cold, to disrupt the region's peace and stability. Nor do they want any country or any force to create conflict and chaos in their common home.

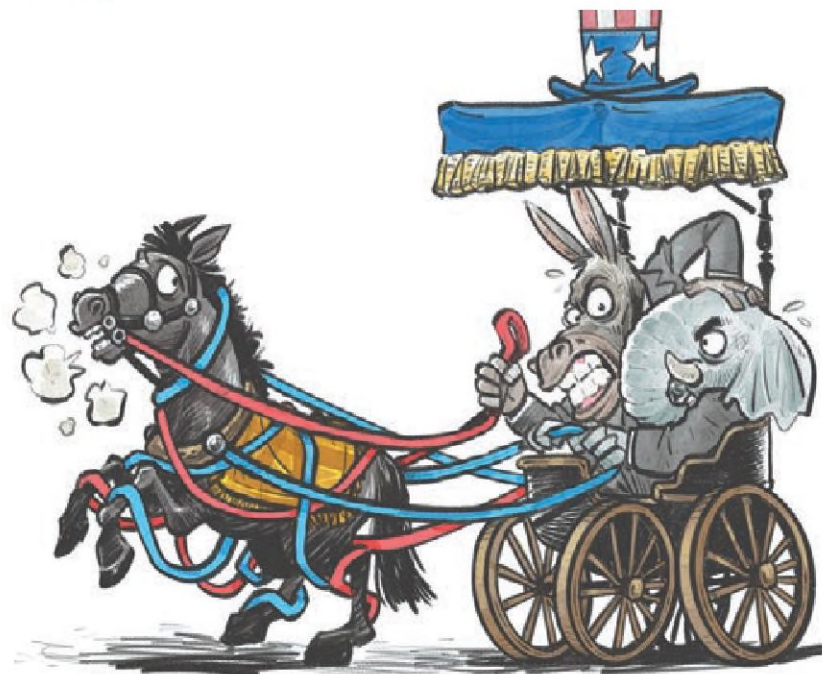
China, on its part, is willing to work with all parties, including the US, to protect the legitimate security interests of all countries in the region. As Dong said, countries should work together to continue to make the Asia-Pacific an anchor for global development and stability.

The respective speeches of the Chinese and US defense chiefs at the security forum brought into stark relief the different approaches of the two countries. While Beijing calls for inclusive cooperation, Washington seeks to create an exclusive club forged in a Cold War mold. The former is the foundation for global peace and stability, while the latter is the harbinger of conflicts.

The US should stop pouring its anti-China poison into the wine bottle of friendship, and cease peddling its value diplomacy in an attempt to drive wedges among countries. These US prescriptions to revitalize its hegemony will only worsen the global security situation by sabotaging global solidarity and enlarging trust deficits.

Instead of buying the snake oil the US was peddling at the forum to safeguard their security, countries in the region should give full play to the regional security architecture and advance open and pragmatic defense cooperation so that they can continue to make the Asia-Pacific an anchor for global development and stability.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Brussels heralds chain reaction of legislation on artificial intelligence

The Artificial Intelligence Act, which was approved by the European Council, late last month, is a ground-breaking law that aims to harmonize rules on AI. The flagship legislation follows a "risk-based" approach, and it can set a global standard for AI regulation.

The new law aims to foster the development and uptake of safe and trustworthy AI systems across the European Union's single market by both private and public actors. At the same time, it aims to ensure respect of the fundamental rights of EU citizens and stimulate investment in artificial intelligence in Europe and spur innovation.

The new law categorizes different types of artificial intelligence according to risk. AI systems presenting only limited risk will be subject to very light transparency obligations, while high-risk AI systems will need to be authorized and will be subject to a set of requirements and obligations to gain access to the EU market.

AI systems such as cognitive behavioral manipulation and social scoring, for example, will be banned from the EU because their risk is deemed unacceptable. The law also prohibits the use of AI for predictive policing based on profiling and systems that use biometric data to categorize people according to specific categories such as race, religion or sexual orientation.

Notably, the fines for infringements of the act are set as a percentage of the offending company's global annual turnover in the previous financial year or a predetermined amount, whichever is higher. Small and medium-sized enterprises and start-ups are subject to proportional administrative fines.

Considering that AI companies are mainly large multinational and cross-industry companies, and their global turnover comes also from markets outside the EU and also from fields outside AI,

the penalties for violating the EU AI Act can also lead to losses in their turnover in other markets and other industries, which has further increased the deterrent effect of the act on these large companies, most of which are US companies.

That might prompt the United States to follow suit by passing its own AI act to protect US companies' interests in the EU. Meanwhile, some US policy consultants suggest the EU act still has considerable space for improvement, and the US AI act should not only focus on risk prevention and control, but also pay more attention to providing support for AI innovation.

That being said, the EU's AI act will surely prompt more countries to accelerate their legislative work on AI, which can draw on the experience of the EU in the field and make their own AI acts more flexible and adaptable to their respective national conditions.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

Setting the standard for games juveniles play

Against the regulation that requires real-name registration and limits juvenile user's usage time, some children are using their parents' login credentials to spend more time online and even making use of their payment options to splurge. It is against this backdrop that the Internet Society of China released a standard governing juveniles' online game consumption, to solicit public opinion on May 28.

According to the document, if the online company hasn't effectively implemented a monthly consumption ceiling system, under which a user under 16

years of age is allowed to pay no more than 200 yuan (\$27.6) and one aged 16-18 no more than 400 yuan, then it should bear all responsibility and return the extra money spent.

And if the guardian is found to have provided his/her profile and payment details to the juvenile to evade the consumption ceiling, he/she should be considered responsible for the excessive consumption and there can be no refund.

The draft standard is expected to clear the ambiguity in online game issues, thus minimizing disputes and promoting the healthy development of the industry.

Greater participation from parents and schools in implementing the standard is all that is needed now to ensure the online companies do not dominate the process.

To solve the excessive consumption disputes is only one way of regulating the industry and promoting juveniles' healthy gaming habits. More standards are needed, such as in deciding what kind of games are safe for juveniles and how many hours they can spend on such games. Only with such rules can the industry prosper and serve juvenile players better.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

What They Say

Seeking common ground for meaningful Sino-US dialogue

Editor's note: In a recent interview with the Institute of Public Policy of South China University of Technology, Zheng Yongnian, a professor of politics at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen), talked about the development of artificial intelligence and the prospects of cooperation between China and the United States in this field. Excerpts follow:

Artificial intelligence has covered big data and robotics and penetrated all aspects of political, economic and social life. From this perspective, AI's influences on the global geopolitical order and human society may be deeper than nuclear weapons.

Fortunately, the dialogue between China and the United States in the field of artificial intelligence has some basis for optimism. At the San Francisco summit at the end of last year, the two countries reached a consensus on establishing an intergovernmental dialogue mechanism on artificial intelligence and also achieved some results after holding several rounds of talks. Despite obvious differences because of Washington's confrontational approach and other factors,

the continued holding of dialogue between the two countries in this field bodes well.

Despite fierce competition in the field of AI, the different AI development models of China and the US provide room for bilateral dialogue and complementarity, since the US is in a leading position in large model technology and algorithm research and development, while China enjoys certain advantages in technology supervision and big data application.

AI technology is currently developing at a fast pace in the US, as the tech giants there continue to make new breakthroughs, coming up with Sora, ChatGPT4.0, etc. However, it should be noted that the US has been taking a laissez-faire approach to AI, with almost no regulatory framework at the federal level. This approach is fraught with dangers for US society. For example, AI-generated fake news is being used to mislead voters.

If AI in the US continues to develop in this unregulated manner, it will have more negative impacts on society. In comparison, China has made better progress in establishing AI-related rules. China and the US can learn from each other on AI, and the US in particular should learn from China's regulatory initiatives.

In a globalized world, neither China nor the US can completely ignore each other's AI. Although the US attempts to achieve absolute leadership in AI, it still overestimates itself in some aspects. China is very smart in the commercial application of AI, and there is the possibility of it catching up with the US.

It is hoped that the consensus reached by the two heads of state will serve as a good starting point for China and the US to appreciate each other's AI advantages and learn from each other, which is good for the development of the two countries and world peace.

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COMMENT

Ong Tee Keat

Diplomacy enriches ties with Malaysia

The trajectory of the 50-year-old Malaysia-China diplomatic relations has never been bump-free along its course. But it is the challenges that have kept bilateral ties resilient.

During the three-year COVID-19 pandemic since late 2019, Malaysian NGOs, supported by Chinese entrepreneurs, spontaneously aided pandemic-stricken areas, leading to reciprocal support from the Chinese government with vaccines and medical supplies sent to Malaysia. This manifests a perfect match of the state-centric "Track 1 diplomacy" with the people-driven "Track 2 diplomacy" between the two countries when many other parts of the world were still grappling with trust deficit that hindered concerted human rescue endeavours.

Obviously, state actors in some countries were still suffering from the Cold War mindset, characterized by the ideological schism that had once dominated the world order.

In retrospect, half a century ago, then Malaysian prime minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein made a landmark move that took the world by storm when he visited Beijing at the height of the Cold

War. His handshake with Chairman Mao Zedong made Malaysia the first ASEAN member state to reach out to China, that culminated with the fostering of diplomatic ties with the most populous nation of the time.

The former Malaysian prime minister's move might have raised many eyebrows in the West, because the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, generally dubbed as a Western ally in the region, was widely expected to toe the West's line.

Be that as it may, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein's bold yet visionary move was deemed consistent with the 1971 ASEAN Declaration of ZOPFAN, a foundational declaration seeking to create a "zone of peace, freedom and neutrality" in Southeast Asia, "free from any form or manner of interference by outside powers" in order to "broaden the areas of cooperation".

Fast forward to 1991, Malaysia extended its engagement with China to ASEAN when it hosted the 24th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Kuala Lumpur where the Chinese foreign minister was invited for the first time. That paved the way for China to integrate with the bloc as the first dialogue partner, which later evolved into an ASEAN-China comprehensive strategic partnership in 2021.

Prior to that, Malaysia and China had their comprehensive strategic partnership sealed in 2013, the inaugural year of

the Belt and Road Initiative, which Malaysia was one of the first countries to join.

While the East Coast Rail Link project is still in progress under the Belt and Road Initiative framework, incumbent Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's high profile visit to China in 2023 further bolstered bilateral ties when he reached a consensual decision with President Xi Jinping to build a China-Malaysia community with a shared future — a further platform enabling multi-dimensional engagement between the two nations.

This is well poised to help integrate Malaysia with such China-initiated global initiatives as the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative — the three other Chinese public goods offered to global governance in the interest of humanity, alongside the Belt and Road Initiative.

Since Malaysia will assume the ASEAN's rotational chairmanship in 2025, all eyes in ASEAN will naturally be focused on the outcome of the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area 3.0 where wider market access to China is anticipated.

Alongside this, perhaps what appears no less relevant is ASEAN's outreach to China in realizing the goals of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, of which one of its pillars — the ASEAN Economic Community — envisions the creation of a sin-

gle market that allows free flow of goods, services, labour and capital within the region.

The economic pillar, along with the ASEAN Political and Security Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, looks set to resonate with the aspirations of the latest three China-proposed global initiatives. In pursuit of the well-being of the more than 660 million people it represents, ASEAN should be bold enough to pursue its strategic autonomy by engaging with China to realize the shared goals underscored in the ASEAN Community Vision 2025.

In this context, Malaysia with its prowess in community building makes an ideal choice for bridging the gulf. In pursuit of its age-old legacy of independent and autonomous diplomacy under the time-tested framework of the "ZOPFAN declaration", Malaysia has the edge of taking such lead when it assumes the ASEAN chairmanship next year.

After all, we are not obliged to dance to the tune of others, notably external powers, which remain obsessed with their zero-sum games mindset against the background of geopolitical rivalry.

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Kang Bing

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Only if foreigners visit the country can they see the real China

China has been taking measures since last year to attract more overseas tourists. It has granted visa-free entry to citizens of a dozen countries and made special electronic payment platforms operational for overseas visitors so they can purchase products and services, and pay their bills more easily. The country has also increased the number of international flights to make it more convenient for tourists to travel to the country.

These efforts seem to be yielding results. Incomplete data suggest the number of tourists from certain European and Asian countries has increased by double digits since the start of this year. In fact, we see more tourist groups on the streets and reports say some travel agencies are running short of guides.

Many observers believe the number of inbound trips could equal, if not exceed, the level in 2019 when the Chinese mainland received about 145 million inbound trips from outside the mainland.

Most of the resource-rich countries in Europe, Asia and the Americas are still struggling to control inflation. When people are worried about paying the bills and making ends meet, they are unlikely to plan foreign tours even if countries such as China offer preferential policies and a wonderful traveling experience.

However, China has always considered foreign visitors as an important part of people-to-people exchanges.

Besides, international flights are yet to recover to the pre-pandemic level, so few airlines are offering attractive discounts. Worse, sanctions and counter-sanctions have prevented many Western airlines from flying over the Russian territory, forcing them to cover longer distances and spend more time and fuel to reach China.

By offering tourist-friendly policies, China is keeping its promise of further opening up its market. To that end, it has also shortened the negative list for foreign investors, reduced taxes on many imported products, established more free-trade zones, and invested more in Belt and Road projects.

While international tourism is yet to fully recover, China's domestic tourist market recovered to a large extent last year, with 490 million trips made across the country with consumption of 4.9 trillion yuan (\$676.64 billion). The number of domestic tourists is expected to reach 6 billion this year.

However, China has always considered foreign visitors as an important part of people-to-people exchanges.

As a journalist, I have seen many Western media outlets changing, from trying to be objective or balanced in reporting on China to pointing the finger at the country for whatever it does, because such reports invoke laughter due to their absurdity.

Those who still rely on such media outlets for information on China are welcome to visit the country to see reality with their own eyes. They will find that it takes about five hours to fly from one end of the country to the other, and they can see the magnificent landscapes, from the world's highest peak, the 8,848.86-meter Qomolangma (Mount Everest), to the lowest point in China, the Turpan Basin (154 meters below the sea level) in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. They can visit the Palace Museum (Forbidden City) and the Terra Cotta Warriors in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, and climb the Great Wall in Beijing to learn about the country's civilization and its reunification efforts.

More importantly, they can talk with the Chinese people — many Chinese people below 40 years can communicate in English — on the streets, in restaurants, at tourist sites and other public places — to know why more than 90 percent of them are satisfied with the Chinese government, how China has managed to eradicate absolute poverty and why the accusation of the country using "forced labor" in Xinjiang is nonsense.

By talking with the common people, they can learn that China is facing a lot of challenges including a slowing economy, hostilities from some Western countries and yet pursuing high-quality development. By visiting China, foreigners can form their own opinion about China based on empirical evidence instead of being led astray by media reports and politicians' jargons.



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

Swaran Singh

Time for Beijing, New Delhi to collaborate for shared goals

Xu Feihong, China's new ambassador to India, arrived in New Delhi in May. For more than one reason, his initial media interactions and reports on his arrival have raised hopes of an early normalization of India-China ties since the border standoff in 2020.

What makes Ambassador Xu's arrival so promising is the fact that it ends the longest interlude for India not having a Chinese ambassador over the four-plus decades.

Xu's predecessor, Sun Weidong, left India in October 2022, but his three years in India largely coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and border face-offs which stymied the implementation of the decisions both countries' leaders had reached at their informal meetings in Wuhan and Chennai in 2018 and 2019 respectively. Since then, both the actual and assumed opportunity cost of this mutually harmful stalemate had been accumulating for both sides. Ending this deadlock through an apex-level meeting

remains the key.

But to put things in perspective, the four years of border tensions have not been devoid of official level dialogue, though these existing mechanisms have revealed serious fatigue in ensuring peace and tranquility on the Line of Actual Control. In the past four years, the two countries have held 21 rounds of military commander-level talks and 29 work meetings on border affairs. These have resulted in reviving peace and tranquility through military withdrawals at least at four friction points. Three other such points remain under discussion but this piecemeal progress has seen patience eroding on both sides.

These four years have also seen the two countries' leaders meeting in multilateral forums and even holding two rounds of bilateral talks on their sidelines.

More importantly, India-China trade continues to grow, with China still being India's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade volume reaching \$136 billion last year. India's largest ever imports from China have created a surplus of more than \$100 billion for China. In investments as well, in spite of added restrictions, through India's national

security filter, China continues to be an aggressive investor in India, especially in its e-commerce platforms, start-ups and infrastructure.

Therefore, this is a historic opportunity for the two sides to mould emerging global narratives and initiatives to restore long-term peace along their border. Being the world's two most populous countries — as also peer civilizations with powerful militaries, leading countries in technology and largest emerging economies — they have inordinate stakes in making global governance democratic and representative.

Both India and China remain committed to democratizing global decision-making and, as such, they are deeply engaged in helping other developing, including least-developed, countries, to boost their economic growth. Also, both India and China seek to bring the Global South to the center stage of the global governance system. The G7 industrialized nations profit- and market-driven industrialization and urbanization have resulted in the unequal distribution of resources, greatly harming the Global South.

Their shared drive for democratizing

global governance, by ensuring the Global South plays a key role in global decision-making, has seen China proposing the Belt and Road Initiative 11 years ago, and following it up by proposing the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, while India has launched the "International Solar Alliance", the "Global Coalition of Biofuels" and so on with similar concerns.

Of course, there are divergences in the two countries' strategies, but by working on their shared objectives, they can maximize their combined appeal and efficacy to address common challenges, which will help them maintain mutual peace partnership. This 70th year of Panchsheel, or the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, should be an apt occasion for the two sides to explore the possibilities of laying a fresh foundation for a peaceful partnership grounded in their shared ancient wisdom of the world being one big family.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

CAI CUIHONG AND LI YUHUA

Virtual signaling

China must respond to the challenges posed by the increasing cybersecurity cooperation among Quad members

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is an informal dialogue mechanism comprising the United States, Japan, India and Australia. As the Joe Biden administration pushes ahead with its "Indo-Pacific" strategy, greater weight has been given to the Quad mechanism. Notably, with global cyberspace governance



Cai Cuihong

plagued by disorder and the proliferation of security issues, the Quad countries have ramped up their efforts in cybersecurity cooperation.



Li Yuhua

Since the Quad's launch in 2017, meetings have been elevated first to the ministerial level and later to the level of heads of state, with six senior working groups established, including the Quad Senior Cyber Group and the Quad Critical and Emerging Technology Working Group. In addition, the role of the private sector in cybersecurity cooperation has also been enhanced.

Quad countries have expanded cooperation in areas such as cyber intelligence and information sharing, communication technology development and deployment, software security standards and practices, and the building of resilient supply chains. As the leader of this group, the US has been seeking to enhance strategic trust and foundation for military cooperation among the four nations, and to exclude China from cyberspace cooperation.

The Quad has engaged countries such as the Republic of Korea and

Vietnam to form the "Quad plus", and collaborated with other US-led multilateral security mechanisms such as AUKUS, US-Japan-ROK trilateral relations, and NATO, thereby building a complex network of cooperation. Through these collaboration frameworks, the US has cemented its central role in the mechanisms, which helps it push for more flexible cooperation on related issues, thus forming a greater encirclement against China.

The enhanced cybersecurity cooperation of the Quad poses severe challenges to regional security and cyberspace governance as well as global connectivity.

First, it has exacerbated regional tensions and disrupted regional stability. The enhanced collaboration among the US, India, Japan and Australia in military intelligence and information sharing and the joint military drills including cyberattack and defense have strengthened the US' intervention in the "Indo-Pacific" region. Should a US-led "Indo-Pacific NATO" be formed, it will undermine the long-standing stability of the region, and threaten the regional and global security order.

Second, it will poison the environment of global cyberspace governance. Global cyberspace governance requires the concerted efforts of all countries. But Quad countries' cooperation in cybersecurity is essentially a pseudo multilateralism that is exclusive in nature. Rather than alleviating the global governance deficit in cyberspace, it will escalate competition among major countries and disrupt technological cooperation in the virtual realm, further turning cyber issues into political and security issues.

Third, it will fuel the trend of de-globalization and fragmentation of the global economy. The Quad countries' enhanced cooperation in



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

building resilient supply chains and critical infrastructure is aimed at creating a technological and economic small clique with the US at the core. This will disrupt global supply chains and fragment technology standards, and increase the costs and risks of doing business, thereby impeding global economic growth. In addition, it will increase tensions in international relations and complicate global efforts to tackle common challenges such as climate change and public health crises.

Despite the strengthening of Quad cybersecurity cooperation, some impediments to it still exist.

First, the four countries within the grouping have divergent interests and concerns in many aspects.

The US is pushing for Quad cooperation with the aim of implementing its "Indo-Pacific" strategy, thus maintaining its dominance in cyberspace. Japan closely follows the US, sometimes acting even more enthusiastically than the latter. India is seeking greater strategic autonomy, thus downplaying the military significance of the Quad. Australia is trying to repair its relations with China, and is therefore unwilling to fully toe the US line.

Second, the four countries vary considerably in cybersecurity capacity. With different starting points in cyberspace development, the four also have significant differences in investments in technology, talent and capital in the field. Even

if they push forward cooperation through compromises and concessions, their disparities in development level will hinder the implementation of cybersecurity cooperation. For instance, India is lagging behind in cybersecurity development, making it difficult for the country to coordinate with the other Quad members.

Third, a question mark remains over the allies' trust in Washington. The track record of the US surveillance and eavesdropping on its allies has raised concerns over its credibility. After Donald Trump took office, the US has demanded its allies to take more responsibilities in global affairs, dampening the allies' confidence in the US commitment to their security.

Although the Biden administration has pledged to enhance cooperation with US allies, real inputs have been limited due to the international situation and domestic political strife. Moreover, the Russia-Ukraine crisis and Palestine-Israel conflict as well as the uncertainties in the US presidential election have cast further doubt over the US' commitment to its allies.

Nonetheless, the Quad attempts to form an anti-China bloc in cyberspace, which poses a grave threat to China's national security and development interests. China should take precautions in this regard.

First, China needs to closely monitor the Quad's latest moves on cybersecurity cooperation and address any spillover effects. The Quad has laid bare its ambition to draw Pacific island nations and Southeast Asian nations into its cybersecurity cooperation framework, which may escalate geopolitical tensions in China's neighborhood and further squeeze China's development space. China needs to keep a close eye on these developments, and communicate

with regional countries in a timely manner.

Second, China should use its advantages to break the anti-China cyber alliance. Quad countries and other nations in the "Indo-Pacific" region have close political and economic ties with China, with many using China's telecommunications and cyber technologies. China should have an open and inclusive mind, and promote multilateral cooperation in cyberspace via platforms such as the Digital Silk Road to break up the loose anti-China alliance.

Last, China needs to enhance the capacity building of its cybersecurity system.

China should optimize cybersecurity policies and regulations, improve the cybersecurity mechanism, and raise national awareness of cybersecurity, especially in areas such as data security, information infrastructure, emerging technologies, and application security risk prevention. At the same time, the country needs to establish domestic industry alliances and technology partners, and push for the opening-up of industry standards and interoperability, thus raising the overall cybersecurity capacity.

Only by deepening international cooperation in cyberspace can all countries build an open, fair, just, and non-discriminatory digital environment, thus building a community with a shared future in cyberspace.

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WANG YOUMING

More members, more consensus needed

In the BRICS Russia Year, the grouping should focus on promoting greater cooperation to deliver more concrete benefits for its members and the rest of the Global South

Ever since Russia took over the rotating chairmanship of BRICS, the international community has been observing every move Russia makes in organizing the BRICS presidency. Against the backdrop of complex geopolitical situations, BRICS is facing complex challenges.



From the perspective of multilateral mechanism building, a structural paradox of being both bigger and stronger is confronting BRICS countries. After being expanded to a 10-country bloc, BRICS has embarked on a new era of "greater BRICS cooperation". The expansion of BRICS can certainly have a scale effect, making the BRICS voice louder. However, after the expansion, BRICS will also face politically the challenge of "more members, less consensus".

BRICS was born out of the economic rise of emerging countries. Economic collaboration has naturally been the primary goal of the BRICS bloc. Thus, how to balance economic and financial cooperation and political and security cooperation has also become a top concern for BRICS countries in the BRICS' Russia Year and in the years to come.

Furthermore, all members of the expanded BRICS are non-Western countries. Their joint efforts to reshape the international system will naturally raise the concerns of the US-led West. Some analysts from Western political and academic circles believe that the growth of

BRICS means the rise of the non-Western camp. The international community is also concerned that a growing BRICS and the Western allies camp will constitute two new "parallel, confrontational systems". After Russia took over the rotating chairmanship of BRICS, the fear of confrontation between the two camps has only risen.

To address the concerns, this year BRICS can focus on hot spot issues on the basis of the previous consensus and make efforts in specific areas to promote greater BRICS cooperation to deliver more concrete benefits.

First, it should strive to achieve practical results in financial cooperation among the BRICS countries. BRICS member countries have many disputes and differences over how to make the bloc bigger and stronger and whether or not to establish a BRICS secretariat and a BRICS-led rating agency. Meanwhile, there exist many technical and policy obstacles to the building of a BRICS unified market.

However, there is a greater consensus among member countries on deepening BRICS financial cooperation. For instance, most political and academic figures of the BRICS members believe that it is practicable to increase the use of local currencies in trade settlement and expand currency swaps among BRICS countries to reduce reliance on the US dollar, although the establishment of a new BRICS currency and "dedollarization" are not feasible in the short run.

The establishment of a BRICS payment system to get rid of the US and Western-controlled Society for

Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, SWIFT, system has received wide support within the political and academic circles of the BRICS member countries. Russia, which holds the BRICS presidency in 2024 and has long been plagued by Western financial sanctions, is bound to accelerate the establishment of the BRICS payment system this year.

According to last year's BRICS Summit held in South Africa, central bank governors and finance ministers from BRICS member countries should submit a proposal for the establishment of a BRICS payment system before the BRICS Summit 2024 to be held in Kazan, Russia, in October. Therefore, it is expected that the creation of a new payment system, the "BRICS Bridge", will be a top priority for the bloc in the BRICS Russia Year.

The New Development Bank has become a high point of the BRICS cooperation mechanism. Since its inception, it has registered good performance and achieved an international reputation, attracting more Global South countries to join it. Based on the BRICS expansion, BRICS can further promote the expansion of the NDB, so as to achieve two-way expansion between the BRICS and the NDB for a greater scale effect of the BRICS mechanism.

The expansion of the NDB should no longer be limited to Global South countries; developed countries such as Singapore can also be



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

included. This will help attract high-caliber financial talent from developed countries and draw on their rich experience in international financial governance to address the increasingly fierce competition in the same area.

Furthermore, most of the new BRICS members are rich in oil and energy resources. BRICS countries can take advantage of this situation to establish an energy partnership. They can expand the use of local currencies in oil trade settlement to accelerate currency diversification globally.

The expanded BRICS bloc should also step up efforts to accelerate the International Monetary Fund quota reform. Based on the completion of the IMF's 16th General Review of Quotas, Global South countries should further enhance their voice and representation in the IMF.

Second, an artificial intelligence governance framework under the

BRICS AI initiatives, to ensure that Global South countries enjoy the benefits of AI technologies.

China and Russia can make use of such platforms as the China-Russia Digital Economy Research Center and the Russia Home (Xiamen) Collaborative Innovation Center to jointly strengthen research on AI technology.

Third, BRICS countries should bolster security cooperation and people-to-people exchanges.

It has become increasingly necessary and practical for BRICS countries to expand cooperation into the field of security affairs. It should strengthen the top-level design and promote security cooperation as an important direction of future BRICS cooperation.

Similarly, closer people-to-people exchanges should become an important driving force for the sustainable development of greater BRICS cooperation. Based on such people-to-people exchange platforms as the BRICS Games and the BRICS Universities League, mutual visa exemption policies should

be introduced among BRICS countries at an early date so as to enable more convenient people-to-people exchanges.

At a time when the global governance system is characterized by a combination of "disorder, dysfunction and imbalance", BRICS will expand and deepen cooperation in areas that accord with the new political and economic ecosystems, and accelerate the transformation of the international system and the restructuring of the international order. Greater BRICS cooperation will steer global governance toward a fast track of rebalancing.

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LIFE

CULTURAL JOURNEY

A century ago, the tall clock tower's bell rang out, signaling the shifts for workers at Dasheng Cotton Mills.

Adjacent to the clock tower, on the bank of the canal connecting Nantong to Yangzhou in Tangzha ancient town, Nantong city, Jiangsu province, the bustling Dasheng Wharf facilitated the unloading of raw cotton and the dispatch of finished products to Shanghai, Sichuan and Jiangxi provinces and beyond.

Today, the clock tower, built in 1915 and once the highest point in the area, still stands proudly, with its bell ringing on the hour, every hour, just as it did 100 years ago.

The Tangzha area originated in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) when a local official had a floodgate, or *zha*, constructed on the canal. As the floodgate was near a family surnamed Tang, so came the name Tangjiayzha — Tang family floodgate — later shortened to Tangzha.

The ancient town, now a sub-district of Nantong's Chongchuan district, is well-preserved and retains much of its original architectural charm. Yet this historical sub-district of Nantong has undergone a significant transformation.

Since the start of the new century, the Nantong authorities have launched preservation efforts for the area's industrial heritage, transforming it into a historical and cultural sub-district. Adhering to the principle of restoring buildings to their original condition, the architectural complexes have been repaired and added with new service facilities. Meanwhile, the area's original charm and appearance have been maintained.

Tangzha ancient town now stands as a beacon of efficient production for blended yarn and fabric and has become a new hot spot for industrial heritage tourism. Additionally, it hosts numerous cultural enterprises, blending its rich historical legacy with modern innovation.

Tangzha ancient town has been praised by Wu Liangyong, a professor at Tsinghua University and an academician of both the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Engineering, as the "foremost town of modern industrial heritage in China".

During a visit to Nantong in 2002, Wu noted that "since the Self-Strengthening Movement, Tangzha has become the most well-preserved site of modern industrial heritage in China. It features the most diverse and substantial array of industrial categories, with its original sites and conditions remarkably intact. Tangzha is a prime example of early Chinese national industry". The Self-Strengthening Movement was a campaign of economic and military modernization in the second half of the 19th century, designed to strengthen the national power during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

Solid foundation

The visionary behind Tangzha's transformation was Zhang Jian (1853-1926), from Nantong, a top scholar of the late Qing Dynasty, who was a leading social reformer, educator and a patriotic industrial entrepreneur in early 20th-century China. Starting in 1895, he established factories, founded schools, built parks and constructed roads, shaping Tangzha into one of the first significant industrial towns in modern Chinese history.

Today, Zhang's vision for the place



A PLACE WITH A SENSE OF HISTORY

Ancient town retains charm of the past with modern efficiency,
Li Wensha and Li Yingxue report in Nantong, Jiangsu province.



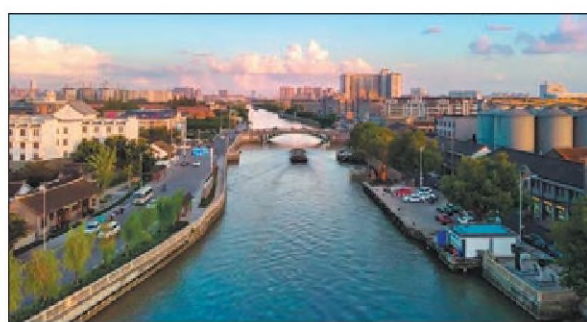
Top: An art exhibition at a century-old building in the "Year 1895" cultural and creative industrial park in Nantong, Jiangsu province. **Left:** The clock tower at Dasheng Cotton Mills in Tangzha area of Nantong, sitting next to the Dasheng Wharf, still stands proudly, with its bell ringing on the hour, just like 100 years ago. **PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY** **Right:** A bust of Zhang Jian, a social reformer, educator and a patriotic industrial entrepreneur, at the Haonan Villa, his former residence, which is now part of the Nantong Museum. LI WENSHA / CHINA DAILY



is presented in a new way, with Tangzha's unique blend of historical charm and contemporary innovation making it a captivating destination for both tourists and businesses.

An old warehouse that stored cottonseed oil a century ago is now an urban memory exhibition hall. A handmade soap factory transformed into a cultural experience center and a former rice milling plant is now a movable type printing experience center. A vegetable market, once a facility for workers, has been converted into a commercial street in the Tangzha Beishi, or northern market, a scenic area that was located north of the ancient town. Since opening in October 2021, the scenic area has attracted over 3 million visitors, according to local authorities.

In 1895, Zhang founded China's first large-scale cotton textile enterprise, the Dasheng Cotton Mills. He didn't stop with the cotton mill. He maximized the use of raw materials at every production stage. Cottonseeds left after ginning were pressed for cottonseed oil and the waste from the oil plant was used to produce soap and candles. He also established oil mills, flour mills, ironworks and breweries. Tangzha soon became a bustling commercial hub, a key transportation center and



The Tangzha area of Nantong is well-preserved and retains much of its original architectural charm. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

a booming industrial town in the region, earning Nantong a place as one of the birthplaces of modern Chinese industry.

For over 120 years, the Dasheng Cotton Mills has operated at its original site. The wharf, factory school for workers' training and a man-made river that is a key water resource for fire prevention in the factory still serve their original purposes, making the mill a living museum of Chinese industrial history.

"As the new generation of 'Dasheng people', we aim to carry forward Zhang Jian's entrepreneurial spirit," says Qi Yingbin, chairman of Jiang-

su Dasheng Group. The company has preserved the factory's historical look while embracing modern trends in the textile industry. The newly built smart spinning factory has significantly boosted production efficiency.

In 2022, the Dasheng group launched China's first smart spinning factory during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25), requiring fewer than 10 workers per 10,000 spindles. This factory was recognized by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology as a model smart manufacturing facility. Currently, the factory employs over

7,000 people, Qi says. "Looking ahead, Dasheng group will focus on smart manufacturing, low-carbon development, full industrial chain integration, and promoting Zhang Jian's cultural legacy," he adds.

The historical buildings of the Dasheng Cotton Mills have been carefully preserved. Qi accentuated their commitment to minimal intervention with the principle of "restoring the old as the old".

The goal "is to make it look as if no restoration has been done", Qi says. "For example, the clock tower's original appearance was kept, the corroded stairs replaced and the clock fine-tuned for accuracy. Now, it still chimes on time."

And plans for more detailed protection and launching of industrial heritage sites and expansion of industrial heritage tourism will be realized, Qi adds.

Over 100 years, three things at Dasheng Cotton Mills have remained unchanged — the name given by Zhang Jian, the focus on the textile industry and the factory's original location.

Hands-on experience

Wang Zhenyu, a staff member from Nantong Chongchuan cultural tourism development company, introduced how Tangzha's old

industrial sites have been turned into cultural attractions.

For one thing, local people observe May 23 every year as the Industrial Culture Experience Day, to commemorate the birth of the first batch of yarn that was produced by Dasheng Cotton Mills on May 23, 1899. "This event helps residents and tourists experience the industrial culture and the patriotic spirit of early entrepreneurs represented by Zhang Jian," Wang explains.

More industrial tourism routes will be launched, attractions to be upgraded and heritage sites that have been scattered in various locations across the town will be connected in the future. This shift aims to enhance the preservation and promotion of industrial heritage, Wang adds.

For example, every month on the 17th and 18th when historically, workers at Dasheng received their wages and spent money, they celebrate the "17/18 shopping festival", encouraging rounds of shopping once a month. "We turned this tradition into a market featuring cultural heritage products and Nantong's specialty snacks," he says.

"Our activities are based on Tangzha's unique cultural resources."

Experiential tours for children and residents are also hosted, Wang adds.

In a printing museum built based on the renovated rice milling factory, visitors engage in activities such as selecting movable types of Chinese-character blocks and arranging a model plate of their choice, ready to print. The museum also showcases old printing equipment like typesetting machines and flatbed printers, creating a rich cultural atmosphere.

Among the visitors is resident Dou Jianying, 30, with her 6-year-old son. While picking out word blocks, Dou explains to her child the history of movable-type printing, one of the "Four Great Inventions" of ancient China.

"We printed some four-character idioms, giving my son a taste of traditional culture, which I found really meaningful," Dou says.

A short walk away from Dasheng Cotton Mills, visitors arrive at the "Year 1895" cultural and creative industrial park. Since 2009, Nantong has been preserving Tangzha's industrial heritage, transforming the great Zhang Jian's legacy into a bustling park.

With its old walls, tall chimneys and industrial-style buildings, the park is a blend of history and charm. Xu Hong, general manager of the park, explains that it houses 44 buildings, five of which are more than 100 years old.

Following the principle of "restoring the old as the old", they carefully repair damaged parts with century-old wood, keeping the original look intact, while reinforcing with stainless steel on the outside, Xu says.

Buildings No 7 and No 8, both over 100 years old, are now public spaces that host various events, such as car launches, anime shows and fashion shows. "We hold nearly 100 exhibitions a year," Xu adds.

According to her, the park has attracted over 40 companies who rent office spaces — keeping the old machinery as background exhibits — where young designers work next to antique machines, blending history with modernity seamlessly.

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Visionary shapes city for society to thrive

Nantong in Jiangsu province holds seven national firsts — the first normal school, private museum, textile school, embroidery school, drama school, a school for those with speech and hearing challenges run by Chinese, and the first meteorological station — all thanks to Zhang Jian (1853-1926). He was a *zhuangyuan*, the top candidate in the imperial examination in 1894 during the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), a leading social reformer, educator and a patriotic industrial entrepreneur in early 20th-century China.

There was another record — in 1895, Zhang established China's first large-scale cotton textile enterprise the Dasheng Cotton Mills in Tangzha, previously called Tangjiayzha, ancient town of Nantong.

The patriotic industrialist and educator's impact on Nantong goes beyond industry. His reforms in



Li Yingxue
Reporter's Log

education, culture, charity and urban development propelled Nantong into modernization.

How does one person leave such a mark on a city? My recent visit to Nantong uncovered some answers.

For Zhang, his connection with Nantong lasted over a century, shaping the city's present and future.

More than a century ago, Zhang left his official career to establish industrial ventures in Tangzha. The Dasheng Wharf, built for the Dasheng Cotton Mills, became a symbol of that era.

Today, Zhang's vision has come to life. Nantong's textile industry is now diverse and thriving, making

textiles one of the city's most iconic and traditional pillar industries.

In late 2022, the Nantong municipal government set an ambitious goal — that by 2024, the city's large-scale textile enterprises expect to achieve a total output value of 220 billion yuan (\$30.95 billion).

Zhang envisioned a "one city, three towns" layout for Nantong, aiming for balanced development of the urban, rural and scenic areas. The "one city" was the old downtown area of Nantong, then a county, which was for residential and commercial use.

For the three towns, Tangjiayzha was an industrial zone, Tiansheng Port served as the port area and Langshan was a scenic spot. The plan embodied Zhang's idea of harmony between city and nature, similar to the global "garden city" concept of the time.

Du Jiale, head of the Nantong

Museum, believes that Zhang seamlessly blended China's traditional culture with modern technology, creating a unique vision. Zhang used Nantong as a test case, turning it into a model county that set an example for much of China, according to Du.

As a pivotal figure in China's modern education reform, Zhang played a crucial role in shaping Nantong's comprehensive education system, blending his educational vision into all his industrial endeavors.

He started with basic education, establishing normal schools and various other educational institutions in Nantong, covering everything from kindergarten to university-level and specialized education.

The Nantong Museum, China's first public museum founded by Zhang in 1905, is now a bustling cultural center. Haonan Villa, Zhang's

former residence during his later years and now part of the museum, offers unique historical and cultural experiences. The blooming wisteria in its surroundings that Zhang planted then still attracts many students for sketching sessions today.

"Zhang Jian personally oversaw every aspect of the Nantong Museum's construction, ensuring meticulous attention to detail," Du says.

Zhang believed in modern museum concepts, deeming museums as a venue for education and knowledge spreading purpose, Du says, adding that Zhang's contributions to museology went beyond theory and had a significant impact on the city.

For example, Zhang believed that a museum's architecture should be a city's first exhibit. Today, many visitors view museum buildings as iconic landmarks of the city, Du explains.

Last year, more than 20 research-based learning routes were launched, based on the theme "Zhang Jian and the first modern city," according to Du.

Furthermore, Du mentions that

they are currently crafting educational tours, centered around the theme of Zhang's educational legacy.

"We plan to take students on guided visits to a selection of prestigious universities cofounded by Zhang Jian, such as Fudan University, Nanjing University and Tongji University. Through these visits, students will gain deeper insights into the rich cultural heritage of these esteemed institutions," Du says.

Professor He Yun'ao from Nanjing University's School of History praises Zhang as a pioneer among Chinese private entrepreneurs and a key figure in transitioning China from an agricultural to an industrial civilization.

He says: "Zhang Jian transformed Nantong into China's first city in the modern sense and made significant contributions to the industrial, commercial and water conservancy sectors, including projects on the Yangtze, Yellow and Huaihe rivers.

"Zhang Jian truly showed how one person can shape a city and achieve remarkable feats beyond their era," he adds.

LIFE

Vincenzo Perretta, CEO of Volatour, a travel agency based in New York, is looking forward to the implementation of more favorable tourism policies, he said during a recent trip to Xi'an, Northwest China's Shaanxi province.

"The rate of visitors from China to the United States is quite low, partly because we don't have enough flights. So there is not enough airlift to sustain high volumes," Perretta said at the recent 14th China-US Tourism Leadership Summit held in the city.

"But there is definitely potential for both countries to generate more business," he adds.

Perretta has visited China many times.

"I love China and I think that it is a great place for Americans to discover," he says, adding that many Americans have a very different concept of what China is today and he would love to bring more people to explore what the country has to offer.

"You guys did a good job in welcoming us. The food and beverage arrangements were fantastic. The transportation and all the services were great. It's really unbelievable," Perretta says about his experiences at the summit in Xi'an.

"What we saw in Xi'an was amazing. I visited the city 20 years ago to see the Terracotta Warriors and it was nice to see that again," he says.

His company signed a cooperation agreement with the government of Shenzhen, South China's Guangdong province, during the summit.

"We will help to promote each other's countries and build up what is needed and what is missing," he says.

Perretta wishes might be answered as government officials and tourism players have proposed the facilitation of travel at the summit where 400 industry representatives discussed boosting bilateral tourism cooperation and people-to-people exchanges between the world's two biggest economies.

They expressed high expectations for concrete actions to improve the visa application process and access to tour information, as well as transport and payment to remove tourism barriers between the two countries.

"The Chinese government has taken various measures to improve conveniences for inbound tourists such as using payment procedures, simplifying the visa process and optimizing the service environment for international tourists," says Gu Huimin, a tourism science professor from the Beijing International Studies University, during a forum focusing on facilitating inbound travel and diversifying experiences.

"In addition, China is actively working on an inbound tourism promotion plan, both the government and companies are working together to provide international guests with more convenience to show how beautiful China is," Gu adds.

More convenience

Dai Haiyong, head of the foreign exchange business with Tencent Financial Technology, says the company has come up with two products for international travelers to China.

The first is binding international bank cards to WeChat for QR code payments, while the second is using overseas e-wallets for direct payments, Dai says, adding that the company has been accelerating cooperation with e-wallets around the world.

"We also launched a solution for small payments without verification. Tourists coming to China don't need to fill out any information and



Both countries optimistic for more inbound travelers on back of bilateral cooperation, face-to-face exchanges, **Yang Feiyue** reports.



can make quick payments, greatly enhancing overall convenience," he says.

Millions of inbound visitors to China have used the company's payment service since July last year and gave positive feedback, Dai notes.

More investment will go into diversifying payment methods such as facial recognition, and product functionalities will be streamlined.

"In terms of identity recognition and customer service, we will leverage visual or deep-learning capabilities to better serve everyone," he says.

Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, director of the Macao Government Tourism Office, says the city has applied an electronic customs clearance system that has played a positive role in facilitating travel for inbound visitors.

Last year, the city's financial management bureau worked on a service to convert different foreign currencies directly into Macao's scanning payment system.

"We hope to enhance convenience for our travelers in spending in Macao in the future," she says.

Macao is also leveraging advanced technology to address other issues, including making it easier for inbound travelers to search and understand Macao.

"We are currently working on launching a system through our mainland's Ernie Bot (AI model by Baidu) platform, which we hope will soon support and utilize various international languages to serve our customers," she says.

Wan Qingchao, executive vice-president of China Eastern Air Holding, says after five rounds of increased flights, the number of flights between the two countries



Clockwise from top: The live show *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* portraying a royal love affair is among the attractions that impress US attendees of the 14th China-US Tourism Leadership Summit in Xi'an, Shaanxi province. The US guests pose with actresses in traditional costumes. US participants interact during the show. Visitors from the US view a model of the ancient city while touring Xi'an, Shaanxi province, in May. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

has now increased to 92 flights per week.

Nevertheless, it's only 28 percent of the number before the pandemic.

"My colleagues and I are looking forward to more direct flights between the two countries to meet the needs of communication and exchanges, and to continue and deepen the friendship," Wan says.

Winning back visitors

The US counterparts at the summit say they are also on the move to win back Chinese travelers.

Julie Stufft, deputy assistant secretary for Visa Services with the US Department of State, says China was the number one demand market for US visas and the US side is very

eager to get back to that level.

"We've done a few things to make that easier," Stufft says.

One is to have as few touch points as needed between the government and the traveler and to make it easier to get the interview that is needed, she adds.

Another thing is removing the interview requirement when possible. This policy has expanded last year, according to her.

"For example, a Chinese student studying in the United States coming back to China a year ago would have needed an interview to get a tourist visa after studying in the United States. Today an interview would not be necessary and we would just process that visa," she

says, adding that the US is also working on keeping the wait time for visas as low as possible and trying to accommodate a visa applicant from any country on a business trip to places such as Tokyo, Frankfurt or Paris.

"That has been a game-changer for us in terms of processing numbers," Stufft says.

The US Consulate General in Wuhan, Hubei province, has also opened a new office, aiming to help more Chinese applicants to get interviews more quickly.

"We poured a lot of resources into being ready when the demand signal returns to what it was in 2015 and 2016, and even 2019. I'm really happy to say that this year so far we've done three times as many visa issuances in China over last year. That's a very strong signal in the right direction," Stufft says.

As the 10-year visa came out in 2014, Stufft says she anticipates that many Chinese travelers will want to renew that visa in 2025.

"We are ready for that to happen and we're excited that those folks won't need a visa interview at that point. You can just mail in your passport and it's done within a few days. It's very, very convenient," she says.

Geoff Freeman, president and CEO of the US Travel Association, says although there are things discouraging travel that are beyond control, the issue of visas and better customs experiences can be addressed through future efforts.

"Another opportunity for us to improve is to look at various inconveniences that travelers confront," Freeman says.

He notices that one inconvenience is when many travelers visit the US, if

they are moving on from a gateway city, they have to go through customs, get their bags and come back through the Transportation Security Administration's screening process to recheck everything.

"There isn't a seamless transfer that people can do in American airports right now, which we're trying to address," Freeman says.

"We created a commission of former government members who are experts in a wide variety of areas to help give us solutions that can improve traveler experience," he adds.

Good outlook

Participants at the summit say they are optimistic for the future, as the two governments have both shown positive attitudes in boosting tourism.

During the event, Chinese State Councilor Shen Yi-qin noted that holding this summit is a measure to implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state at the San Francisco meeting last year, and it will promote the recovery and development of China-US tourism cooperation, taking it to a new level.

China is willing to work with the US to deepen tourism cooperation, expand cultural and people-to-people exchanges, and lead mutual learning among civilizations, Shen says.

Shen adds that China will continue to work with the US to promote exchanges and cooperation in areas such as culture, education, sports and youth, and make positive contributions to the development of healthy, stable and sustainable China-US relations.

China warmly welcomes tourists from all over the world, including American tourists, and will strive to make it easier for foreigners to travel, work and live in China, Shen says.

At the meeting, Grant Harris, US assistant secretary of commerce for Industry and Analysis at the Department of Commerce, says an important factor in achieving the goal of the National Travel and Tourism Strategy proposed by Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo almost two years ago is "the ability of the US travel and tourism industry to attract more Chinese travelers to visit the United States for leisure, business and education purposes."

It sets an overarching goal of attracting 90 million visitors to spend \$279 billion annually by 2027, according to Harris.

"Before the pandemic in 2019, the US welcomed nearly 3 million Chinese visitors who spent \$33 billion experiencing the country. China was our top overseas market for spending in the United States," he says.

In 2023, 1.1 million Chinese travelers visited the US, representing 38 percent of the pre-pandemic level, he adds.

"Restoring Chinese visitation to 2019 levels would support over 50,000 American jobs," he says.

The US anticipates that Chinese visitation will increase 150 percent from 2023 to 2025, 4.7 times faster than the rise in overall overseas visitation to the US during this time, according to Harris.

He stresses that this success cannot be achieved without gatherings like the summit and the continued dedication from both countries to find ways to enhance people-to-people exchanges.

"I know that my team is looking forward to working with you in the years to come. We encourage steps to provide a strong business environment to create opportunities for US companies operating in China," he says.

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HONG KONG — Around 200 pieces of artifacts from East China's Shandong province are on display for the first time in Hong Kong from May 28.

Through a parallel display of major archaeological discoveries made in Hong Kong and Shandong, respectively, dating to three historical periods, the exhibition sheds light on the similarities between the two local cultures, as well as the pluralistic integration of ancient Chinese civilization, says Bernadette Linn, secretary for development of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government at the opening ceremony.

Exhibits from Shandong include an eggshell black pottery high-stem cup with perforations that represent the pin-

Shandong artifacts debut in Hong Kong



Left: Artifacts from Shandong province are on show at the Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Center. Visitors appreciate the exhibits on May 28. **Right:** One of the 200 pieces from Shandong. PHOTOS BY WANG SHEN / XINHUA



aculations that represent the pinnacle of Chinese prehistoric pottery craftsmanship, as well as a red pottery tripod pitcher with bag-shaped legs representative of prehistoric Shandong culture.

The artifacts chronicle the development of Shandong culture from the Neolithic period to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

Also on display are artifacts unearthed in Hong Kong, including a stringed stone ornament set, quartz rings and a perforated pottery basin with an incised wave pattern.

The exhibition is being held at the Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Center until Oct 6.

XINHUA

LIFE

Online battles keep elderly ahead of the game

Multiplayer challenges are not just for the young as older generations join the action, **Wang Qian** reports.

Communicating over a headset with her fingers flying across the keyboard, Yang Xiurong, 53, is a formidable participant in the popular multiplayer online battle arena *Honor of Kings*, also known as *Arena of Valor*.

Teamed with her daughter Wu Sijia, 29, Yang made a name for herself in a suitably combative tournament held in Chengdu, Southwest China's Sichuan province, in 2022. She was awarded the title of the most valuable player in a match for her outstanding performance operating the support hero Yaria during the event.

"Just like square dancing, mobile games are a way of entertainment, which should not be limited by age. For people who are getting old, like me, we can still feel young," Yang says. She has gone viral on microblogging platform Sina Weibo after her passion for the video game made national headlines. The story was viewed more than 35.6 million times. A netizen named Chenxi comments that it is "the ideal life after retirement".

Early last year, sponsored by food delivery platform Meituan Waimai, Qin Yuliang, 53, Ge Xiaoxiang, 56, Zou Xiaodong, 60, Fang Weihua, 56, and Yang as the captain, set up their team called Xiyanghong (Sunset Red) to play against young gamers across the country. Receiving a month's training from coach Zhou Haoqi, they were invited to compete against a professional team — the Hero Jiuqing E-sports Club in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, in April last year.

Although they lost the game, Xiyanghong's performance on the online battlefield still challenged the competitive gaming stereotypes of esports seen as a young man's game, with professional players considered "over the hill" in their 20s.

For Yang, "what matters is not winning or losing, but the happiness that the team enjoyed together in the game".

With gaming selected as an official medal event at the 19th Hangzhou Asian Games, the country's video game player population grew to a record 668 million by the end of June last year, according to statistics from industry association China Game Industry Group Committee.

There have been long-standing arguments about whether or not children and adolescents should



Top: A certificate Yang Xiurong and her daughter Wu Sijia won at the sixth national tournament of the *Honor of Kings* in 2022.

Above: The mother and daughter livestream as they play the video game.

be allowed to play video games. While many Chinese parents strictly control their children's screen time in the internet age, Yang's case provides a different perspective on how parents and children can bond through video games.

Family night

When Yang started playing *Honor of Kings*, she just wanted to stay connected with her daughter, who took a night shift in a State-owned company in Chengdu in 2016.

"My mom has always been my best friend, with whom I share everything, good or bad, in life," Wu says, adding that, a week after she played the game, she recommended it to her mother.

It was not easy at first for Yang to get to know and understand the basics of the game, which has a vast range of heroes and complex game-play mechanics. Before *Honor of Kings*, Yang had puzzle games, like *Collapse*, and card games downloaded to her smartphone, which she found funny but not challenging enough to spend her leisure time.

"It is definitely a challenging game for beginners, like me. To understand the skills, equipment and play styles of Zhou Yu (a hero in the game), I practiced more than 4,000 times," Yang says, adding that compared to young players, with quicker reactions and better techniques, she has her own advantages — emotional stability and patience, helping her make wise decisions in the arena.

Having played the game for eight years, Yang has developed her own strategy — to make up for her slow reaction speed, she prefers heroes with faster mobility speed and those able to withstand blows from enemies.

Always aiding her daughter in the game, Yang has enjoyed the nights she spent in the Hero's Gorge defending their base, like what she does in life.

"No matter in the game or in life, I have always accompanied and supported my daughter," Yang says, adding that they also have quarrels and disputes, but they will always find a way to solve disagreements and move forward.

When Wu decided to quit her stable job and become a game streamer in early 2021, Yang didn't doubt her daughter's choice, because she trusted that Wu "knew what her specialty was", and she knew that being young means to give anything a go, the mother says.

At the beginning, there were only several viewers for Wu's livestreaming, and to help warm up the audience, Yang joined Wu in the broadcast to help viewer numbers from home and abroad reach more than 300,000 at peak hours.

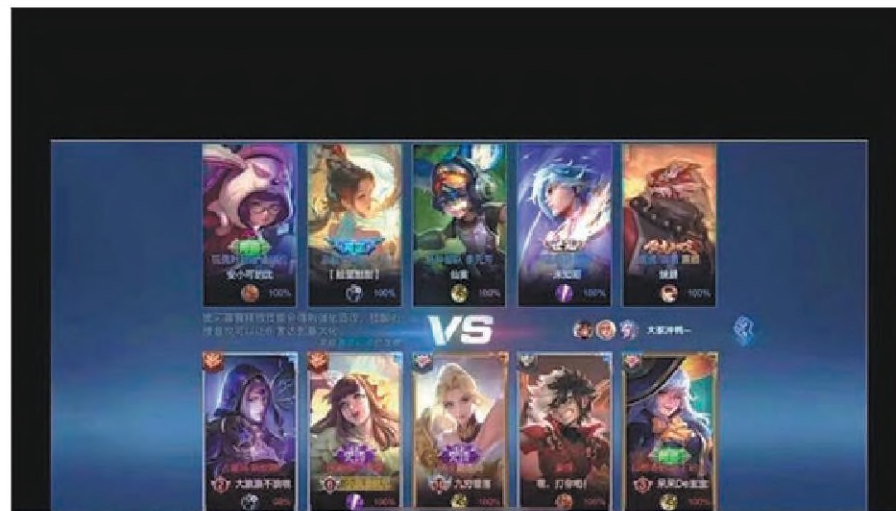
"I can play better than many young gamers, which makes me feel great," Yang says.

Silver-haired fans

According to a report released at the 2023 Global Esports Summit and the Tencent Esports Annual Conference, there were about 11 percent of gamers aged 45 and over in China last year, while the ratio was 9 percent in 2020.

Just like Xiyanghong, an increasing number of senior citizens are participating in video games with proven benefits that competitive gaming can offer.

A clinical research report published in the journal *Behavioural Brain Research* in 2020 found that video games showed potential in improving key aspects of memory



Top: With King Pro League commentator Li Jiu (left), Yang (middle) and Wu livestream playing a game online. Above: Communicating via headset with fingers flying across their smartphones, members of Xiyanghong (Sunset Red), a senior *Honor of Kings* team, compete against the Nanjing Hero Jiuqing E-sports Club in a game last year. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

in older adults. Researchers supported by the National Institute on Aging in the United States discovered that individuals aged between 60 and 80 who played 30 to 45 minutes video games per day for four weeks displayed improved recognition memory.

Although video games may not be an ideal substitute for real-world experience, they may serve as an additional and entertaining method to improve cognitive health, according to the research.

Qin from Xiyanghong says that the game keeps his mind active and helps exercise his hand-eye coordination. Ge, a nasopharyngeal cancer survivor, says that playing *Honor of Kings* has helped him get through the tough times during his fight

with the disease.

Yang Binglin, affectionately known as "Gamer Grandpa" on short-video platform Bilibili, has achieved a Guinness World Record title at the age of 88 by becoming the oldest male gaming livestreamer early this year. His channel — "Hardcore gamer old man Yang" — has more than 303,000 subscribers.

It's not only happening in China. There's a growing global appetite for esports, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, as gaming offered an entertaining and safe alternative to socializing and recreation during the lockdown.

In September 2021, Matagi Snipers was established as Japan's first senior esports professional team with its members required to be

above 65. Boasting an average member age of 67, it aims to become a team "respected by grandchildren", according to its official website.

Sponsored by tech giant Lenovo, Silver Snipers is a senior *Counter Strike* team from Sweden, which was assembled with the explicit goal of broadening the audience of esports to the generation with ample disposable income and leisure time.

For Yang, video games are just a new pastime to enrich her life and she hopes as more senior players like her participate in the gaming community, they can make the sector appealing to a broader demographic.

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AI gives the visually challenged a chance to enjoy movies

By XU FAN
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Despite losing her eyesight at 52, Beijing resident Zhang Hua has maintained her enthusiasm for the cinema.

For more than a decade, she has been a regular visitor to the China Braille Library to enjoy "barrier-free movies", a special version tailored for people with visual impairments. These movies, typically screened on Tuesdays, feature added audio narratives that explain visual elements such as character movements and settings.

However, the main regret for her and fellow movie fans is that most of these films were released several years or even decades ago, primarily due to copyright issues.

A new service jointly launched by the technology company Tencent and the library will expand their options. Titled "Barrier-free Cinemas", the service, aimed at benefiting China's more than 17 million visually impaired individuals, is scheduled to release over 600 films and TV dramas.

Most highlighted projects include

actress-director Jia Ling's *YOLO*, this year's highest-grossing film, the crime series *The Long Season*, and the sci-fi TV series *Three-Body*, adapted from Liu Cixin's Hugo Award-winning novel.

Li Daren, deputy senior president of Tencent Video, the streaming site that provides the service, reveals that cutting-edge artificial intelligence technology will be employed to speed up production processes.

"In the past, creating a special version of a feature-length movie required around 30 days, with professionals needing to watch the film 13 to 15 times, write the narrative script, and perform the voice-over job," he says.

The AI models developed by Tencent can automatically generate a script based on the video content. "After the wording is polished, the AI models can also generate the voice-over automatically, allowing our volunteer workers to make slight adjustments and double-check at the end. The entire process can be reduced to 10 days," he adds.

The service also plans to recruit a total of 100 volunteers, with most



An audience with visual impairments enjoy director Jia Ling's movie *YOLO* during a special screening in the China Braille Library in Beijing on May 15. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

expected to be selected among movie fans in colleges and within the company, to create barrier-free versions of the selected programs, including actress Liu Yifei's costume drama *A Dream of Splendor*,

the romance series *The Oath of Love*, and actor Wu Lei's *Love Like the Galaxy*.

He Chuan, deputy director of the China Braille Library, says that such movies, known as "audio descrip-

tion" in the West, can be traced back to their earliest exploration in the 1970s.

He recalls that the library began to explore the production of barrier-free movies in 2003, with the first title being director Ridley Scott's historical epic, *Gladiator*.

But it was the historical epic *The Founding of a Republic*, a tribute to the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, that became the first of its kind to be officially released in the barrier-free format on discs in 2011. Since then, more than 860 such movies have been produced and published, adds He.

"Besides incorporating voice-overs, the remade video content also includes footage of a host performing sign language, framed in a small window at the bottom right. This practice allows people with hearing impairments to comprehend the audio background," he says.

With the experience accumulated over past years, He says the library has established a set of criteria to ensure the quality.

"To write the narrative script is

akin to a translation task. The script needs to be accurate, beautifully crafted, and the writer should exercise restraint when incorporating hints within scenes. The creators must discern when to speak and when to hold back," he explains.

Acknowledging that achieving such nuance and delicacy remains a challenging task for AI, he says they will conduct further training on AI models to make digital creations more humanlike.

"Over the past decade, we have noticed that watching films is the preferred form of entertainment for the visually impaired, garnering larger audiences than activities such as reading or learning musical instruments," says He. Nevertheless, with the rapid advancement of the Chinese film industry, he says that they have observed movies becoming increasingly challenging to narrate due to the inclusion of more action sequences, elaborate stunts and complex artistic expressions.

"It's a significant challenge but we are confident that we will improve in the future," he says.