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# CHINA DAILY

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## Pakistani PM praises strong, fruitful ties

China's achievements in fighting corruption, alleviating poverty, empowering youth hailed

By ZHOU MO in Shenzhen and ZHAO JIA in Beijing

Pakistani Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif lauded on Wednesday the "visionary leadership" of President Xi Jinping and the ironclad ties between China and Pakistan, while urging his country's businesses to seize the "golden opportunities" brought by bilateral cooperation.

Speaking at the China-Pakistan Business Conference in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, Sharif attributed the miraculous transformation of Shenzhen — from a small fishing village to a modern metropolis — to the forward-looking vision of great Chinese statesmen, from Deng Xiaoping to Xi. He called Xi "one of the world's greatest leaders". Sharif, who is on a five-day official visit to China, his first since taking office in March, praised the remarkable achievements made by China in fighting corruption, alleviating poverty and empowering its youths. Such efforts have delivered rich dividends, he said.

Addressing a roomful of Pakistani and Chinese business leaders, Sharif said he accepted and appreciated the dynamism of the Chinese leadership and President Xi. The Belt and Road Initiative, put forward by Xi, has evolved into "a wonderful system to bring peace" to a world torn by conflicts and wars, he said.

Calling China a "great friend" and "great neighbor" of Pakistan for supporting the South Asian nation through thick and thin, Sharif said his country has benefited immensely from the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, with Chinese investors committing more than \$25 billion to projects in Pakistan.

He noted that China's ascent to a higher level in the industrial chain has presented "golden opportunities" for Pakistan, which has abundant natural resources and comparative advantages in traditional industries.

Sharif, who is leading a delegation representing around 80 Pakistani enterprises, will hold talks with Chinese officials in Beijing and also visit Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi province.

Business and investment cooperation is the major focus of his visit, and members of the Pakistani delegation will explore economic, trade and investment opportunities when meeting with their Chinese counterparts.

In 2022, bilateral trade between China and Pakistan reached \$26.5 billion, down 4.6 percent year-on-

year, according to data from the Ministry of Commerce. Direct foreign investment by Chinese enterprises in Pakistan amounted to \$560 million the same year.

Jatin Kewlani, managing director of Pakistani enterprise K.K. Group, which deals in agricultural products, said he sees enormous potential in the Chinese market, given its massive size. China's food market is huge, due to the country's very large population, and it "will bring us a lot of business opportunities", he said.

Zain ul Abideen, chief operating officer of DSG Energy, a solar energy company in Pakistan, said his country is growing fast because of industrialization and privatization, and that offers tremendous investment opportunities for Chinese companies, especially in the renewable energy sector.

"Solar power is ... green energy, and development of the industry is picking up pace in Pakistan. The mandate from our prime minister is to increase the amount of green energy usage in our country," he said, adding, "So there are a lot of opportunities for Chinese people to come and invest in the photovoltaic industry."

Ahsan Iqbal, Pakistan's minister for planning, development and special initiatives, said that another delegation of 126 Pakistani business leaders is also visiting China at the moment.

China plays an important role in Pakistan's development, and the economic and cultural connections between the people of the two countries are strong and focused, he said.

Li Qingyan, an associate researcher on South Asia studies at the China Institute of International Studies, said enhanced practical economic cooperation between the two countries will help boost Pakistan's growth and its capability to deal with economic challenges.

Li underlined the need for Pakistan to make further efforts to ensure the safety and security of Chinese individuals, projects and institutions on its soil. Any attempt to damage or disrupt the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the friendship between China and Pakistan will not succeed, she added.

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## Barred entry



Asylum-seeking migrants from Mexico huddle under umbrellas to protect themselves from the scorching sun on Tuesday near the border wall in Jacumba Hot Springs, California, the United States, after US President Joe Biden announced sweeping border security enforcement measures. The presidential proclamation will bar migrants from being granted asylum when US officials feel the southern border is "overwhelmed".

GO NAKAMURA / REUTERS

## Nation's reform efforts hailed by execs, experts

By OUYANG SHIJIA and ZHONG NAN

China's recent move to deepen economic structural reform is an attempt to cultivate new quality productive forces and foster high-quality development in the long run, offering increasing growth opportunities for stakeholders both at home and abroad, said experts and entrepreneurs.

They said that China's reform efforts will mainly focus on key areas including technological innovation and industrial upgrading, which will help resolve economic woes, create new growth drivers and inject strong impetus into the world's second-largest economy.

Their comments came after President Xi Jinping said in late May that reform should originate from real needs and address the most urgent issues to improve the socialist market economy, with the president calling for efforts to deepen theoretical innovation

and promote institutional innovation during the process of solving practical problems.

"Deepening reform, particularly institutional reform, will help remove obstacles and difficulties hindering the development of new quality productive forces, and promote optimal allocation and free flow of production factors including capital, technology and labor," said Liu Quanhong, director of the industrial and technological economics research institute of the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research.

Liu Dian, a researcher at the China Institute of Fudan University, said that China's economy is currently grappling with still-weak demand, prompting calls for further economic structural reform. "The imperative of such reform lies in igniting internal dynamics through institutional innovation, breaking barriers to economic circulation, and restoring market confidence."

He noted that China is facing

bottlenecks in its path to high-quality development, such as slow progress in industrial upgrading and overcapacity in some sectors, alongside inadequate high-end supply.

"Market vitality is hampered by financing difficulties faced by small and medium-sized enterprises coupled with high operational costs," he said. "There's a pressing need to enhance innovation capabilities and streamline the technology transfer process, amid a complex external environment impacting domestic circulation and industrial chain security."

In an article published recently in Qiushi Journal, the flagship magazine of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, the National Development and Reform Commission said the country will speed up the process of deepening reform of the economic structure and build a high-level socialist market economy system. The key focus will be on fields including building of a high-standard market system, removing obstacles and difficulties in the development of new quality productive forces, and building a higher-level open economic system.

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### WORLD WATCH

By Zulkafli Hassan Khan

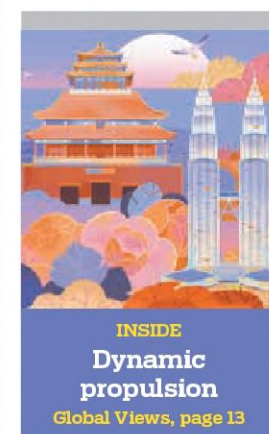
## Decoupling, de-risking only harm US interests

The constant propagation of the national security doctrine and erosion of the true spirit of international trade and business practices by politicians and policymakers in the United States are leading to destructive trends that harm the national economy, industry and investment propositions in the country.

Unfortunately, the politicians and policymakers have not learnt any lesson from the slowing economy and low industrial output in the US and still insist on pushing unwise legal and administrative de-risking measures against China and Chinese companies.

Economic protectionism, leveraging national security in economic affairs and unilateral imposition of sanctions, investment bans and other forms of decoupling and de-risking steps have become self-destructive, leaving prospects of economic recovery, large scale manufacturing, fiscal and monetary stability and business productivity low.

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## CHINA-EUROPE FREIGHT RAIL SERVICE TRAVERSES CONTINENTS, HISTORY

Traveling down pioneering path laid by Silk Road, 'steel caravan' records major milestone

By LUO WANGSHU in Xi'an, and Urumqi and Horgos, Xinjiang [luowangshu@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:luowangshu@chinadaily.com.cn)



The China-Europe freight rail service achieved a remarkable milestone on May 25 by completing its 90,000th journey — an outstanding achievement that underscores the success of the Belt and Road Initiative and its deep roots in history.

The service, which facilitates the movement of goods between China and European nations, has also

bolstered infrastructure connectivity, streamlined cargo transportation, and enriched trade and communication channels.

Since it began in 2011, the service has transported more than 8.7 million containers carrying goods valued in excess of \$380 billion, according to the China State

Railway Group, the operator of the service.

The China-Europe freight train, often referred to as a "steel camel caravan", has made these remarkable achievements in just 13 years.

Ironically, the first camel caravan to travel from China to Europe — and reportedly led by the Chinese imperial envoy Zhang Qian — took 13 years to make that singular, historic trip.

See Train, page 2

## Green drive



Volunteers plant mangrove seeds on Wednesday to mark World Environment Day in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. The theme of the 2024 World Environment Day is "land restoration, desertification, and drought resilience". CHAIDEE MAHYUDDIN / AFP



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# PAGE TWO



Customers shop at a store that sells international products in Horgos, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, in May. GUAN YONGJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

From page 1

Over 2,000 years ago, Zhang Qian departed on his expedition from Chang'an, now Xi'an in Northwest China's Shaanxi province. He traveled thousands of kilometers westward, traversing what is today the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and various nations in Central Asia. That expedition laid the foundation for the Silk Road, heralding the dawn of links between the East and West.

Zhang's first expedition earned him widespread acclaim as a national hero and the trailblazer of the Silk Road.

Numerous merchants, travelers, and their camel caravans subsequently followed in his footsteps, facilitating trade and cultural exchanges between China and Europe and playing a pivotal role in advancing human civilization.

Inspired by Zhang Qian's historic journey and the monumental success of the Silk Road, China proposed the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013 — a modern iteration of the Silk Road aimed at fostering enhanced communication between the East and West. Over the past 11 years, this initiative has garnered widespread acceptance and proven its importance and efficiency on a global scale. One of the prominent achievements underscoring the success of this initiative has been the China-Europe freight train service.

### Surging ahead

The exponential growth of the service, from a few dozen trips at first to over 17,000 a year, highlights the increasing market demand for this cost-effective and reliable mode of transportation when compared with air and sea routes.

This growth has been particularly pronounced since 2016.

From 2016 to last year, the annual number of China-Europe freight train services surged from 1,702 to over 17,000, a tenfold increase with an average annual growth rate of 39.5 percent.

The initial surge to reach 10,000 journeys spanned 90 months, whereas the leap from 80,000 to 90,000 took a mere seven months.

Since May 2020, the monthly number of China-Europe freight train services has consistently exceeded 1,000.

The annual value of goods transported by the service soared from \$8 billion in 2016 to \$56.7 billion last year, underscoring its growing significance in international trade.

Furthermore, the service's evolution to include a diverse range of goods underscores its adaptability and relevance in meeting market demands.

The types of goods transported by the China-Europe freight train have expanded from IT products like laptops and printers in the early stages to over 50,000 varieties of goods across 53 categories today, including clothing, shoes, hats, automobiles

and parts, daily necessities, food, timber, furniture, chemicals, and machinery equipment.

Since last year, there has been an increase in the transportation of new energy vehicles, lithium-ion battery products, and photovoltaic products manufactured in China. On May 25, new energy vehicles were lined up at a freight railway station in Xi'an, ready to be loaded onto a customized train bound for Europe. According to Cao Ping, who is responsible for vehicle transportation at the Xi'an Branch of the China Railway Special Cargo Logistics Co, the train, specially designed for vehicle transport, can accommodate 261 new energy vehicles per trip. She highlighted the rise in vehicle transportation since last year. "Last year, we sent about one to two train services on average every month, and this year, the number has increased to five to eight," she said.

Cao added that most of the new energy vehicles shipped via the China-Europe freight train are from BYD and Geely, both of which have production bases in Xi'an.

### Spreading its reach

As a crucial link in the international logistics supply chain, ensuring that the China-Europe freight train service becomes faster, more reliable, convenient, efficient, and cost-effective is paramount for its continuing success.

The key to unlocking this success entails a combination of strategic planning, operational excellence, technological innovation, streamlined processes, and seamless coordination among all parties involved. Expanding the network by opening new routes, even amid global crises, is an essential element.

Today, the network of the China-Europe freight train service reaches 223 cities in 25 European countries, and connects more than 100 cities in Asia.

Xinjiang serves as a significant ketchup global production hub, annually exporting approximately 700,000 metric tons of the sauce to European markets such as Italy and Spain.

Xinjiang Tianshun Supply Chain Co, a logistics and supply chain management company based in Urumqi, plays a pivotal role in transporting ketchup to Europe, but predominantly relies on shipping.

However, the Red Sea crisis led to the company's ketchup shipments being stranded at Tianjin Port since the Spring Festival in February.

"We have had over 10,000 tons of ketchup piled up in Tianjin Port since the Spring Festival (because of the Red Sea attacks)," said Ding Zhiping, president of the company.

With ketchup having a shelf life of about 18 months to 2 years, Ding faced challenges in dealing with the stranded cargo in Tianjin until a new opportunity arose.

# Train: Carrying hopes of development



Containers are loaded on freight trains before leaving Urumqi, Xinjiang, to Europe in May. GUAN YONGJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

### Rise in number of China-Europe freight trips



A new China-Europe freight train route was opened, covering over 10,000 km in about 35 days and seamlessly integrating rail and maritime transportation. It traverses the Caspian and Black seas to reach its final destination, Salerno, Italy — offering a significantly quicker journey compared with traditional maritime routes to Southern Europe.

Since April, the company has utilized the new China-Europe freight train route to transport ketchup from Xinjiang to Europe. "Thanks to the new train service between Xinjiang and Italy, our logistical challenges have been swiftly resolved, leading to increased export volumes, reduced transit times, and improved operational efficiency," Ding said.

Innovations introduced to the organizational model, have cut the average transportation time between China and Europe by over five days since the commencement of operations, according to the China State Railway Group.

On May 25, a freight train loaded with 55 containers carrying a diverse range of goods, including LCD monitors, auto parts, clothing, and daily essentials, departed from Xi'an, marking the 90,000th China-Europe freight train service.

This train headed west, exiting China through the Horgos border



Customers select imported food for the Spring Festival at a store in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, in February. LI YIBO / XINHUA

port in Xinjiang, passing through Kazakhstan and Russia, and is expected to reach Malaszewicze in Poland within approximately 15 days.

Shao Boer, the general manager of Xi'an International Inland Port Multimodal Transportation, a logistics company based in Xi'an, said his company was heavily reliant on the China-Europe freight train service.

He singled out the introduction of a set-scheduled service in October 2022 for special praise. "The set-scheduled service, in my opinion, is a milestone development in the China-Europe railway service, as it signifies a transition from gradual quantitative evolution to a qualitative change," he said.

Unlike traditional freight carriers, the set-scheduled trains strictly adhere to a fixed timetable throughout the entire route, resulting in reduced transportation times and enhanced service predictability.

Shao said precise coordination involving railway operators and service providers from seven countries, including China, Russia, Belarus, and Germany, had facilitated the speed and punctuality of the set-scheduled service.

"For instance, the set-scheduled train departs from Xi'an at 3:55 am on Wednesday and Friday," he said.

"China will inform the train's arrival time in neighboring Kazakhstan, requiring the Kazakhstan railway operator to receive the train. Moving forward, the Kazakhstan railway service provider will manage the time traveling in their country to adhere to the schedule to ensure the operation is on time," he said.

The entire journey timetable is like a "freight high-speed train", he said, arriving at each city and station in each country at the scheduled times. "This is why it runs very fast," he said.

The set-scheduled service has significantly improved transit times, with a journey from Xi'an to Duisburg, Germany, now taking only 12 days.

Five scheduled services have already been initiated from Xi'an to Duisburg, and Chengdu, Sichuan province, to Lodz, Poland, reducing travel times by 30 percent compared with regular China-Europe freight train services.

"It takes only three days from Horgos border to Chengdu, Sichuan province," said Bai Hanguo, a senior staff member at the Urumqi branch of the China Railway Container Transport.

"The entire trip from Lodz, Poland to Chengdu is 11 days and eight hours, reducing the time by about three to four days compared with regular China-Europe freight train (traveling on the same route)," he said, adding that the company is working to ensure a stable supply of goods for the set-scheduled train service.

Cooperation with the Customs Department to expedite customs clearance procedures has also made the service faster.

"To improve efficiency for customs clearance, we have set up a 24-hour duty post at the station to facilitate immediate inspections upon a train's arrival, expediting the release process," said Zhao Yuanfeng from Horgos Customs.

"It means that no matter when the China-Europe train arrives at the border train station, it can be inspected immediately and released as soon as possible."

Bai said: "After the goods arrive at the departure port, no other customs clearance procedures are required. The railway department will inspect the goods and send a report to customs through a shared system. After customs verify the information, the goods can typically be released within 10 minutes."

The new model has significantly enhanced operational efficiency, ensuring goods can be swiftly processed and dispatched, ultimately contributing to the overall speed and effectiveness of the China-Europe freight train service, Bai added.

### Overcoming obstacles

As the freight train service traverses European and Asian nations, it encounters myriad challenges, including the quest for stable sources of goods, limitations in transportation capacity, customs clearance procedures, and the intricate process of loading and unloading cargo to align with different railway tracks in different countries.

Numerous stakeholders, ranging from city governments to railway departments and customs authorities, have diligently collaborated to overcome these obstacles and enhance operational efficiency.

"Roads pave the way to prosperity across all industries," Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Mao Ning said at a recent media briefing.

"The China-Europe freight train not only transports goods but also carries opportunities and hope. This express freight service not only expedites the delivery of goods between China and Europe but also fosters the development of new logistics hubs, commercial centers, and industrial parks, bridging the geographical and economic distances between the two regions, fostering mutual benefits and reciprocity."

In Chinese cities like Xi'an, Zhengzhou, Henan province, Horgos and Urumqi in Xinjiang, and numerous locations in China, products from Europe have become ubiquitous. Chinese consumers are becoming more acquainted with these products and are showing a strong interest in their countries of origin. A similar phenomenon is unfolding in European nations.

If the pioneering figure Zhang Qian were to journey through time to the present day, he would take immense pride in his exploratory endeavors, which laid the foundation for a trade route spanning more than two millennia.



China-Europe freight trains wait to depart from Alataw Pass, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on May 25. YU HUI / XINHUA

## TOP NEWS

## On top of the world



A DJI drone takes part in a test run on April 30 at the base camp of Mount Qomolangma, also known as Mount Everest, from the Nepali side. The Chinese drone maker on Wednesday said the test run for the world's first-ever drone delivery on the world's highest peak had been carried out successfully. XINHUA

## Beijing, ASEAN ready to build closer community

By PRIME SARMIENTO  
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All of us need to promote or instigate peace, rather than agitate for war between China and the United States."

Victor Gao Zhikai, vice-president of the Center for China and Globalization

## Inside

explore the best ways to synergize the development initiative with ASEAN's Community Vision 2045 and accelerate negotiations on version 3.0 of the China-ASEAN free trade areas. China is also ready to work with ASEAN members in more effectively implementing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

Mohd Faiz Abdullah, chairman of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies in Malaysia, in his opening address highlighted the challenges facing the current international order, including the shift from unipolarity to multipolarity and the growing influence of emerging middle and major powers.

"What is clear is that unipolarity, and perhaps even bipolarity, is on its way out," Mohd Faiz said.

The forum, held in Kuala Lumpur from Tuesday to Thursday, was convened by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies in Malaysia and organized on behalf of the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies.

More than 100 delegates, including some of Southeast Asia's key business executives, experts and government officials attended the high-level symposium to discuss the increasingly complex strategic landscape and how this affects the global order.

For the Global South, the choice is not whether to side with China or the United States, said Victor Gao Zhikai, vice-president of the Beijing-based Center for China and Globalization.

"The real choice is between whether China or the United States — or both China and the United States — are doing the right thing or the wrong thing," he said.

"If China does the right thing, we want to learn from it. If the United States is doing the wrong thing, why do we follow in their footsteps?"

Despite the fluctuation in bilateral relations, staging a war will never be an option for the two countries, said Gao, one of the speakers at a panel discussion on major power rivalry.

"All of us need to promote or instigate peace, rather than agitate

for war between China and the United States," Gao said, adding that no one will benefit from any conflict.

While there are concerns about how the US presidential election in November might affect bilateral relations, Gao said he believes there will be "inevitable peace" between the two countries.

Yun Sun, a senior fellow at the Stimson Center in Washington, said the two sides have been conducting dialogue and strengthening cooperation in several areas.

"We're also seeing cooperation for possible joint law enforcement (and) contract audits. We're seeing discussions about issues including the Gaza crisis," Yun said.

"So, we are basically seeing a lot of (cooperation) activities happening between the two, which then helps to mitigate the tense relations."

Yun said the results of the US presidential election are unlikely to affect US policy on China because Washington maintains "continuity and consistency on some of the approaches to China."

Herve Lemahieu, director of research at the Lowy Institute in Australia, said he is optimistic about the Asia-Pacific, noting that the region has not seen conflicts such as those happening in Europe and the Middle East.

"So, there is still hope in Asia for to avoid the worst," Lemahieu said.

## Nations urged to jointly uphold global security

Senior CPC official calls for boosting openness, solidarity, inclusiveness and cooperation

By CAO DESHENG  
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A senior official of the Communist Party of China warned on Wednesday against overstretching the concept of security, saying that such a practice would erode the foundation of common development and make the global security dilemma more acute.

Liu Jianchao, head of the International Department of the CPC Central Committee, made the remarks at the opening ceremony of the third Wanshou Dialogue on Global Security, which was hosted in Beijing by the Chinese People's Association for Peace and Disarmament.

Liu said that when pursuing security, countries need to bear in mind that humanity as a whole rises and falls together.

"Countries should not simply put security above everything else, label everything as security related, or break the balance between security and other issues like development and governance. ... Such a practice cannot address security challenges, but only makes things worse and further undermines global peace and stability," he said.

Liu emphasized that the practice of building "small yards and high fences", seeking decoupling and cutting supply chains undermine international trade, segment the global market, and disrupt global industrial and supply chains.

Noting that no country can achieve unilateral security or absolute security in isolation, he highlighted that only with common security for all can the world be a truly safe and secure place.

No country should place its own security above other countries' security, put up its own fence at the doorstep of others, undermine others' security interests or squeeze others' security space, he said.

Liu called for embracing common security, sticking to openness and inclusiveness, and strengthening solidarity and cooperation to make the world a better place.

"In terms of areas of cooperation, we could start with the easier and less sensitive ones, such as climate change and counterterrorism, and gradually enrich the content of

international security cooperation," he said. "In this way, a balanced, effective and sustainable security architecture can be established."

Liu urged major countries to shoulder key responsibility in upholding global security and to act in a way that fits their status. "They should take the lead in upholding the basic norms governing international relations based on the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, and provide more public goods and more certainty to global strategic stability and world peace."

The international experts attending the dialogue commended the Global Security Initiative proposed by President Xi Jinping, and called for international cooperation to address global security challenges.

Moon Chung-in, former special adviser for national security to former Republic of Korea president Moon Jae-in, said that the Global Security Initiative, which calls for common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, bears important implications for the diffusion of the collective security system.

He called for concerted efforts to prevent the return of the old Cold War system, especially in East Asia. "For example, extension of NATO in East Asia does not seem desirable. Multilateral security cooperation efforts should be restored in the region," Moon said.

George Yeo, former foreign minister of Singapore, said the world is entering a period of moral confusion, with all of its attendant risks. "We must confront our common dilemma and not allow mutual suspicion and miscommunication to lead to our common ruin," he said, calling for dialogue to find win-win outcomes.

Doug Bandow, who was special assistant to former United States president Ronald Reagan, called for dialogue between Washington and Beijing to address the source of insecurity.

"Whatever our disagreements, to my mind, it should be clear to both governments that it is inconceivable that we would ever come into conflict," said Bandow, who is currently a senior researcher at the Cato Institute, a US-based private nonprofit organization devoted to public-policy research.

## Reform: Tech innovation, supply chain seen as focus

From page 1

"China is racing to create a favorable institutional environment for nurturing new quality productive forces, which is conducive to advancing Chinese modernization," said Liu, from the China Institute of Fudan University.

According to a meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee held in late April, the third plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Committee to be held in Beijing in July will focus on further deepening reform and promoting the modernization of China amid challenges at home and complexities abroad.

Robin Xing, chief China economist at Morgan Stanley, said, "We believe the policy focus will remain on enhancing technology innovation and supply chain self-sufficiency in terms of a push for economic reform and a concerted focus on key strategic sectors."

Wang Peng, a researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, said the government will introduce more policy measures to support the development of new quality productive forces, including financial subsidies, tax incentives and targeted measures for the business environment.

Highlighting that the concept of new quality productive forces is fully in line with his company's growth strategy, Ye Weiguo, chief operating officer of Gyre Pharmaceuticals, a Beijing-based manufacturer of drugs for organ fibrosis, said the company

will continue to invest in new drug development and consistently utilize emerging technologies and new materials to boost its growth.

Gyre Pharmaceuticals, with plants in Beijing and Cangzhou, Hebei province, invested 104 million yuan (\$14.4 million) in research and development activities in 2023, accounting for 13 percent of its annual sales revenue.

Xu Linxiao, president of Changzhou Hongbang New Energy Technology Co, an electric equipment manufacturer based in Changzhou, Jiangsu province, said the company has intensified its efforts to make innovative products to address market pain points.

Changzhou Hongbang's export value reached 22.94 million yuan in the first four months of 2024, an increase of 2,521.8 percent year-on-year, data from Nanjing Customs showed.

With the global trend of restructuring and upgrading value chains becoming increasingly apparent, innovation-driven growth has become the fundamental approach for Chinese exporters to gain competitiveness and secure a higher position in the world's value chain of high-tech industries, he added.

Merck China President Marc Horn said, "I think China is very resilient and has shown that it can transform very rapidly and is on a good transformation trajectory."

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## Curbs: US enterprises suffering from substantial losses

From page 1

Recently, the US Department of Commerce ruined the true spirit of international business when it blacklisted 37 Chinese entities, citing so-called Chinese involvement in Russian military affairs. Worse, higher tariffs are being introduced on import of electric vehicles and other products from China.

The spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Commerce described it as abuse of export control measures to suppress and contain companies of other countries.

Just as the spokesperson said, such measures have multiplier effects such as promotion of lawless international trading and business systems, blatant denial of the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese companies, undermining the security and stability of global industrial and supply chains, and impeding the recovery and development of the world economy.

In reality the US and Chinese economies are closely interconnected, but their trade and economic ties are becoming strained. Despite record levels of US-China bilateral trade in 2022, the trading relationship is becoming less interdependent. Rising tensions between Washington and Beijing

are driving US and Chinese investors away from each market.

The US government will feel the impact of its decoupling policy against China and face difficulties in producing EV batteries without Chinese-produced graphite. Graphite is a core material in lithium batteries, and currently China accounts for 70 percent of its supply worldwide.

The truth is, economic protectionism will not save the US economy, industry or society.

The US decoupling and containment policies against China are badly hurting the efficiency, productivity and growth of its industries. Critical analysis reveals that the US government has implemented stringent export controls to weaken China's high-tech capability in the last three years. Nevertheless, the US decoupling and containment policies are backfiring, negatively impacting the US itself, creating a complex double-edged effect.

The Federal Reserve Bank of New York's latest report, titled "Geopolitical Risk and Decoupling: Evidence from US Export Controls", highlighted this issue. It reconfirmed that the US export controls led to widespread decoupling between American suppliers and Chinese companies. The

affected US suppliers are more likely to terminate existing relationships with Chinese clients and less likely to form new ones.

Resultantly, due to the strict export regime and anti-trade/business and investment policies, numerous American suppliers are being badly affected and are unable to form new supply chain connections with clients in the US or allied nations within three years of the export controls being enforced.

Now, these US companies and business enterprises are suffering from substantial losses, inching toward the trap of non-performing loans, default risks and low industrial productivity and market shares.

In the end, it is the US companies and enterprises that have suffered collective losses of \$130 billion because of its decoupling and containment policies against China. These suppliers are also encountering fall in revenue, profitability and workforce. Bank loans to these suppliers have notably shrunk, signaling wider financial limitations.

Conversely, targeted Chinese companies have increased their reliance on domestic and non-US suppliers to cope with the US restrictions. Interestingly, it has promoted domestic innovation in

China as businesses are forced to reduce their dependence on American technology.

It seems that the Chinese manufacturing sector has achieved large-scale, diversified and multi-tiered system development which is expanding in the global market, especially in sectors like EVs, green technologies, shipbuilding and high-speed rail, and steel, with the US lagging behind it and merely busy in new narrative of "overcapacity", which is indeed undercapacity of its own industrial potential.

Thus the US' so-called national narrative has double standards, and its ongoing decoupling, de-risking and containment of China are self-damaging for its economy, industry, investment potential, banking industry and above all its role in the international trading system. True economic globalization and international cooperation is the only way forward.

The author is president of the Society of International Relations & Law, the Institute of Legal Studies, Lahore, and director of Pak-China Corridor of Knowledge, Pakistan. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## BUSINESS

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## Surge in ship orders ups China's foreign trade

By ZHONG NAN and WANG KEJU

Amid rising global demand, technological progress and new international environmental regulations, market watchers and shipbuilders predict that China's shipbuilding industry will contribute significantly to the country's foreign trade this year.

Many global shipping and energy companies, as well as automakers, have placed a large number of orders for ships like mega container vessels, liquefied natural gas (LNG) carriers and vehicle carriers from Chinese shipyards in recent years.

Reflecting this demand, Chinese companies exported a total of 1,809 vessels in the first four months, marking a 19 percent increase year-on-year. The value of these exports reached 100.3 billion yuan (\$13.84 billion), surging 108.4 percent, said the General Administration of Customs.

New international regulations designed to cut carbon emissions in the maritime industry are pushing shipowners to buy and invest in greener ships, said Li Yanqing, secretary-general of the Beijing-based China Association of the National Shipbuilding Industry (CANSI).

Li said this shift favors Chinese shipbuilders equipped with the technology to construct such eco-friendly vessels.

Even though Chinese companies face strong competition from rivals in South Korea and Japan, the country's ability to offer cost-effective solutions without compromising on



Large ships under construction at a shipyard in Rongcheng, Shandong province. LI XINJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

quality can help it to maintain a competitive edge in the global market, said Zeng Ji, a professor of shipbuilding at Shanghai Maritime University.

Chinese shipyards saw the volume of new orders amount to 24.14 million deadweight tons in the first quarter, up 59 percent year-on-year, accounting for 69.6 percent of the world's total, CANSI said.

Zhou Jinglei, vice-president of Taizhou Sanfu Ship Engineering Co Ltd, a Taizhou, Jiangsu province-based private shipyard, said the company currently has orders to build 45 vessels, with production plans scheduled through to 2027.

"While maintaining our advantage in building multipurpose heavy lift vessels, we have increased our investment in technological innovation to develop high value-added ships equipped with advanced methanol and LNG dual-fuel power

systems," said Zhou.

Compared to traditional fuel-powered container vessels, dual fuel-powered container vessels can further cut carbon, nitrogen oxide and sulfur emissions, he said, adding that these ships can be flexibly deployed on major global shipping routes.

China Merchants Jinling Shipyard (Yangzhou) Dingheng Co Ltd, a subsidiary of State-owned China Merchants Group, set sail a 16,300-ton dual-fuel chemical tanker in late May. Its delivery date to a Swedish client is expected in late June. The vessel will be the tenth of its type to be delivered to the same shipowner.

Liu Qiang, head of the company's sales unit, said this type of ship is one of the company's pillar products, and its key feature is the use of floating frequency and floating pressure electrical systems, equipped with a large uninterrupt-

ed power supply system.

"This ensures that the ship can navigate for 20 minutes in a loss-of-power situation, significantly enhancing its safety and maneuverability," Liu said, noting that his company received seven new ship orders in the first four months, with its order book now full through to 2027.

Shipyards in Jiangsu province exported various types of ships valued at 34.83 billion yuan in the first four months, making it the top province in terms of export value nationwide, statistics from Nanjing Customs showed.

This represents a 90.3 percent increase compared to the same period last year and accounts for 34.7 percent of China's total value of ship exports between January and April.

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## Market expects more steps to guard investors

Analysts looking forward to Lujiazui Forum as CSRC hints at new policies

By ZHOU LANXU and OUYANG SHIJIA

China is likely to roll out more measures to better protect investor rights at the high-profile Lujiazui Forum later this month, with focus on strengthening investor compensation in cases of interest infringement and delisting, analysts said on Wednesday.

They commented after Wang Li, deputy director of the China Securities Regulatory Commission's general office, said on Tuesday that the commission will release new capital market policies at this year's Lujiazui Forum, which will be held in Shanghai from June 19 to 20.

The announcement has sparked speculation that significant regulatory changes may be in the offing, especially those related to settlement rules.

On Wednesday, the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index, however, closed 0.83 percent down at 3065.4 points, having rebounded on Tuesday.

Analysts close to the matter said any new policies would likely focus on ensuring solid implementation of the nine measures unveiled by the State Council, China's Cabinet, in April. Those measures serve as a development blueprint for the country's capital market and stress strengthened regulation and enhanced investor protection.

Analysts said some measures are still needed but appear less likely to be announced at the forum. These include steps for market stability, including establishment of a stock stabilization fund and a T+0 trading mechanism for select stocks. The T+0 mechanism means the settlement of stock trades occurs on the same day when the trade is executed, as against the next day (T+1) mechanism now effective in the A-share market.

"The SCI has fluctuated around the 3,100-point mark recently, making investors look forward to more positive policy measures to

improve the sentiment," said Yang Delong, chief economist at First Seafont Fund.

The measures anticipated at the Lujiazui Forum may aim to encourage listed companies to increase cash dividends, establish a compensation mechanism to protect investor interests and strengthen crackdown on behaviors that infringe investor interests, Yang said.

A chief economist at a Shenzhen-based securities firm who sought anonymity citing compliance issues, emphasized the urgent need for a well-functioning mechanism to compensate investors for losses due to delistings, as the number of delistings increases amid the country's push for stricter delisting standards.

"Efforts should also be made to expand the size of the government-funded investor protection fund to aid or compensate small investors in distress," the economist said.

Sharing similar sentiments, Yang Haiping, a researcher at the Central University of Finance and Economics' Institute of Securities and Futures, said he anticipates the CSRC will likely announce measures aimed at enhancing investor protection and boosting investor confidence.

"These (expected) measures will likely primarily address the compensation and restitution for investors in cases like financial fraud and delisting scenarios where investors' legitimate rights are infringed," Yang said.

Another potential policy focus expected is the launch of a system that positively correlates the performance of financial products like funds and wealth management products with the management fees they charge to investors, Yang said. "If investors do not make a profit, the fees should be zero."

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## China, EU, Singapore in multilateral green capital push

By ZHOU LANXU and LIU ZIZHENG

China, the European Union and Singapore are collaborating to develop a new version of the Common Ground Taxonomy, which will upgrade the existing China-EU green finance cooperation initiative into a multilateral project and further boost international green capital flows, said a leading expert close to the matter.

As a milestone of China-EU bilateral green finance cooperation, the Common Ground Taxonomy, or CGT, was first published in 2021 and updated in 2022.

It is a list of economic activities that are recognized by the green taxonomies of both China and EU, which makes it easier for borrowers from both jurisdictions to access green funding in each other's capital markets.

"Singapore has joined already. It is now working with our team to develop the next version of the CGT, using European, Chinese and Singaporean taxonomies as a basis," said Ma Jun, co-chair of the International Platform on Sustainable Finance Tax-

onomy Working Group, which is in charge of the formulation of the CGT.

"We can imagine that in the future, we will probably have more countries joining the CGT so that it will become a more broadly supported, broadly adopted and international labeling tool for green assets," Ma told China Daily.

The Monetary Authority of Singapore said on May 21 that it is working with the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, to complete the mapping of the Singapore Asia Taxonomy to the Common Ground Taxonomy by the end of this year.

The mapping of taxonomies, in general, refers to the process of comparing each other's technical standards of green economic activities, and is seen as a preparatory step for formulating the updated version of CGT.

Ma said the CGT has global implications. Other countries that want to build their own green finance taxonomies can use the CGT as a building block. This will help boost green capital flows between those countries and China as well as the EU.

Ma is also president of the Institute of Finance and Sustainability, a

Beijing-based green finance think tank, and a former member of the PBOC's monetary policy committee.

While China's development of green finance started years later than many developed economies, Ma said the country managed to develop its green loan and green bond markets into the world's largest, now worth about 30 trillion yuan (\$4.14 trillion) and 2.5 trillion yuan, respectively.

For instance, China initiated the preparatory work for the green bond market in the latter half of 2015, releasing two key documents. By the following year, China had emerged as the world's largest green bond market, he said.

"That's why, some European friends were joking with me that China grew from zero to hero within one year."

Behind the rapid development was a "top-down approach" in designing and promoting the green finance markets, with the government rolling out official, compulsory green finance standards, or taxonomies, Ma said.

"The key thing was we had a standard to define what a green bond is. That is the official one, rather than an

NGO type of standard operating on a voluntary basis," Ma said.

He said the Chinese experience is relevant to many other developing countries. This is because some factors are common. For example, resources and talent are more concentrated in regulatory bodies; and State-owned enterprises still play a big role in the economy, which makes a top-down approach effective.

China has stepped up efforts to work with other economies to facilitate the international exchanges of green finance knowledge and practices, via a global platform called the Capacity Building Alliance of Sustainable Investment or CASI, which was established in December.

As the chairman of the CASI, Ma said the alliance aims to train 100,000 people in developing countries and emerging markets by 2030, with face-to-face learning events planned to be held in Hong Kong this month, and in Africa and the Middle East in the second half of this year.

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## AWS will step up long-term play in nation, exec says

By FAN FEIFEI

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Amazon Web Services is committed to long-term investments in China, and will focus on offering generative artificial intelligence technology and helping Chinese enterprises in their digital transformation, a senior executive said.

The cloud service platform of United States technology company Amazon will continue to invest in generative AI and drive enterprises in accelerating their digital transformation and AI innovations, said Rob Chu, corporate vice-president and president of Amazon Web Services Greater China.

Amazon's cloud computing business has witnessed steady growth in the country, Chu added.

AWS has established specialized teams to provide industrial solutions, AI and cloud services to different industry segments — automotive, manufacturing, life sciences, retail, media and entertainment, gaming

and finance — in the nation.

The company also said it will strengthen cooperation with Chinese smart mobility solutions provider NavInfo in fields like intelligent connected vehicles, and the development and mass production of intelligent driving technology. It will also roll out localized and tailor-made services for the automotive industry in China.

"The industrial application will be the direction where generative AI can really create the most value in the future. We are still in the early stages of development, but the possibilities are endless," Chu said.

He noted that AI-powered large language models are of great significance and serve as the foundation of generative AI innovation, and that enterprises need to choose appropriate models and innovative platforms for generative AI applications, based on their diversified business scenarios.

He said AWS hopes to leverage its advantages in computing power, mod-

els and frameworks, and abundant application services to help enterprises build and apply generative AI.

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.

According to a report by global consultancy McKinsey & Co, generative AI will add between \$2.6 trillion and \$4.4 trillion in annual value to the global economy, resulting in a significant effect across all sectors of industry.

The report said banking, high technology and life sciences are among the industries that could see the biggest impact — as a percentage of their revenues — from generative AI. Across the banking industry, the technology could deliver an additional \$200 billion to \$340 billion value annually if it is fully implemented, it added.

Chu said AWS has continued to

invest in China since its entry into the local market in 2013, and is committed to helping Chinese enterprises expand their presence in overseas markets and enhance their competitiveness globally. AWS has already served nearly 80 percent of Chinese enterprises choosing to go abroad, he said.

Wu Lianfeng, vice-president and chief research analyst at market consultancy IDC China, said several Chinese firms have currently prioritized leveraging AI to drive business growth, while various industries are looking to seize the opportunities of digital transformation driven by AI.

However, these enterprises are facing mounting difficulties in the process of digital transformation, such as a lack of innovation and collaboration among various departments.

He said enterprises should devise long-term plans for digital transformation and continuously pour money into this field.

China's spending on information



A view of the booth of Amazon Web Services during a recent expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

and communications technology (ICT) is expected to increase by 9.8 percent year-on-year in 2024, surpassing the global average by two percentage points, IDC said. It further predicted that the growth rate of ICT spending in China will likely reach 10.2 percent year-on-year in 2025, continuing to outpace the global average.

Noting that the digitalization of enterprises serves as the cornerstone of the digital economy, Xiang Ligang, director-general of telecom industry association Information Consumption Alliance, said enterprises should accelerate the large-scale application of AI technologies and promote the transformation and upgrade of traditional industries.

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# BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

## Telecom firms strut latest LLM stuff

Immense data, rich scenario edges in country still require further exploitation

By MA SI  
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At a bustling exhibition center in Fuzhou, Fujian province, visitors flock to a captivating demonstration by China Unicom. Here, tea enthusiasts can customize their tea orders via a tablet, specifying the type, quantity and packaging. Within minutes, robotic arms precisely select, seal, engrave and deliver the tea to a storage unit — an entirely automated process. This human-free production line exemplifies the remarkable advancements in artificial intelligence and automation.

By leveraging extensive data analysis and advanced AI large language models, companies can automate workflows, thus reducing labor costs and enhancing production efficiency, said an employee of China Unicom at the expo.

This innovation is part of the telecom carrier's in-house LLM, which is roughly translated as Yuanjing, designed to empower various sectors like clothing, automaking and equipment manufacturing with robust AI capabilities.

This initiative reflects a broader trend among China's top telecom operators — China Unicom, China Mobile and China Telecom — which are aggressively investing in AI. As AI technology rapidly evolves, these giants are enhancing their capabilities in computing power, data and applications, thereby fueling a new wave of industrial modernization, triggering innovation in areas such as 5G, industrial internet and smart manufacturing.

For instance, China Unicom's "AI plus" strategy aims to build LLMs across more than 10 industries — such as equipment manufacturing and light textiles — to boost efficiency and quality. Additionally, they focus on strengthening internal security to safeguard this new industrial landscape.

China Mobile has introduced its Jiutian AI model, collaborating with government agencies and enterprises to co-develop over 20 industry-specific AI models. These models span a wide range of applications including network management, customer service, smart home, public services, transportation, healthcare and industrial sectors.

In another engaging showcase, a dual-armed six-axis robot prepares and serves coffee, even cleaning the cup afterward — a testament to the

fusion of networking, computing power and AI. This robot integrates the latest technologies in network, computing and AI. Based on data accumulation and intelligent algorithms, it has developed multimodal capabilities to meet needs in fields such as entertainment, household chores and family care, China Mobile said.

The surge in digital innovation is underpinned by robust data infrastructure. According to a report released by the National Data Bureau, China's data production reached 32.85 zettabytes (1 ZB equals approximately 1 trillion gigabytes) in 2023, a 22.44 percent year-on-year increase.

To harness the full potential of these data elements, the NDB, along with other departments, launched the "Data Elements plus" three-year action plan (2024-26). The first batch of 20 typical application cases spans industries like industrial manufacturing, modern agriculture, trade circulation and transportation, showcasing best practices in data utilization.

However, the immense data and rich scenario advantages in China still need further exploitation. The National Data Resources Survey Team's latest report highlighted challenges such as the high total data volume but insufficient effective supply, the need for proactive planning of computing power, and the improvement of diverse data circulation models.

Multiple departments have expressed their commitment to deepening reform of market-based allocation of data elements, optimizing digital infrastructure and unlocking the value of data elements.

Liu Liehong, head of the NDB, emphasized the need for innovation in data infrastructure. He highlighted efforts to promote data resource property rights, circulation, transaction, benefit distribution and security governance. The goal is to build a dynamic, categorized, and hierarchical data resource management system that facilitates data development, openness and efficient flow.

Wang Jiangping, deputy minister of industry and information technology, outlined plans to accelerate the deployment of 5G and gigabit optical networks, advance 6G research and expand intelligent computing infrastructure. This includes enhancing interconnectivity, promoting high-quality development of the industrial internet, and integrating AI and



**Above:** China Unicom showcases its motion capture technologies and digital human models during an expo in Shanghai in May.

**Left:** Visitors flock to the China Unicom booth during the Mobile World Congress in Shanghai in June 2023.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

**32.85**  
zettabytes  
China's data production volume in 2023

data elements to empower new industrialization.

Jian Qin, general manager of China Unicom, said the company focuses on building a digital foundation of computing and networking, with intelligent data usage and comprehensive security, to support economic and social transformation.

In recent years, China Unicom has significantly improved its network capabilities, supporting low-latency industrial control applications with extensive 5G coverage and deepening 5G private network applications.

By upgrading intelligent computing supply, it ensures reliable computing power for new industrialization. The company's intelligent computing layout and its advanced computing scheduling platform offer diverse computing resources, driving forward intelligent applications that inject innovation into industrialization, Jian said.

China Unicom's Yuanjing LLM, for instance, is notable for being industry-specific, customizable

and secure. Although AI model implementation in industrial fields is still exploratory, China Unicom fosters an open, collaborative innovation ecosystem, providing computing power and algorithms while partners contribute data and scenarios.

This cooperative approach has led to significant advancements across 10 sectors, including clothing, automotive, equipment manufacturing, warehousing, logistics, power, steel, mining, light textiles, ports and chemicals, experts said.

For example, Yuanjing LLM dramatically enhances design efficiency at a Hangzhou garment factory. Previously, a skilled designer could create three to four clothing designs per day, taking two days to finalize one. Now, the AI model generates designs in just three seconds, including visualizing the fit, vastly boosting designers' productivity, China Unicom said.

In home appliance manufacturing, Yuanjing LLM improves quality control through AI-augmented visual inspections, reducing defect rates

by 50 percent. In port operations, China Unicom's AI applications, developed with a port company in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, enhance safety and efficiency across over 30 operational scenarios, significantly reducing accident rates.

China Mobile Chairman Yang Jie also highlighted the company's AI journey since 2013, culminating in the largest single intelligent computing center among global telecom operators, with a total computing power of 17 exaflops. An exaflop is a measure of performance for computers that can calculate at least 1 quintillion floating point operations per second.

Chen Yili, deputy chief engineer at the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology's Cloud Computing and Big Data Research Institute, said: "Algorithms, computing power and data are the three pillars that support AI development, with computing power serving as the driving force for AI advancement. As large-scale AI models now have 1 trillion parameters, demand for computing power

currently exhibits exponential growth. The enhancement of computing power not only accelerates the training speed of large-scale AI models, but is also a crucial factor for the rapid iteration and widespread application of AI technology."

With over 10,000 AI plus projects across sectors like governance, industry and healthcare, China Mobile said its LLMs significantly contribute to digital transformation.

Moreover, China Mobile has established the Jiutian Research Institute, fostering a team of 2,000 AI experts. They aim to produce top-tier AI technological innovations, efficient industry integration platforms and high-quality AI+ applications to further empower the digital economy.

Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Information Consumption Alliance, a telecom industry association, said the initiatives of China's leading telecom operators illustrate a transformative approach to industrial modernization through AI and data integration.

As they continue to innovate and collaborate across various sectors, the potential for AI-driven efficiency and productivity gains appears boundless, representing a significant step toward a smarter, more automated future, Xiang said.

Ke Ruiwen, chairman of China Telecom, stated, "We will actively participate in the construction of the national data infrastructure, providing functions such as data confirmation and registration, data fusion computing and trusted data spaces, to support data aggregation, circulation and utilization."

This concerted effort by government bodies and enterprises marks a significant step toward realizing the full potential of data elements and AI, driving China's digital economy forward.

## Comm operator's TeleAI surmounts dialect challenge

By MA SI

In a groundbreaking development, TeleAI, the artificial intelligence research division of China Telecom, has unveiled the industry's first advanced speech recognition model capable of understanding and processing over 30 Chinese dialects.

This large language model, known as Xingchen in Chinese, addresses a significant barrier in customer service, where millions of daily calls, especially from elderly users in remote regions, are made in local dialects that traditional AI systems and customer service representatives struggle to understand.

With approximately 20 percent of China's population not fluent in spoken Mandarin Chinese, this advancement aims to bridge the communication gap, ensuring equitable access to digital services for all, China Telecom said.

TeleAI has tackled the challenge of creating an LLM that breaks away from conventional approaches, which typically limit recognition to

a single dialect. By incorporating Cantonese, Shanghaiese, Sichuanese and Wenzhouese, among others, the Xingchen model marks a significant leap forward in natural language processing technology, China Telecom said.

This is particularly crucial for elderly residents and those in less-developed regions, who rely heavily on their native dialects for communication, the company added.

Traditionally, dialect research has been a labor-intensive process, reliant on subjective human assessment and annotation, making comprehensive documentation difficult. AI, with its ability to systematically and efficiently catalog and analyze linguistic data, offers a transformative solution. TeleAI said it has already amassed a database exceeding 30,000 hours of high-quality dialect speech, positioning itself as a leader in this field.

The Xingchen speech recognition model is currently being piloted across several regions including Fujian, Jiangxi, Beijing, the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region and the Inner Mongolia autonomous

region. In these provinces, regions and cities, China Telecom's intelligent customer service has integrated this model, enhancing its ability to comprehend and respond to calls in 30 dialects.

This integration has resulted in the system handling approximately 2 million calls daily with improved naturalness and fluency. Furthermore, the Xingchen model powers a platform, covering 31 provincial-level regions and managing 1.25 million calls per day, significantly enhancing customer service efficiency. The model is also deployed in various government service hotlines, facilitating better customer service and smarter governance.

The LLM offers a clue into how China Telecom is working to sharpen its technological edge.

Ke Ruiwen, chairman of China Telecom, emphasized the company's commitment to ongoing technological innovation, leveraging its integrated digital infrastructure.

Ke said the advancement of cloud computing and AI models is a collaborative effort with partners across the industry, focusing on cutting-edge technologies and open

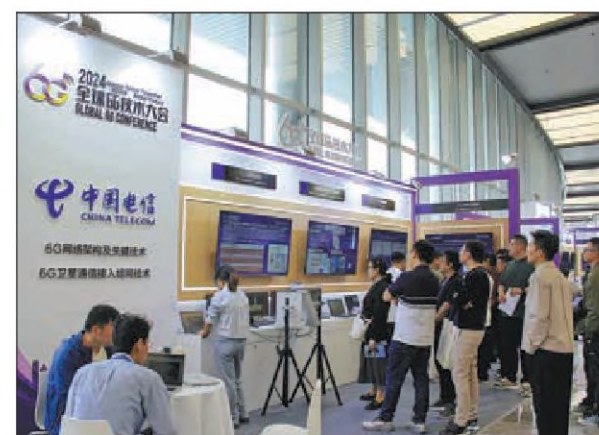
cooperation.

China Telecom's cloud computing business, whose English name is State Cloud, has crossed a threshold in intelligent cloud development and entered a new stage of development, Ke said.

So far, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission has promoted 36 centrally owned enterprises to build cloud computing platforms in 40 industries, and China Telecom's cloud computing infrastructure supports 24 out of the 40 sectors.

Gou Ping, vice-chairman of SASAC, said SOEs have been growing their presence in computing power, data and algorithms, which effectively support the development of the digital economy and the construction of a digital China.

In May, China Telecom also launched direct-to-phone satellite connectivity in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. With the theme of "Mobile Always Online, Never Lost Contact", the launch officially announced that relying on the capability of the Tiantong-1 satellite



Visitors check out China Telecom's technologies during an expo in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, in April. WANG LUXIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

system, China Telecom said it would provide direct-to-phone satellite connectivity service to users in Hong Kong.

China Telecom will take Hong Kong as the first station to start internationalized overseas operating services of the satellite system. This is a breakthrough milestone for China's satellite communication industry in the internationalization

process, the company added. Chen Lidong, director of the emergency communications center at the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said China Telecom has made progress in recent years in firmly implementing the Belt and Road Initiative, deepening international cooperation and promoting high-quality infrastructure interconnection.

# WORLD

## FRIENDS AFAR

### Fascination for pandas cultivates cultural bonds

**Editor's note:** China Daily presents the series Friends Afar to tell the stories of people-to-people exchanges between China and other countries. Through the vivid narration of the people in the stories, readers can get a better understanding of a country that is boosting openness.

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo  
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For almost 13 years now, Takahiro Takauji, 45, has made Tokyo's Ueno Zoo his daily destination, rain or shine, capturing the giant pandas through his lens.

Recalling his initial encounter with the pandas, he said: "Once I took a walk to Ueno Zoo, and at that time, the father Ri Ri and mother Shin Shin of giant panda Xiang Xiang were there. They were so cute, so similar to humans."

Having been captivated by them, Takauji made daily visits to the zoo to photograph these endearing giants, and posted their photos on his blog.

Initially, Takauji thought of doing this for a month. However, he has continued to pursue his passion till today.

In 2012, Ri Ri and Shin Shin had a baby, but it died in less than a week.

"I hoped to see their offspring again. With this hope, I persisted until 2017, when their daughter Xiang Xiang was born," Takauji said.

Xiang Xiang's arrival sparked a surge in panda enthusiasts at the zoo, while Takauji's blog saw a rise in the number of users.

Takauji is a web designer by profession. To balance his profession and passion — photographing Xiang Xiang — he goes to the zoo early in the morning, and even works while waiting in line.

He created a blog called "Mainichi Panda", at a time when not many people were sharing images of pandas online.

"I find joy in spreading these images," he said. "Some people living in Okinawa or Hokkaido can also see these photos. I want to share these adorable animals I see through my lens with more people."

Many readers leave comments on his blog, expressing their love for pandas. Some express gratitude to China for lending them to Japan. Such appreciation is a great encouragement for Takauji.

As of March 5, the number of new users on Mainichi Panda totaled 1,174,405, with page views soaring to more than 20 million. The monthly views reached nearly 500,000.

Since 2011, he has been visiting the Ueno Zoo almost every day, interrupted only by two significant events. The first was his daughter's birth, and subsequent breaks were because of the pandemic.

Takauji's blog became so popular that many publishing companies approached him to discuss publica-

tion of photo albums featuring giant pandas.

In 2013, Asukashinsha Publishing released two volumes of photos featuring Ri Ri and Shin Shin. Later, Tokyo-based Heibonsha came up with a similar album.

About 10 volumes of photo albums featuring Xiang Xiang have been published. The reception was positive, prompting a continuous stream of publications, including reprints as well as new releases.

On Feb 21 last year, Xiang Xiang returned to China, and has since resided at the Bifengxia Giant Panda Base in Ya'an, Sichuan province.

As Xiang Xiang departed, it received a tearful farewell from fans at the airport.

In November, Takauji visited Sichuan along with a tour group for a "reunion" with Xiang Xiang.

"When I arrived there, not only were the surroundings exceptionally good, but also the people taking care of Xiang Xiang were exceptionally kind," he said. "I felt the happiness of Xiang Xiang and felt relieved."

Besides the reunion, Takauji tried the classic Sichuan dish, Mapo tofu; watched face-changing, a highlight of Sichuan Opera; and exchanged views with local Xiang Xiang fans on its life in both China and Japan.

#### Enhancing exchanges

From March 9 to 14, Takauji visited China again, this time with a group of Japanese college students.

"In Japan, the information that students can obtain about China is limited," he said. "Some things can only be felt when you are there, and some information can only be obtained when you are there. I hope the two countries enhance people-to-people exchanges."

Many Japanese people have started to learn about China and the Chinese language because of their love for giant pandas. Takauji said he believes using animal images to develop people's interest has a significant effect on improving Sino-Japanese relations.

"Historically, China has been Japan's teacher, and there are many things we can learn from China. Friendly relations between the two countries are necessary," he said.

"Everyone should deepen their understanding of each other through exchanges, especially through symbols like giant pandas. When people see pandas, they all smile. I believe pandas will be a good opportunity to promote friendship between Japan and China."



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is garlanded by senior Bharatiya Janata Party leaders at the party headquarters in New Delhi on Tuesday. MANISH SWARUP / ASSOCIATED PRESS

## Modi declares victory amid setback to party

### Results signal shift in voter priorities as India copes with economic distress

By APARAJIT CHAKRABORTY in New Delhi  
For China Daily

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared a victory for his ruling party's alliance in the general elections as a "historical feat" while ignoring the setback for his Bharatiya Janata Party.

The BJP, which lost the outright parliamentary majority it had enjoyed during its first two terms, agreed on Wednesday with the allies to form the government.

Official results by Wednesday showed the BJP had secured 240 seats, short of the majority mark of 272, out of the total 543 seats in the lower house of the Indian Parliament.

The National Democratic Alliance led by the BJP won 294 seats, passing the majority mark in parliament, according to the Election Commission of India.

Speaking on Tuesday evening at the BJP headquarters in New Delhi, Modi said: "In our third term, the country will write a new chapter of big decisions. ... This is Modi's guarantee."

He has taken a more positive view on X, declaring his coalition had won a third term, saying, "This is a historical feat in India's history."

Modi is now the second Indian prime minister to win a third consecutive term after Jawaharlal Nehru, the country's first premier after independence in 1947.

Yet, the victorious fanfare could not hide the stunning blow that shattered Modi's image of the most dominant Indian politician in decades, analysts said.

The return to federal coalitions marks a renewed emphasis on cooperative federalism, and the new government will not be able to pursue its centralist agenda of

#### China congratulates alliance on win

China extended its congratulations on Wednesday to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's alliance for its victory in the country's general elections.

India's ruling National Democratic Alliance, led by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party, secured the majority of seats in the Lok Sabha, or lower house of the Indian Parliament.

A sound and stable China-India relationship serves the common interests of both countries and is

conducive to regional and global peace and development. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning told a daily news conference.

Beijing is ready to work with New Delhi to push for the steady development of bilateral ties based on the fundamental interests of the two countries and the two peoples, Mao said.

ZHOU JIN

uniformity as the basis of national unity, said Balveer Arora, chairman of the Centre for Multilevel Federalism in New Delhi.

The opposition INDIA alliance, comprising the Indian National Congress and other smaller parties, clinched 233 seats, falling short of the majority mark, as confirmed by the election commission.

The main opposition INC, which dominated India for decades after independence but witnessed a decline in every election over the past 10 years, has secured 99 seats, almost doubling their seats in the 2019 general elections.

#### Livelihood issues

The decline in the seat tally for the BJP, even in its heartland bastions, shows livelihood issues, such as unemployment and inflation, overcame the appeal to nationalist Hindu identity sentiments, Arora said.

Modi has overseen India's ascent to become one of the world's fastest-growing economies, and its fifth largest, but the most populous country is facing a jobs crisis.

"The underlying economic distress of people in the unorganized sector impacted the election result," economist Arun Kumar told Agence France-Presse.

Moreover, the BJP's oversight of regional political dynamics in candidate selection is largely responsible for its poor performance in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Haryana, Amit Rajendra Dholakia, a professor in the Depart-

ment of Political Science at The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda in India, told China Daily.

Another reason is the BJP miscalculated the effect of two major issues: the controversial Ram temple and Modi's personal popularity, Dholakia said. Contrary to expectations, these elements failed to sway voters, who were more focused on localized concerns.

Modi's trump card "was his emotional pitch to the Hindus ... trying to overcome the negativity around unemployment, inequality, price rises," Kumar said. "That failed because people have reacted to their economic situation, their real issues."

Santosh Mehrotra, a development economist, told AFP. "There is no doubt that India is seeing a job crisis at home."

It needs to create 10 million to 12 million nonfarm jobs to absorb both people entering the economy and its surplus agricultural workers, Mehrotra added.

In addition, Dholakia said the opposition mobilized itself quite well, which further eroded BJP's electoral standing.

The INC, led by Rahul Gandhi, emphasized social welfare measures during its campaign, said Tanvir Aejiaz, an associate professor at Ramjas College, University of Delhi. Most importantly, it managed to keep a good coalition without any bickering, he added.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

## US rate cut hopes fueled by cooling jobs data

By HENG WEILI in New York  
hengweili@chinadailyusa.com

Wall Street has been looking for any signs of a potential rate cut in the past year, only to have its hopes dashed by persistent inflation.

But this week, stock market investors may have gotten the tea leaves they have long desired.

Hiring by US private employers slid to a four-month low in May, with small firms reducing staff, and wage gains for job changers moderated for a second month, according to the private ADP employment report released Wednesday.

The results could spur the Federal Reserve to begin cutting interest rates this year.

On Tuesday, the Labor Department reported job openings fell in April to the fewest in more than three years, and the ratio of vacancies to the number of unemployed had returned to levels seen prior to the pandemic outbreak in early 2020.

The cumulative impact of the reports was that the S&P 500 and Nasdaq hit record closing highs on Wednesday, powered mainly by technology stocks.

"Whether the Fed can ease policy this year will depend on its confidence on inflation. We continue to expect the first rate cut in December, followed by four 25bp (basis points) cuts in 2025," Bank of America analysts wrote in a note on Wednesday, reported Business Insider.

Nearly two-thirds of economists in a May 31-June 5 Reuters poll, however, predicted the first cut in the federal funds rate to a 5-5.25 percent range would come in September.

US 10-year Treasury yields fell to a two-month low on Wednesday ahead of Friday's highly anticipated government employment report for May.

Bond prices and interest rates move in opposite directions.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 96.04 points, or 0.25 percent, to 38,807.33 on Wednesday; the S&P 500 gained 62.69 points, or 1.18 percent, to 5,354.03; and the Nasdaq Composite gained 330.86 points, or 1.96 percent, to 17,187.91.

Chip stocks rose 4.5 percent, buoyed by gains to Nvidia and Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing. Nvidia's market valuation hit the \$3 trillion mark for the first time as the chipmaker overtook Apple to become the world's second-most valuable company.

Canadian stocks and bonds rallied on Wednesday, while the Canadian dollar touched a near two-week low against its US counterpart, after the Bank of Canada became the first central bank among G7 countries to cut interest rates.

Not everyone is optimistic on this week's market exuberance.

"The stock market is cheering a worsening job market b/c the @federalreserve will come in and 'stimulate,' giving Wall Street more money, paid for by inflation for the masses. Wall Street is now cheering Main Street job losses, and EVERYONE is acting like this is a good thing," stock analyst Gordon Johnson posted to his 49,000 followers on X on Wednesday.

Agencies contributed to this story.

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## Police arrest pro-Palestine protesters at Stanford University

By MINGMEI LI in New York  
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At least 13 pro-Palestinian protesters were arrested at Stanford University early Wednesday morning after briefly barricading themselves in the president's office.

The demonstrators broke into Building 10, which houses the offices of the president and provost, at around 5:30 am, demanding that the California school divest from companies connected to Israel, and called for transparency and amnesty. A group of 50 protesters were outside the building chanting, "Free, Free Palestine."

Around three hours after the protesters took over the building, they were cleared by campus police and the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office, according to Dee Mostofi, the university spokeswoman.

Shortly after the arrests, law enforcement officers started dismantling a pro-Palestinian encampment that had been on a campus plaza since late April, along with a nearby pro-Israel display.

All arrested students will be immediately suspended, and if any of them are seniors, they "will not be allowed to graduate," said school officials.

It wasn't immediately clear whether "will not be allowed to graduate" indicated that students would be prohibited from participating in commencement ceremonies or expelled from the school without receiving their diplomas.

There was extensive damage to the interior of Building 10 and the exterior of the buildings in the main quad, Mostofi said.

The damage included "extensive graffiti vandalism on the sandstone buildings and columns of the main quad," she said in a statement, adding that it conveyed "vile and hateful sentiments that we condemn in the strongest terms."

The building had been renamed to "D. Adnan's office" in honor of Adnan al-Bursh, a Palestinian surgeon who died in April in an Israeli detention facility.

The protesters vowed to remain inside the building and refused to leave until their demands were met, according to the group's statement.

They wanted Stanford officials to include a vote by university trustees on whether to divest from companies "that provide material and logistical support to Israel's current military campaign."

They also demanded that the president of Stanford, Richard

Saller, support the divestment proposal, disclose all holdings in Stanford's endowment and drop all disciplinary measures against pro-Palestinian student activists.

"If these demands are met, we will leave your office, President Saller," said an activist as she sat at a wooden desk inside the building, in a video posted on Instagram.

Officials said a public safety officer was injured after being shoved by protesters who interfered with a transport vehicle.

In April, 18 protesters were arrested at the university. Wednesday was the last day of

classes for the spring term. The upcoming graduation ceremony is set for June 15-16.

College students across the nation staged campus protests this spring, demanding that their schools withdraw any investments they say are helping Israeli forces in their military operations in the Gaza Strip.

During the current graduation season, several school commencement ceremonies were either canceled or relocated due to campus protests.

No school has agreed to divest financial connections to Israel. At Brown University in Rhode Island and at the New School in New York City, officials said they will discuss voting on the issue.

Agencies contributed to this story.

# ACROSS ASIA

In this weekly feature China Daily gives voice to Asia and its people. The stories presented will come mainly from the Asia News Network (ANN), and of which China Daily is among the 20 members.

Editor's note:

## Sherpa summits highest peak for 30th time

Trailblazing climber Kami Rita Sherpa reached the top of Mount Qomolangma, also known as Mount Everest, for the 30th time on May 22, breaking his own record for the most summits of the world's highest mountain.

Kami Rita stood atop the summit at 7:49 am, Khim Lal Gautam, the Everest base camp coordinator told the Kathmandu Post.

This marks his second ascent of the season, after his first on May 12.

Kami Rita's mountaineering journey began in 1992 when he joined an expedition to Everest as a porter.

He made his first Everest ascent on May 13, 1994, aged 24.

Since then, he has been climbing Everest almost every year.

Following Kami Rita is another Sherpa — Pasang Dawa — who has 27 summit titles on the world's highest mountain.

But this year, Kami Rita, 54, has no contender.

Dawa Sherpa of Imagine Nepal Trek and Expeditions, where Pasang Dawa works as a senior guide, said Pasang Dawa would not be climbing Qomolangma at least for this spring.

"Pasang Dawa has informed us that he is tired of climbing Everest and wants to take a rest," said Dawa Sherpa. "He is not in favor of competition on Everest."

Last year, Pasang Dawa, now 47, reached the top of Mount Qomolangma for the 27th time, after his double ascent in a single season. Kami Rita climbed the mountain twice to reclaim his record.

This year, Nepal's Department of Tourism has issued Everest climbing permits to 419 fee-paying individuals. Last year, permits were issued to a record 479 individuals.

With at least one Sherpa guide hired by each climber, there will be nearly 1,000 climbers attempting to scale Everest this year.



Kami Rita Sherpa poses with his certificates in his room on the outskirts of Kathmandu, Nepal, in January 2021. PRAKASH MATHEMA / AFP

Records, titles, deaths and crowds are nowadays synonymous with the highest mountain.

Cases of casualties have been rising on the mountain. Renowned Kenyan climber Cheryuiot Kirui died a few meters below the summit on May 22. His Sherpa guide Nawang Sherpa has gone missing.

British climber Daniel Paul Paterson and his Sherpa guide Pastenji have gone missing in the mountain's "death zone". The duo were returning after reaching the summit on May 21. Officials said hopes of finding survivors are slim.

"We regret to inform you that a cornice collapse occurred yesterday (May 21) at Hillary Step. Two of our brave team members, Daniel Paul Paterson of the UK and Pastenji Sherpa, are missing. Eyewitnesses reported the incident took place between Summit Ridge and South Summit, and some climbers were swept away in Kangshung Face," Lakpa Sherpa, managing director of 8K Expeditions, the agency managing Paterson's climb, wrote on his Facebook page.

"Our dedicated search and rescue teams are deployed on the ground. They are working tirelessly to locate our missing climbers. Our thoughts and prayers are with their families during this challenging time."

Binod Babu Bastakoti from Lekhnath in Kaski district died on May 22 near the south Col while descending from the summit.

Nearly 8,800 mountaineers have climbed Mount Qomolangma from the Nepali side since Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and New Zealander Edmund Hillary first set foot atop the world's highest peak in 1953.

THE KATHMANDU POST



A dog sports sunglasses at a pet competition in Nakseongdae Park in Seoul on April 27. YONHAP NEWS AGENCY VIA VCG

## Every dog has its day

Shifting consumer preferences fuel popularity of various breeds, but excesses of puppy mills lead to surge in abandoned animals with adoption shunned

Park Ji-won, 34, often hears comments like, "It's refreshing to see a shih tzu. They seem so rare these days", while walking her 5-year-old dog.

The recurring remarks prompted her to ponder a question: During her elementary school years, shih tzus were everywhere. Where have all the shih tzus gone?

"Even when I encounter them occasionally, they're usually very old," she said.

Park's observation reflects a shift in pet preferences in South Korea over the past few decades.

In the early 2000s, shih tzus were among the most popular breeds in the country along with Yorkshire terriers, cocker spaniels and schnauzers. Trends have since shifted, with breeds like beagles, dachshunds and Samoyeds having their moments of rising and waning popularity.

As of 2024, the most popular breeds are Pomeranians, bichons frises, Coton de Tulears and Maltipoos.

### Canine coverage

The popularity of certain dog breeds in South Korea is often triggered by media exposure.

In 2002, for instance, the SBS television show *TV Animal Farm* featured a cocker spaniel named Woongja, which increased the popularity of the breed.

Shih tzus experienced a surge in popularity around the same time after former television personality Ko Young-wook, who served time in prison after being found guilty of rape, showcased his mother's 10 shih tzus on the program.

Media attention on a particular breed is further amplified by pet shops and puppy mills, according to animal advocacy group Korea Animal Rights Advocates.

"To understand the origins of these trends, one has to know how dog auctions take place in (South) Korea," the group's head Jeon Jinkyung said.

At these auctions, puppy mill owners and pet shop owners share a mutual interest in current or future trends, in which certain breeds with desirable facial features have the potential to be sold at high retail prices.

"They may even engage in price-fixing," Jeon said, adding that the tactic is used to artificially inflate the price of a specific breed at auction, thus creating the illusion of high demand and manipulating dog breed trends.

These trendy dogs then reach pet shops. The shop owners may recommend customers purchase trendy dog breeds that have appeared in the media and customers often are not presented with many other options.

Kim, 29, who visited a pet shop in Seoul in August, received a breed recommendation from a local pet shop.

As she entered the shop, she was initially recommended a Maltipoo, a small mixed-breed poodle.

### 90,000 abandoned dogs

were rescued in South Korea in 2018, accounting for about 64 percent of the number of newly registered dogs in the same year.



From top: Pet owners present their dogs at the first Seoul Pet Festival on Oct 8. An animal rights group holds a birthday party for dogs at an animal shelter in Gyeonggi, South Korea, on June 16. Pet dogs and their owners attend the first Seoul Pet Festival on Oct 8. YONHAP NEWS AGENCY VIA VCG

The shop owner said Maltipoos are popular because they are manageable in size, easygoing and shed little fur, making them a perfect fit for apartment living.

Kim said that she could not help but notice the abundance of similar-looking small white dogs in the shop.

As she was taking some time to look around, the owner then suggested a mini bichon frise, assuring her it shared the Maltipoo's desirable traits.

"She also told me that it is the breed that singer Kang Min-kyung owns," Kim said.

Ultimately, swayed by the trend and the owner's recommendation, Kim decided to adopt the mini bichon frise.

In South Korea, buying dogs at pet shops is commonplace. A 2023 survey conducted by animal welfare research association Aware on 2,000 South Koreans aged 20 to 69 found that, when asked about their adoption method, 46.7 percent reported that they acquired their dogs through acquaintances, while pet shops came in second, accounting for 14.5 percent.

### Pet problems

Pet industry insiders warned that the sale of trendy dog breeds without careful consideration, coupled with the excessive breeding of popular dogs by puppy mills, could lead to a surge in abandoned animals once the trend subsides.

Data from the Animal and Plant Quarantine Agency's 2018 research paint a troubling picture. While the number of newly registered dogs in South Korea reached 140,000 in 2018, a staggering 90,000 dogs, about 64 percent of those registered figures, were abandoned and rescued in the same year.

The rise of abandoned trending breeds is particularly worrisome. In 2010, only 399 Pomeranians were listed as abandoned. By 2018, after the breed's popularity soared, that number jumped to 2,217. Similarly, abandoned bichons frises increased from zero in 2010 to 348 in 2018.

Jeon from the Korea Animal Rights Advocates argued that this trend-driven market also discourages people from adopting abandoned dogs, with many of them desperately needing families.

"While trendy dogs are being purchased, many abandoned dogs are being euthanized due to a lack of adoption," Jeon said.

She said that the market trend incentivizes breeders to produce ever-smaller dogs, which can lead to health problems in the dogs themselves.

"Breeders prioritize small, attractive dogs that sell quickly ... often neglecting to screen for potential genetic diseases," Jeon said.

THE KOREA HERALD

## The 'little red hat' who gives free haircuts to the needy

On the first Tuesday of every month, residents at Beo Crescent in the Tiong Bahru area of Singapore can be seen shuffling to the void deck of Block 26.

They form a neat line, take a number and wait patiently for their turn.

Within half an hour, they leave with their hair trimmed, hearts full and wearing smiles — thanks to Mark Yuen, who is, more often than not, wearing his trademark red beret.

Since 2016, the 69-year-old retired wealth adviser has traveled all over the island giving free haircuts to the elderly and the needy.

Armed with scissors, shavers and combs, Yuen — nicknamed "Little Red Hat" by some of his "customers" — provides the service at various places, including nursing homes and senior centers, three or four times a week.

He also makes house calls for people who are bedridden or immobile.

"At the end of the haircut, when I see them smile and they say 'thank you', it rejuvenates me," he said. "Sometimes, the new haircut makes them feel neat and look younger."

Yuen's haircut sessions are also a good way for his elderly patrons to socialize. "Getting the seniors outside their homes and spending time with other residents and volunteers, I hope it will give them a sense of community care and love ... that they are not alone," he said.

When The Straits Times went to observe one such session in May, the seniors were seen arriving at the void deck as early as 8 am. While waiting for their turn to have their hair trimmed, some chatted with one another or with the six volunteers who were there to assist Yuen.

About 50 residents turned up, most of whom were senior citizens.

Getting the seniors outside their homes and spending time with other residents and volunteers, I hope it will give them a sense of community care and love ... that they are not alone."

Mark Yuen, retiree offering free haircuts to seniors in Singapore

Yuen recalled a time when he helped a man who had not cut his hair for 13 years. "He liked his haircut. It felt very rewarding and gave me a different sense of achievement."

Some may consider his involvement in cutting people's hair an accomplishment. He picked up the skill in 2016 at 61, an age when some may be looking to put their feet up and enjoy retirement.

He said: "After I retired, I wanted to learn something that would enable me to give back to society."

He took about three months to complete a 150-hour course before taking an exam to be certified.

The journey was not without its challenges, he said. Self-doubt, back pain and even difficulty holding the scissors and maintaining his focus were obstacles he had to overcome.

During the course, he gave a bedridden senior a free haircut and it planted the idea in him to provide such a service for the less fortunate.

Yuen is not alone in his act of altruism.

In 2016, he organized a group of volunteers called Team MDI — named after the hair salon where he was trained — so that they could join the sessions to offer free haircuts to seniors and those from lower-income groups.

With a Facebook page and by word of mouth, the team has since grown to nearly 100 volunteers.

One of the newest volunteers in the team is 27-year-old Ismail Bouaouine from Morocco, who arrived in Singapore about a month ago.

The hairdresser, who also provided free haircuts and dinner back in his home country, said: "I feel that I should make people happy and show them that there is good in life."

THE STRAITS TIMES

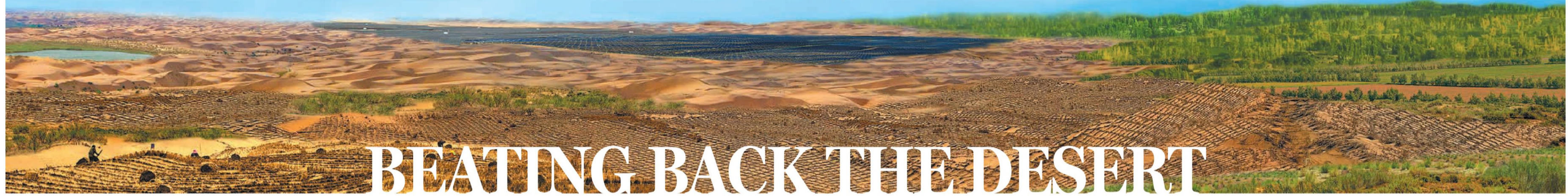
## Wild in the water

Participants compete for the goal spot in the dash race during the Kashima Gatalympics tidal sports event in the mudflats of the Ariake Sea off Kashima city, Saga Prefecture, Japan, on June 2.

THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN VIA AP



Editor's note: As protection of the planet's flora, fauna and resources becomes increasingly important, China Daily is publishing a series of stories to illustrate the country's commitment to safeguarding the natural world.



# BEATING BACK THE DESERT

The Three-North Shelterbelt Program serves as a vast barrier against the spread of various sandy lands in northern China. China Daily reporters Yan Dongjie and Cui Jia visited the Tengger, Kubuqi and Badain Jaran deserts to witness the efforts and achievements of the megaproject.

When thinking about deserts, countries such as Libya and Saudi Arabia come to mind, but China actually has more varieties of deserts than any place on the planet. With nearly 18 percent of the nation's land mass classified as "desertified" — that's 1.69 million square kilometers — China's 12 major deserts are: The Taklimakan Desert, the Gurbantunggut Desert, the Badain Jaran Desert, the Tengger Desert, the Kumtag Desert, the Qaidam Basin Desert, the Kubuqi Desert, the Ulan Buh Desert, the Mu Us Sandy Land, the Hulunbuir Sandy Land, the Horqin Sandy Land and the Hulunbuir Sandy Land. In addition, stony deserts — barren wastelands that are made of pebbles and rocks such as the Gobi Desert — also take up a significant portion of the desertified land.



Covering vast swaths of the northwest, north and northeast of the country, the threat of these deserts and their spread has existed for centuries. However, several generations of hardworking and dedicated Chinese people have made it their raison d'être to push back these deserts. They've done this by thinking outside the box, or grid, planting trees and shrubs, and creating a "Green Great Wall" that spreads across 13 provinces and autonomous regions in northern China and protects over 150 million hectares of farmland. In the 1950s, China was considered one of the "most desertified" countries in the world, with places such as Zhangwu county in Liaoning province in the northeast of the country consisting of 90 percent sandy area. In 1978, the central government made a significant decision to implement the Three-North Shelterbelt Program across 13 provinces and autonomous regions in northern China to fight against desertification. Over the past 45 years, more than 45 percent of the desertified area has been managed, and the forest coverage rate has increased from just over 5 percent to 13.84 percent.

On June 6 last year, President Xi Jinping highlighted the period from 2021 to 2030, the sixth phase of the Three-North Program, as the key phase for consolidating and expanding achievements in fighting desertification, during a meeting with officials in Bayannur in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region. More than ever, desertification control measures are backed by scientific research and the use of the latest technology, said Lu Qi, head of the Three-North program research institute.

"Each desertification control project is now planned based on the conditions and resources of different areas, backed by research data. And people have reached a consensus that the goal of desertification control is to ensure that people's lives and development won't be threatened by deserts, which also need to be protected as they are essential parts of the ecological system," said Lu.

From top: Workers make straw grids at the Horqin Sandy Land in Tongliao, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, in March. Workers transport saplings to the Horqin Sandy Land in April. Photovoltaic panels are installed on straw grids at the Horqin Sandy Land in Chifeng, Inner Mongolia, in May. PHOTOS BY LIAN ZHEN / XINHUA

Scientific decision-making

"The key to China's success in its path of sand prevention and control lies in scientific

decision-making and planning," said Dang Hongzhong, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Forestry and the Three-North program research institute, adding that the innovative action taken in Zhangwu county in the 1950s was a step forward in sand control. In 1952, Zhangwu established China's first sand control research institute, with Liu Bin as its director. Liu and other pioneers in sand control decided to introduce the Mongolian Scots pine from the Greater Hinggan Mountains to control sandy areas. "In traditional thinking, shrubs or grasses should be used to control shifting sandy areas, and planting trees on shifting sand dunes went against the laws of nature. The old experts were not bound by traditional rules, made bold breakthroughs and embarked on an innovative path that no one had expected," said Dang.

Although they had found a drought-resistant tree species, planting trees on shifting sandy land was challenging. "Zhangwu was eight latitudes away from the original habitat of the Mongolian Scots pine, making the introduction difficult," said Zhang Xueli, deputy director of the Research Institute of Sand Control and Utilization in Liaoning province. Liu and other sand control pioneers imported Mongolian Scots pine for three years. In the first year, almost all the saplings perished.

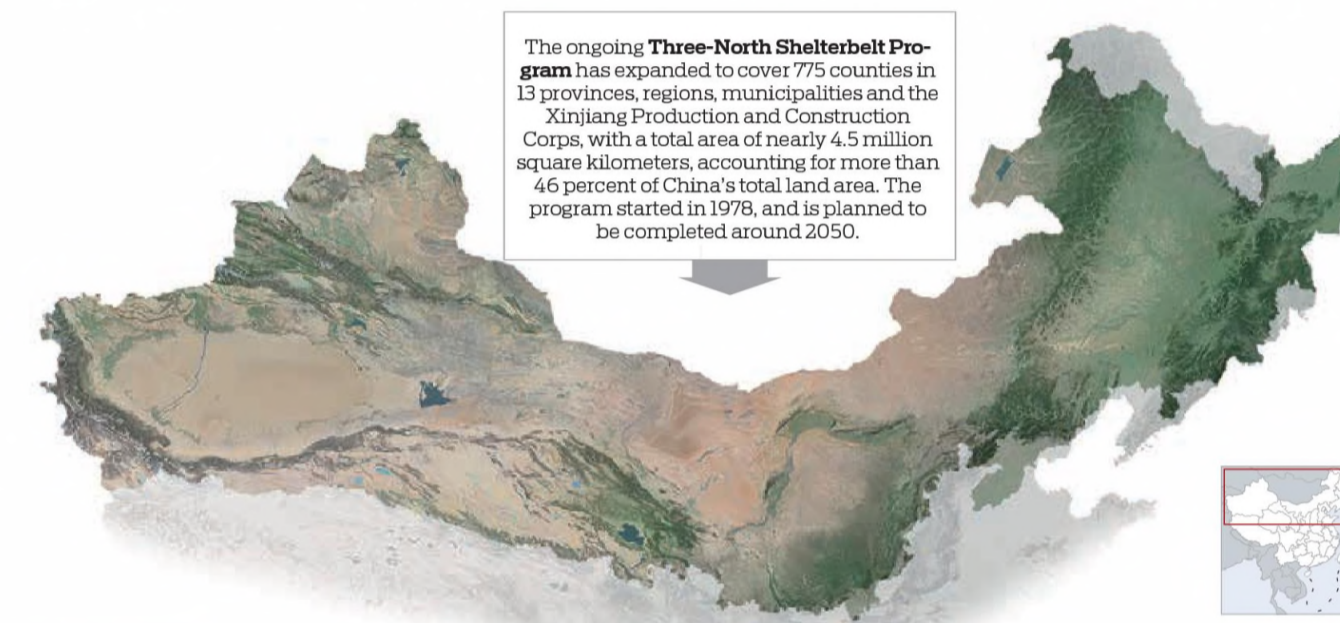
"The experts later found that in their original habitat, the Mongolian Scots pine was covered by thick snow in winter, providing insulation and moisture retention. "However, Zhangwu is very dry in winter and spring, with strong winds, and only two saplings that were accidentally buried by sand survived," Zhang said. Learning from this experience, researchers covered the next batch of planted pines with sand and soil. Those pine trees survived the winter, growing into the oldest existing forest in the sandy area, known locally as "the autumn of 1955".

As a result, Zhangwu is also known as the "birthplace of scientific sand control in New China." In 1978, the planting of Mongolian Scots pines in sandy areas won national scientific awards and has since been widely promoted in more than 10 provinces and regions, with Mongolian Scots pines becoming a core tree species in the Three-North Shelterbelt Program in Inner Mongolia and other provinces.

Over the past 70 years, the forest coverage rate in Zhangwu has increased from less than 3 percent to over 30 percent, and more than 8,500 forestry technicians have spread the experience of afforestation and sand fixation to more than 10 million hectares of forests being planted.

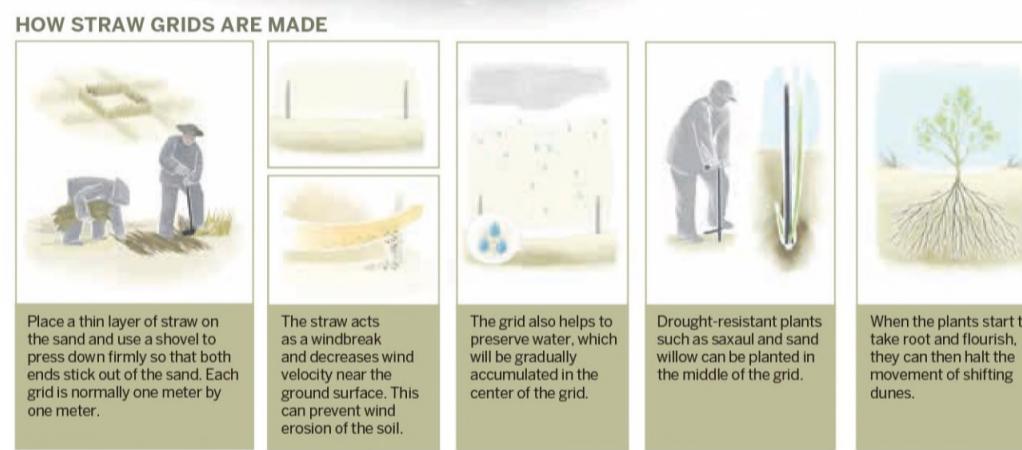
Afforestation and management

In addition to the Mongolian Scots pine, nearly 500 plant species that can be used as windbreaks and for sand fixation have been identified in China's decades-long sand con-



**The Three-North Shelterbelt Program 1978-2023**

- 32 million hectares** Afforestation and conservation completed
- 33 million hectares** Desertified land treated
- 30 million hectares** Farmland protected
- 61 percent** Area prone to soil erosion that has been effectively controlled
- 13.84 percent** Forest coverage rate, up from 5.05 percent in 1978



Workers plant trees in the Horqin Sandy Land in Horqin Left Wing Rear Banner, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, in April last year. LIAN ZHEN / XINHUA

Control practice. The recently published book *Common Plants Used in the Three-North Program* includes 178 tree species, 177 shrub species and 143 herbaceous plant species. "After confirming the plant species, the second key to our sand control efforts has been scientific afforestation," said Dang. Through continuous exploration, sand control pioneers have formulated scientific afforestation plans based on the different natural conditions in various regions. "Usually, we need to use straw grids for sand fixation, while also introducing shrub species such as *Salix gordejewii* and *Artemisia halodendron* to follow up. Only under such protection can the saplings of trees like Mongolian Scots pines survive better," Dang said. Wang Feng, director of policy and strategic development for combating desertification at the Chinese Academy of Forestry, explained that a straw grid involves inserting discarded wheat straw into the sand, burying half the straw while leaving half above the surface, forming a checkerboard pattern. This method can prevent wind-blown sand on the surface and help retain water to a certain extent.

"Although the straw grid is not an original sand control method in China, it is the most widely used here. After innovative improvements in terms of area coverage and method, the effect has also been enhanced," Wang said.

In Horqin Left Wing Rear Banner in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, Wang pointed to a grassland where trees and shrubs grow and said, "Unlike planted forests, this area has naturally regenerated into a sparse woodland grassland landscape, which is a very healthy natural state."

Over the past decade, Wang has visited many sandy areas in Inner Mongolia, Liaoning and other regions, studying how tree density can form the healthiest ecosystem under different environments. Dang and his team have also spent a considerable amount of time observing whether planting forests will cause a drop in the groundwater level and other sensitive issues related to afforestation.

"After more than 10 years of monitoring, we have concluded that the transpiration of Mongolian Scots pines accounts for approximately 42 percent of the local precipitation annually, reaching close to 60 percent in some years, but has never exceeded 100 percent," Dang said. "Before, because people did not know how much water this tree species used for growth, some were concerned that it would deplete groundwater. However, scientific monitoring has overturned this conclusion."

He explained that the Mongolian Scots pine is highly drought-resistant, with over 85 percent of its fine roots concentrated within a depth range of 60 centimeters from the surface, which also means it does not consume a large amount of groundwater. "One of the most important issues is how



From top: A treated area of Horqin Sandy Land in Tongliao, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, in May. A worker waters trees planted at the edge of the Horqin Sandy Land in Tongliao in April. PHOTOS BY LIAN ZHEN / XINHUA

to allow the planted trees to naturally reproduce, so that the forests planted by humans for many years can naturally regenerate and continue, ensuring that these 'Green Great Walls' can protect our farmland and cities for generations to come, rather than having to replant them after 100 years," Dang said.

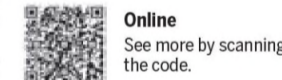
"Photovoltaic Great Wall" In Ordos, Inner Mongolia, a "photovoltaic Great Wall" running along the greenbelt on the edge of the Kubuqi Desert is taking shape. After its completion in 2030, the "photovoltaic Great Wall" consisting of photovoltaic panels will have an average width of 5 km and stretch for 400 km. That's farther than the distance between London and Paris.

The project, which is only 5 km from the Yellow River, will also act as a wind and sand barrier along the watercourse. The integration of ecological treatment and energy development is expected

to inject new vitality into desertification control, said Du Huiliang, the mayor of Ordos.

Different than regular photovoltaic projects, all the panels installed on this project have been raised more than 3 meters above the ground allowing sand-binding plants and agricultural products to grow underneath, according to Liu Tianyun, deputy head of the Ordos forestry bureau. The project, which is expected to achieve an installed capacity of 100 million kilowatts, will also help treat 200,000 hectares of sandy land.

Contact the writers at yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn



Online See more by scanning the code.

By CUI JIA and YAN DONGJIE

Judging by the color of the sand and the direction of the wind, Ma Junhe from Minqin county, Gansu province, can tell the precise origin of a sandstorm when it hits. He said such a skill is common among people who live next to deserts as they are the ones who truly understand why anti-desertification efforts are so urgent for China.

"People say when the spring wind blows over your cheeks, it feels so soft that it's like being touched by the hands of your caring mother. It's also true in Minqin, but in a completely different scenario. When the strong wind mixed with sand hits your face, it feels like being slapped by your mother after you've been naughty," said the 43-year-old, who grew up in the county.

Sitting on the water-thin oasis between the Badain Jaran and Tengger deserts, Minqin's survival depends on fighting back the spreading sands. The local people know too well that if the county fails, not only would they become ecological refugees, the two deserts would also join together, posing a greater threat to China's development.

"People in the city may be hit by sandstorms now and then, but here we can see how it forms, so we know how urgent it is to

stabilize the deserts. No matter how technologies evolve, it's always down to the direction of the wind, Ma Junhe from Minqin county, Gansu province, can tell the precise origin of a sandstorm when it hits. He said such a skill is common among people who live next to deserts as they are the ones who truly understand why anti-desertification efforts are so urgent for China.

For the local people, the slogan "Minqin must not become another Lop Nur" became a mantra during the 2000s. The phrase referred to Lop Nur Lake in northwestern Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, which was a 3,100 square km expanse of water in the 1920s, but has now almost entirely disappeared. Back then, Qingtu Lake in the county was shrinking fast due to desertification. People feared that it might end up like Lop Nur and they would have no choice but to abandon their home.

In 2007, Ma co-founded the Saving Minqin Volunteers Association, a nonprofit organization getting people involved in planting sand-binding shrubs such as saxaul and *Calligonum mongolicum* on the edge of the two deserts. Since taking on desertification control as his full-time job in 2009, he's spent an average of nine months a year working in the deserts. In March 2022, he and his team took

on the difficult task of building a part of the greenbelt, preventing sands from shifting in the north of the county often hit by strong wind and sandstorms, as a part of the Three-North Shelterbelt Program.

More than 98 percent of the plants have survived, and the new sand defense system is taking effect. The team was able to further expand the greenbelt this spring, with the central government attaching greater importance to the project since last year, Ma said.

"More than ever, people in Minqin have a better understanding that what we do not only matters in protecting our home, but is also key to China's future," he added while checking the saxauls he planted a month earlier. "Look, new leaves have started to grow. For me, the best feeling is to see the color green in the desert."

Urgendalai, a Mongolian herdsman who was born and raised near the Kubuqi Desert in Ordos city in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, couldn't agree more with Ma.

"Indeed, the fulfillment is beyond words every time I see the sand willows I planted flourishing in the desert during the past 27 years," the 56-year-old from Hanggin Banner said. Urgendalai started to plant trees in 1997

## Dedicated locals devote themselves to ending desertification



Urgendalai looks into an area of untreated desertified land in the Kubuqi Desert in June last year. LI YUNPING / XINHUA



Tang Ximing introduces straw grids to foreign guests in the Tengger Desert in May. FENG KAIHUA / XINHUA



Ma Junhe (right) and a co-worker plant saxaul trees in Minqin, Ningxia Hui autonomous region, in March 2019. JIANG AIPING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

simply to protect his grassland. "I had no choice because the fast-expanding Kubuqi Desert was destroying my grassland and home. At that time, the amount of sand carried by a strong sandstorm could bury many sheep alive." He was involved in his first large-scale

desertification control project in 1998 to build a road running through the Kubuqi Desert. During the process, he learned many techniques to stabilize the sand and increase the plants' survival rate. Over the next few years, the skills enabled him to plant enough trees and plants to keep his home safe.

"After I completed the project, I decided to carry on the fight against desertification because I know it matters to future generations," said the father of five, who has dedicated his time to desertification control projects including the Three-North program since 2003. "My hard work has paid off, as being hit

frequently by violent sandstorms has become a thing of the past. And people's quality of life has been significantly improved."

Urgendalai said such efforts have been intensified since President Xi Jinping highlighted the significance of strengthening desertification control and prevention on

June 6 last year, pushing to develop an even stronger green shield in the nation's northern regions. He's been very busy planting sand willows to enforce a green belt on the edge of the Kubuqi, which is the desert closest to Beijing and was once a major source of sandstorms carried by the wind to the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. "With the help of new desertification control technology and automated tools, anti-desertification projects no longer need to be so labor-intensive and can be carried out more efficiently. There are a lot of new things for me to learn," Urgendalai said.

In Zhongwei city, Ningxia Hui autonomous region, Tang Ximing tested a tractor that can make straw grids on the sand dunes of Tengger — the fourth-largest desert in China. The grids, commonly made with straw or sand willow branches, can halt the movement of shifting dunes. People can then sow grass seeds and plant shrubs on them. After the plants start to grow, the desert will then become an oasis, Tang said.

"Making such grids is still the most practical way to stabilize sand. And they still have to be laid manually, which can be slow. Also, the labor cost has been increasing, so I've decided to invent a machine that can replace manual labor. The use of automated machinery in

desertification control such as making straw grids and planting trees is an unstoppable trend," he said.

Born in Zhongwei, Tang suffered from sandstorms so strong that they "sometimes blew people into the canal" and covered rice bowls with a heavy dusting of sand. He studied forestry at college and returned to his hometown after graduation in 1991, starting a career in desertification control at a local farm.

"I left Zhongwei to study elsewhere because I was tired of a life plagued by the desert, and I returned and have stayed also because of it," Tang said. "I hope to see more young people joining us in desertification control, because continuous efforts must be put in by one generation after another."

In Zhangwu county, Liaoning province, Liu Ying shared the stories of the county's battle against desertification control since the 1950s with a group of visitors.

More than 20-meter-high Mongolian Scots pine trees can now be seen everywhere in Zhangwu on the southeastern edge of the Horqin Sandy Land. It's hard to imagine that 70 years ago, 96 percent of the land in the county was covered with sand, she said.

Liu Bin, Liu Ying's great-grandfather, moved to the county and became the director

of China's first sand control research institute in 1952. He led researchers in an extremely difficult environment for over 30 years, creating a miracle of desertification control that attracted worldwide attention, and included the successful introduction of drought-resistant Mongolian Scots pine and a scientific sand control plan combining trees and shrubs.

"By sharing the stories of my great-grandfather, I hope that the spirit of fighting desertification can be passed down to the younger generations and inspire them," she said.

In Minqin, Gansu province, Ma Junhe often livestreams the process of planting saxaul on social media, showing people the front line of China's battle against desertification. He invited a group of his followers, many of whom are young people from big cities such as Shanghai and Guangzhou in Guangdong province, to the county to plant saxaul themselves in May.

"I greatly underestimated young people's passion about playing a part in desertification control projects. They really care about the ecological environment and understand the importance of the Three-North program. I think we can count on them," he said.

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## CHINA

# China leads in environmental adjudication

2,813 specialized bodies have been set up nationwide to tackle cases

By CAO YIN  
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China had more than 2,800 environmental adjudication institutes by December, giving it the world's most intensive and complete such judicial system, an official from the country's top court said.

Data released by the Supreme People's Court on Monday, World Environmental Day, showed that by the end of last year, 2,813 environmental adjudication organizations, such as tribunals and judicial teams, had been set up nationwide, a year-on-year increase of nearly 16 percent.

“The professionalism and experience in case hearings are conducive to compiling a code on the environment and ecology”.

Lyu Zhongmei, vice-president of the China Law Society

Ninety new tribunals that specialize in tackling environmental cases were opened in Shaanxi province, with more environmental adjudication teams established to cover major river basins, nature reserves and national parks, the top court said.

“These institutions demonstrate that a specialized, extensive and complete system of environmental justice has been created in our country,” said Yang Leping, vice-president of the Supreme People's Court.

While making the handling of environmental cases more professional, Chinese courts also launched a campaign last year to tackle third-party service agencies that falsify environmental quality monitoring and environmental assessment reports.

In a case disclosed by the top

court on Monday, eight people in Jiangxi province were given prison terms, along with fines, after being found to have sought benefits through the purchase of fake environmental reports.

Those convicted were not only from a shell environmental technology company that sold the forged reports, but also those who bought the fake documents.

“The case indicates our judicial crackdown on the whole process of fraud in the environmental field,” said Wu Zhaoxiang, chief judge of the top court's Adjudication Tribunal for Environment and Resources.

Chinese courts concluded 232,000 lawsuits against environmental violators last year, down 5.8 percent year-on-year. They covered many environmental aspects, such as air, noise or water pollution, illegal mining, smuggling of precious wildlife, and low-carbon development, the top court said.

Meanwhile, a series of judicial documents were issued last year, including ones on forests, minerals and the Yellow River, which had enriched China's legal system on the environment, it added.

Lyu Zhongmei, vice-president of the China Law Society, lauded the achievements made by courts nationwide in environmental protection, saying, “The professionalism and experience in case hearings are conducive to compiling a code on the environment and ecology”.

She stressed the importance of summarizing trial practices in civil, criminal, administrative, public-interest and damage compensation cases related to the environment, calling for more research on judicial procedure rules in the environmental sector.

China is advancing the compilation of an environment and ecology code, with a senior legislator saying in April that the code is expected to be submitted for review this year by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the country's top legislature.

## Family fun



Participants throw colored powder, cheering each other on and expressing blessings during a parent-child mini marathon at Xinglong Park in Jinan, Shandong province, on Wednesday. The event attracted around 300 parents and their children. The mini marathon — 6.6 kilometers long — was aimed at providing a platform for families to showcase love and unity, and encourage more people to enjoy sports.

HUANG ZHONGMING / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Fading of El Nino to bring more rain

By LI MENGHAN  
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The decline of the periodic El Nino weather pattern, which brings warmer air over the Pacific Ocean, could lead to increased rainfall in large areas of China, meteorological experts said on Wednesday.

“The weakening trend of El Nino has persisted since the start of this year, culminating in its conclusion in May. We are expected to enter La Nina conditions later this summer,” Jia Xiaolong, deputy director of China's National Climate Center, said at a news conference on Wednesday.

La Nina contrasts with El Nino by bringing about extensive cooling of ocean surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean. Their dual influences can lead to increased precipitation.

El Nino began in May last year and peaked in December. Rated as having a moderate intensity, it fueled a spike in global temperatures and exacerbated extreme weather events, Jia said.

China experienced a significantly warmer May this year, with the

national average temperature standing at 17.7 C, the highest for that month since 1961, Jia said.

Ko Barrett, deputy secretary-general of the World Meteorological Organization, said on Monday that every month since June of last year has set a new temperature record.

The WMO predicted that between June and August, there is an equal chance of either neutral conditions or a transition to La Nina.

“It is a normal phenomenon for La Nina to closely follow El Nino. Among the six El Nino events that ended in the spring since 1981, five transitioned to La Nina conditions in the coming summer,” said Zheng Zhihai, chief forecaster at the National Climate Center.

From June to July, the lingering effects of the El Nino event will give rise to more precipitation in areas like the Yangtze River Basin. In August, it is expected that La Nina will propel the subtropical high northward, leading to above-average rainfall and larger rainy areas in Northeast China and North China, Zheng said.

“During the pre-flood season, South China saw above-average

precipitation, with Guangdong province recording exceptionally high rainfall,” he said, adding that this year's flood season will be characterized by more floods than droughts, and special attention should be paid to disasters like flooding and landslides.

During the summer, as La Nina develops and El Nino recedes, the tropical monsoon trough will move westward and northward, potentially triggering anticyclones in the Philippines and resulting in fewer typhoons, Jia said.

“It is expected that this year will see 21 to 24 typhoons in the northwestern Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea, slightly fewer than the typical level of 25. Among them, six to eight typhoons are expected to make landfall in China, close to the typical level of seven,” said Dai Kan, deputy director of the National Meteorological Center.

The typhoons are expected to be of strong intensity and mainly affect the eastern areas of South China and the coastal areas of East China. It is possible that one or two will move northward, potentially making landfall or bringing severe impacts to North China, Dai said.

## Chinese scientists design 3D e-skin

A team of Chinese scientists has created the world's first bio-inspired electronic skin with a 3D structure that mimics three mechanical signals found in human skin.

With its intricate 3D distribution, sensory receptors in human skin adeptly perceive external forces and strain. By mimicking this spatial distribution, researchers from Tsinghua University developed an e-skin that replicates the structure of human skin, featuring its own “epidermis,” “dermis” and “subcutaneous tissue”.

“Their spatial arrangement closely mimics the distribution of tactile receptor cells within human skin.”

Zhang Yihui, corresponding author of the study

The e-skin is capable of achieving simultaneous decoding and perception of three mechanical signals — pressure, friction and strain — at the physical level, according to a study published recently in the journal Science.

“A patch of the e-skin, comparable in size to the tip of an index finger, is equipped with 240 metal sensors, each ranging from two to three hundred micrometers in size,” said Zhang Yihui, the corresponding author of the study.

“Their spatial arrangement closely mimics the distribution of tactile receptor cells within human skin.”

The sensors amass signals that are processed and then refined through deep learning algorithms, allowing the biomimetic skin to discern the texture and contours of objects with remarkable precision.

It exhibits a pressure position perception resolution of about 0.1 millimeters, rivaling the sensitivity of genuine human skin, according to the study.

The e-skin holds the potential to be integrated into the fingertips of medical robots for precise early-stage diagnostics and interventions. It can also be used as a bandage to offer real-time monitoring of vital health metrics, including blood oxygen saturation and heart rate, Zhang said.

XINHUA

### Briefly

#### 3 trapped in collapsed tunnel found dead

The bodies of three people trapped in a tunnel collapse in Qinghai province were found by early Wednesday, local authorities said. The tunnel, under construction in Huzhu Tu autonomous county in the city of Haidong, collapsed on Tuesday afternoon. An investigation into the cause is underway, and business operations of companies involved in the accident have been suspended, the city's emergency management bureau said.

#### 3 dead in flooded coal mine, 5 rescued

Eight people trapped in a flooded coal mine in Shandong province have been found and the search and rescue operation has ended, rescue workers said on Wednesday. One body was found on Monday and five survivors and the other two bodies were found on Tuesday, rescue workers said. The flooding occurred at around 5 pm on Saturday at the Huafeng coal mine in Tai'an. Two of the 10 people working underground at the time managed to escape.

#### Seed bank preserves over 11,000 species

The Germplasm Bank of Wild Species in Yunnan province, the largest of its kind in Asia, has preserved over 11,000 kinds of wild plant seeds, according to the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Kun-

ming Institute of Botany. By the end of last year, the seed bank had preserved more than 94,000 plant seeds of over 11,000 species and housed the seeds of over one-third of the wild plants in China.

#### Aircraft complete demo flights

An ARJ21 regional aircraft and C919 passenger aircraft completed their first demonstration flights with sustainable aviation fuel in Shanghai and Dongying, respectively, on Wednesday, according to the Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China. Sustainable aviation fuel is an alternative to traditional jet fuel. Made from renewable materials, it can reduce carbon emissions by up to 80 percent compared to conventional jet fuel.

#### Political adviser gets life sentence for graft

Sun Shutao, a former senior political adviser in Shandong province, was sentenced to life imprisonment by a court in Shanxi province on Wednesday for accepting bribes of more than 129 million yuan (\$17.8 million). From 2001 to 2023, Sun was found to have taken advantage of his various work posts in Shandong to seek profits for departments and individuals in matters such as project contracting, business operation and job adjustment, the Datong Intermediate People's Court said.

XINHUA—CHINA DAILY

## Volunteers help sick kids reach the top

By ZHU LIXIN in Hefei  
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Nine-year-old Lyu Jingwen, who is wheelchair-bound due to spinal muscular atrophy, scaled the peaks of Huangshan Mountain in Anhui province on Monday with the help of volunteers.

As part of a charity program to celebrate Children's Day, which was on Saturday, Jingwen and 38 other children with rare diseases from across the country were carried up the mountain.

“After learning about the mountain through a textbook in school, I had been dreaming of visiting it, but I thought I had no chance to make it to the top,” she said.

Jingwen, who lives in Guangdong province, was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy when she was about two years old and cannot stand on her own.

The mountain, also known as Yellow Mountain, is inscribed on UNESCO's world cultural heritage list and its natural heritage list. A UNESCO Global Geopark, it has a spectacular granite landscape.

The activity was supported by more than 150 volunteers from nine teams, including the scenic spot's volunteer service team and the local Blue Sky Rescue team.

Though there were cable cars to help relieve the volunteers' burden, they had to carry the children in their wheelchairs for



Two volunteers and a child with a rare disease pose for a photo at Huangshan Mountain in East China's Anhui province on Monday.

FAN CHENGZHU / FOR CHINA DAILY

most of the journey.

Cheng Jian, one of the main organizers of the charity program, has paraplegia. He has been organizing the program since 2006, when 26 handicapped people were brought to the mountain peaks.

“After initial contacts with children with rare diseases years ago, I started to learn about their suffering and that of their families,” Cheng said. He expanded the volunteer service to children with rare diseases in 2021.

“I hoped to help give them some encouragement,” he said. Jingwen's mother, Tao Yang,

said, “We can hardly travel with her on our own, let alone climb mountains.”

She said the journey to the mountain meant a lot to Jingwen and the rest of the family.

Du Xu, one of the volunteers and a sophomore at Huangshan University, said, “Seeing the children getting excited made me really happy.”

Cheng said the program has helped more than 1,000 handicapped people from around the world visit the mountain, with the help of more than 5,300 volunteers.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Pernicious collusion seeks to erase Beijing's redline on Taiwan question

The so-called Taiwan-US Defense Industry Forum, being held on Thursday, is positioned as being unofficial. Ostensibly, it is organized by the Taipei-based "Taiwan Defense Industry Development Association" and the so-called US-Taiwan Business Council. While the members of the US delegation participating in the forum are supposedly all representatives of 27 US defense contractors, accompanied by a retired US Marine Corps officer. But even taking that at face value, the intent and security consequences are such that it cannot be viewed as business as usual for the US arms merchants.

It might be tempting to those unwilling to face squarely the intent to view the forum as merely a continuation of what was already in place under the preceding Tsai Ing-wen authorities of the same ruling Democratic Progressive Party on the Chinese island — an impression reinforced by the participating US defense contractors being basically the same group that had presented themselves at last year's event, along with Steven Rudder, the commanding general of the US Marine Corps Pacific until September 2022.

But that would be to ignore the changed context in which the event is taking place. As some have pointed out, it is the first come-and-sell by the major US arms suppliers, including Lockheed Martin and Raytheon, since Taiwan inaugurated another DPP leader, who is a "more dangerous" radical separatist than his predecessor.

The visiting US delegation is scheduled to meet with the island's independence-minded new leader, Lai Ching-te, and his deputy, Hsiao Bi-khim and other senior local officials, to discuss the island's procurement requirements for warships and warplanes, advanced defense technologies and drones.

Beijing has made repeated, very serious representations with Washington, urging the latter to stop "sending wrong signals" to the DPP authorities on Taiwan. But in actual fact, these have stopped being just "signals". They are calculated moves whose potential to blow apart the status quo of the Taiwan Strait should not be taken lightly. The dangerous real-world impact of the US giving too much cause-support to the DPP's agenda-driven weapons buying is palpable. It is no longer an ignorable long shot for those on the island gambling that they can buy enough time to stamp their design for the island on global perceptions.

At the just-concluded Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, China's Defense Minister Dong Jun made it clear, beyond any room for misunderstanding, that Beijing could not, and will not tolerate the island edging toward independence. His words may have sounded harsh or hyperbolic to some ears. But they reflect Beijing's resolve to not let the Lai authorities push the envelope on the island's status with the increasingly overt support from "external forces".

Beijing has already clearly established its "redline" on the Taiwan question. Unfortunately, the US administration seems intent on skirting around it, claiming that it still honors the commitments the US has made to not act in a way that would cross that redline. Yet it requires a tremendous stretch of the imagination to believe that the defense forum qualifies as "unofficial" or upholds the one-China principle in its true form. As a result of the pernicious collusion of Taipei and Washington, Beijing has had to reiterate in no uncertain terms that it cannot renounce the use of force in the face of the threat to China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

US President Joe Biden made clear the provocative intentions of his administration's encouragement of the separatists on the island in an interview with Time on Tuesday, in which he said he does not rule out the possibility of US military intervention in the event of a cross-Strait conflict. But no pressure or threat can shake the Chinese government and people's strong determination, firm will and strong ability to defend the nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said.

The dangerous potential of the incremental approach Washington and Taipei seem to have embraced lies precisely in such seemingly innocuous moves as Thursday's defense forum.

## Visit lays firm foundation for CPEC 2.0

The large business delegation Pakistani Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has brought with him on his five-day visit to China, that started on Tuesday, indicates deepening pragmatic economic cooperation is a key part of the agenda for his second visit to China since he took office in March.

Apart from Beijing, where the Pakistani prime minister and the Chinese leadership will burnish the traditional friendship between the two countries, Sharif and the business delegation he leads will also visit Xi'an and Shenzhen, regional growth engines in Northeast and South China, respectively, with the aim of exploring new opportunities for cooperation.

High inflation and unemployment have exerted considerable downward pressure on Pakistan's economy. That's an important reason why the Sharif government attaches tremendous significance to upgrading the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

The CPEC is a flagship program of the Belt and Road Initiative that has stimulated Pakistan's economic growth and brought tangible benefits to local people since it was launched in 2015. Reportedly, the two sides are looking to raise the CPEC to a higher level by promoting industry, energy, technology, innovation, green transition and opening-up of the Pakistani market to provide sustainable impetus for the country's socioeconomic development over the next decade.

Both sides have expressed the hope that Sharif's visit will help lay a solid foundation for the second phase of the program, which is expected to yield further economic benefits for the two countries, by building on the achievements of the first phase. During that process, the two sides should encourage more Pakistani companies to cooperate with Chinese enterprises, and more Chinese businesses to invest in the South Asian country.

That the Pakistani business delegation consists of representatives of 79 enterprises in industry, agriculture, mining, energy and information technology shows the fields in which Pakistan is seeking to strengthen its cooperation with China. And aerospace, science and technology, education and cultural and people-to-people exchanges are reportedly other sectors in which the Sharif government would like to tap the potential for expanded cooperation.

To facilitate the broadening and deepening of cooperation, Pakistan should formulate more reasonable pro-investment policies and implement related reforms to substantially improve the country's business environment so as to attract more Chinese companies to invest in Pakistan. Meanwhile, as urged by Beijing, Islamabad should take more concrete actions to ensure the safety of Chinese people living and working in Pakistan.

How to further strengthen bilateral anti-terrorist cooperation has likely been a focus of Sharif's meeting in Beijing. Shortly before Sharif's China visit, eleven militants were put in custody. They were accused of being involved in carrying out a deadly suicide attack at Dasu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, on March 26 that killed five Chinese engineers, along with their Pakistani driver. It is expected that the Pakistani military will step up its crackdown on militants in the coming months in a bid to show its resolve to address the safety concerns of the Chinese people working and living in Pakistan.

China is also willing to strengthen cooperation with Pakistan within the framework of the United Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation, promote regional unity and safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of developing countries. It is to be hoped that under the leadership of the Sharif government, Pakistan will enter a new stage of political unity, social stability, controllable security and sustainable development. Sharif's visit shows that China and Pakistan will continue to support each other, and work hand in hand to push the China-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperative partnership to a new level.

Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## More needs to be done to ensure SOEs' house-buying plan works

The most noteworthy change in the package of policies recently rolled out by the authorities to boost the flagging real estate sector was the one encouraging city governments to organize local State-owned enterprises to purchase unsold commercial houses as government-subsidized housing.

The central bank earmarked 300 billion yuan (\$41.4 billion) for government-subsidized housing loans, encouraging and guiding financial institutions to support local SOEs purchasing unsold commercial housing. Following such principle requirements at the national level, more detailed and guideline documents are likely to be formulated in the near future. In fact, local SOEs in several cities such as Zhengzhou and Qingdao have piloted the purchase of commercial housing for this purpose in the past few years, and the latest central government initiative only

means more intensive actions.

The purchase of commercial housing by SOEs seems like a problem for the real estate sector, but the key to its effectiveness lies in whether it can stop the decline in the real estate sector, promote the delivery of purchased houses to buyers, facilitate the benign circle between real estate upstream and downstream enterprises, and smooth the cycle between real estate, government finance, financial institutions and related industries.

At present, a number of measures rolled out by central and local governments will take care of real estate inventory and accelerate the supply of affordable government-subsidized housing.

All latest real estate initiatives need to further focus on the core goal of smoothing the cycle of the entire economic system in order to better stabilize the fundamen-

tals of the economy.

First-tier cities should make greater efforts to stabilize the real estate market by liberalizing purchase restrictions more vigorously and introducing a more clear purchase plan for SOEs.

The advantage of this approach is that it gives local governments the autonomy to take decisions on the basis of local conditions. However, from the perspective of the urgency of stabilizing the real estate market, core and key cities need to do more, and only in this way can local governments, financial institutions and enterprises overcome their difficulties and work together to solve the "one-stop" problem of financing, buying and lending.

Relevant departments should also roll out preferential tax policies for the purchase of commercial housing for affordable housing.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

## Nothing unilateral about the moon and stars

China selected the South Pole-Aitken basin on the far side of the moon as the landing point for its Chang'e 6 probe.

Formed about billions of years ago, it is possibly one of the oldest basins in the solar system, and might offer insights into the history of the moon, the Earth, the sun and all the planets.

In other words, by sending Chang'e 6 to collect soil samples from the basin, China is widening mankind's knowledge horizon vis-a-vis the moon and the solar system. This achievement and that of setting up the Queqiao series, or mankind's first series of relay satellites to communicate with the lunar probe on the moon's

far side, would not have been possible without the effort of generations of domestic space scientists.

Instead of treating the mission as a race the way the United States and the erstwhile Soviet Union did during the Cold War, China has kept an open mind about its space endeavors, sticking to the principle of enhancing international cooperation in space on the basis of equality and mutual benefit, peaceful utilization, and inclusive development.

China has kept its door open for international space cooperation. The far-side mission also included international payloads such as the European Space Agen-

cy's lunar surface negative ion analyzer, France's radon detector, Italy's laser retro reflector and Pakistan's CubeSat.

Such an open attitude deserves to be echoed with goodwill by other nations, especially the United States. It was not until December 2023 that NASA granted permission to its funded researchers to apply for access to Chang'e 5 lunar samples, despite prohibiting most other bilateral activities. The US needs to remain open about cooperating with China and other countries in space. After all, the moon does not belong to any single country.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## Correct understanding of each other key to repairing ties

**Editor's note:** The following are excerpts of a speech given by Cui Tiankai, former Chinese ambassador to the United States, at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore last week, as well as his responses to some of the questions he was asked about Sino-US relations:

China and the United States must have a clear understanding of each other. If we regard each other as opponents, and if we believe that there must be a zero-sum competition between major powers, we may have to resort to unnecessary deterrence, which is likely to escalate into open conflict.

If our goal is to work together for a more stable world, even if there are differences, we can still regard each other as a potential partner for common goals and shared interests.

The Ukraine crisis and the conflict in the Middle East have served to spur the world to strive to establish a balanced and effective new security architecture. We Asians have learned the lessons of war and have been working together effectively over the past few decades in that direction. Although we have various differences, we see greater common interests and

find new ways for coexistence.

The global security architecture should not abandon historical legacies, such as the United Nations Security Council, which was established by mankind based on the lessons of the two world wars. We must recognize that the legitimate security interests of all countries should be taken care of and a balanced approach should be adopted. No one should have the illusion that once they have the upper hand on the battlefield, they can force the other side to compromise at the negotiation table. Doing so will only result in the continuation of war and an arms race.

We must also take into account some emerging possible security threats, such as those associated with artificial intelligence. China has started dialogue with the US on AI in an effort to help build a new global security architecture in that regard.

As for the South China Sea issue, we still hope to communicate and negotiate with our Philippine friends and try to resolve

the problem peacefully and bilaterally.

The situation between China and the Philippines has not always been like this. We must think about what has changed and what has caused these changes.

No party should have the illusion that they can violate China's sovereignty and territorial integrity without paying the due price. That some people frequently mention defense cooperation treaties with other countries can only be regarded as an open threat. Such coercive remarks will only escalate tensions.

Under the framework of ASEAN+, we have carried out many maritime cooperation projects with the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Had there been no interference from any external forces, everything would have gone smoothly. External forces are trying to take advantage of existing disputes, aggravate them and make things more difficult to resolve. This is the situation we are facing today.

## CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

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## COMMENT

Asit K. Biswas and Cecilia Tortajada

## China pioneer of river ethics and management

The world faces a grave water crisis, both in magnitude and extent. Though there are many reasons behind this sad situation, three stand out.

First, the global population has continued to increase, along with commercial and industrial activities. Water is essential for the survival of humans and ecosystems. All important human activities need water, including food production, power generation, and industrial and commercial activities. With increasing population and urbanization, water requirements to support these activities have increased as well.

Second, water management practices are inefficient across the world, though the situation in a few countries such as China and Singapore has been steadily improving, especially in the post-2010 period. For example, water consumption in terms of per 10,000 yuan (\$1,408) of GDP and per 10,000 yuan of industrial added value in China declined by 33.4 percent and 50.3 percent, respectively, between 2015 and 2022. But even after this remarkable achievement, there is still much room for improving efficiency in all sectors.

And third, the impacts of climate change on water sources are far worse than what was expected even in 2020. This will make water management much more complex and uncertain, but most countries are not prepared enough to overcome or adequately handle these impacts and realize carbon neutrality within the next two to four decades.

## Global situation of river management

Historically, river management has been basically dependent on what has been expedient and cheap, rather than what is best for a country in the long run, without ethical considerations playing any role in river management.

A good example of expedient management is the discharge of untreated or partially treated wastewater into rivers. Consequently, rivers all over the world have become increasingly polluted, impacting human health and aquatic ecosystems. For example, the Cuyahoga River in the United States caught fire at least 13 times and was declared a fire hazard, because of the indiscriminate discharge of industrial wastes such as oil and grease into the river. The last time the river caught fire was in June 1969.

Sadly, at least until 1970, pollution of rivers around the world was considered a duty to be paid for economic growth. Industrial development was linked to prosperity and job creation in cities on the banks of the rivers.

It was in the early 1970s that developed countries realized the environment had to be protected for long-term economic and social well-being, with many of them making commendable progress in cleaning up polluted rivers and lakes during the 1970-2000 period.

## Developing nations lag behind in river cleaning

Developing countries, on the other hand, have made limited progress in cleaning up rivers. As a result, rivers passing through or near urban centers have continued to get more polluted. Consequently, river management thinking has gradually evolved, especially in terms of managing water quality. But despite the significant evolution of river management, commensurate progress in river ethics remains conspicuous by its absence.

In 2009, Li Guoying, then with the Chinese Yellow River Conservancy Commission and now China's Minister of Water Resources, proposed that rivers should be viewed as vital beings so that society recognized the initiative, teleonomy, and creativeness of rivers, which means rivers also have inherent value(s) and are subject of rights. He noted, though, that expanding the object of moral concern to natural beings like rivers (mountains) is highly controversial in academia and with the public.

At the second United Nations Water Conference in New York in March 2023, Li pro-



**The granting of legal personhood to an inanimate object such as a river, and appointment of spokespersons to speak on its behalf will likely help protect the river and the riparian environment.**

posed four important initiatives, including the need to respect the rights of rivers in nature, regard rivers as life forms, construct river ethics, maintain the healthy life of rivers and realize the harmonious coexistence of people and rivers.

And at the World Water Forum, in Bali, Indonesia, in May 2024, he said there is a need to develop a community of good practices on river ethics across the world.

## River ethics in other countries

A country that has made good progress in developing water ethics is New Zealand. In 2017, the New Zealand government granted legal personhood to the Whanganui River — the first time in history that an inanimate object like a river was accorded the legal status of a person. According to the Te Awa Tupua Act (Whanganui River Claims Settlement Act) of 2017, the river and its environment are recognized as living beings called Te Awa Tupua.

In fact, the Whanganui River from the mountains to the sea, its tributaries, and all its physical and spiritual elements are recognized as "a living and indivisible whole" having similar legal rights and responsibilities as any living person. The members of the Whanganui tribe who live along this 290-kilometre-long river and its tributaries have had a deep connection with the river for at least 900 years, meaning their association with the river began 700

years before the first European settlers arrived in New Zealand.

The Whanganui tribe takes its name, spirit and strength from the river, and its members rely on the river for much of their food and have built villages on its banks. For them, the river is a "highway" that connects the tribes. They consider the river to be their ancestor and spiritual mentor and use its water to heal the sick. The local Maori people have a saying "I am the river, and the river is me."

Under the Te Awa Tupua Act, two people (one representative each of Whanganui Iwi tribe and the New Zealand government) are the river's spokespersons, and their duty is to protect its interest and the environment around it.

## Pioneering act inspires others

The Te Awa Tupua Act has been a pioneer in managing rivers. Encouraged by this development, the Uttarakhand High Court in India has granted legal personhood to River Ganges within the territory of Uttarakhand province. Similarly, Bangladesh has provided legal personhood to all its rivers.

The granting of legal personhood to an inanimate object such as a river, and appointment of spokespersons to speak on its behalf will likely help protect the river and the riparian environment.

China has been developing its river ethics with its own unique national characteristics to ensure that the technical, economic, environmental and ethical aspects of rivers are properly taken care of, which should further improve its current river management practices.

The developments in China and New Zealand, and some other countries, show there are many ways in which the principles and practices of river ethics will evolve in the future. This will ensure the survival, health, and integrity of the ecosystems of rivers. Simultaneously, rivers and the ecosystems around them will contribute to high-quality development, contributing to truly sustainable development in not only China but also the rest of the world, by bringing significantly more benefits to a much larger number of people. This in turn will help protect the interests of both humans and nature.

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Muhammad Asif Noor



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

## Beijing and Islamabad building a community with a shared future

The ongoing five-day visit of Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to China from Tuesday marks a significant moment in the longstanding and robust partnership between the two countries. This visit, the first by Sharif since the new Pakistani government took office, underscores the deep-rooted ties and strategic cooperation that characterize the relationship between the two neighbors.

The concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, championed by China, finds a tangible embodiment in its relationship with Pakistan, reflecting a partnership built on mutual respect, strategic alignment, and shared aspirations for regional and global peace and prosperity.

Given the significance of Sharif's visit, it is important to consider the historical context and the strategic depth of China-Pakistan relations. Over the years, Sino-Pakistani relations have evolved into an "all-weather strategic cooperative partnership", a term that aptly captures the essence of their ties. Whether in times of peace or crisis, China and Pakistan have stood by each other, demonstrating mutual support and cooperation. Sharif's visit therefore is expected to further consolidate this partnership, with both sides poised to discuss a range of issues crucial to bilateral relations as well as regional stability.

One of the key aspects of Sharif's visit is the discussion on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative. Launched in 2013, the CPEC has been instrumental in transforming Pakistan's economic landscape. It has led to significant infrastructure development, including the construction and development of roads, highways, power plants and ports, which are aimed at addressing Pakistan's critical energy shortage and improving connectivity.

During the visit, both sides are likely to explore ways to further upgrade and expand CPEC, ensuring that it continues to contribute to Pakistan's economic growth, industrialization and sustainable development.

In addition to infrastructure, the focus will also be on enhancing cooperation in other key areas such as industry, agriculture, new energy and information and communications technology. China's commitment to sharing its technological advancements and expertise with Pakistan is a testament to the collaborative spirit that underpins their relationship. This cooperation is aimed at not only boosting economic growth but also fostering innovation and sustainable development in Pakistan.

In fact, by aligning their development strategies, China and Pakistan are setting an example of how strategic partnerships can drive progress and prosperity.

Security cooperation is another crucial area that will be high on the agenda during Sharif's visit to China. The recent terrorist attacks targeting Chinese nationals in Pakistan have highlighted the importance of enhanced security measures to protect both Chinese and Pakistani citizens involved in CPEC projects.

Both countries are committed to deepening cooperation in the fight against terrorism, ensuring that such incidents do not derail their collaborative efforts. China's unwavering support for Pakistan's fight against terrorism and its efforts to maintain regional stability are indicative of the strong trust and strategic alignment between the two countries.

Sharif's visit to China comes at a time when regional and global dynamics are rapidly evolving. The geopolitical landscape in South Asia is marked by complexities and challenges, and the China-Pakistan partnership plays a crucial role in maintaining regional stability. Both countries share a common vision for peace and development, and their coordinated efforts in multilateral forums such as the United Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization reflect their commitment to upholding fairness and justice on global issues.

Sharif's visit is also expected to strengthen people-to-people relations between the two countries, which are a cornerstone of China-Pakistan relations. Cultural exchanges, educational collaboration and tourism are areas that hold immense potential for deepening mutual understanding and friendship between the people of the two countries. These interactions not only foster goodwill but also build a strong foundation for long-term cooperation. And the emphasis on cultural and educational exchanges is a testament to the holistic approach that both countries adopt in nurturing their relationship.

As a matter of fact, the significance of Sharif's ongoing visit extends beyond bilateral cooperation. It is a reaffirmation of the strategic importance that both countries place on their relationship. The high-level meetings scheduled during Sharif's visit will provide an opportunity for the two sides to engage in comprehensive and in-depth strategic communication. Such interactions are essential for aligning the two countries' visions and strategies, and ensuring their partnership continues to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Moreover, this visit is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of China-Pakistan relations. Despite the challenges posed by global and regional issues and the growing uncertainties, created by, among other things, the COVID-19 pandemic and terrorism, both countries have demonstrated a remarkable capacity to adapt to the changing times and cooperate on critical issues.

The successful implementation of CPEC projects during these challenging times is a reflection of the two countries' commitment and strategic foresight. The concept of a community with a shared future for mankind is best exemplified by the ironclad partnership between China and Pakistan, a partnership that continues to thrive and evolve, bringing greater benefits to both countries and their peoples.

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SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

## GLOBAL VIEWS

ONG TEE KEAT

## Addressing sore points ahead

Since picking sides in geopolitical rivalry is not an option for ASEAN, its brainchild RCEP is certainly a better bet for spearheading the endeavor

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement has long been touted as the biggest ever free trade agreement in the world, even before it came into effect in 2022.

Prior to its inception, the combined GDP of all the 15 RCEP signatories in 2019, amounting to \$25.84 trillion, had already surpassed that of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement and the European Economic Area, which stood at \$24.37 trillion and \$18.85 trillion respectively. The mega FTA was optimistically prognosticated to generate significant gains for the world economy. It is anticipated that the RCEP could add \$209 billion annually to world incomes and \$500 billion to world trade by 2030.

As the saying goes: The proof of the pudding is in the eating. True enough, in 2022 — the year the RCEP was inaugurated — the total volume of trade between China and the 14 other RCEP signatories rose by 7.5 percent, amounting to 12.95 trillion yuan (\$1.78 trillion) or 30.8 percent of the total global trade of China. The 2023 figures witnessed a slight dip to 12.6 trillion yuan, but still constituted an increase of 5.3 percent vis-a-vis the pre-RCEP figures in 2021.

Statistics show that among the 14 other RCEP signatories, 10 countries have posted a double-digit rise in their trade with China. In the case of Indonesia, Singapore, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos, the increase has even exceeded 20 percent.

The key objective of the RCEP is to form a larger and advanced FTA beyond the existing ASEAN+1 free trade agreements with the inclusion of several new aspects, such as government procurement (Chapter 16), more tariffs to be eliminated in the trade in goods (Chapter 2) with the ultimate goal of doing away with 92 percent of all product tariffs within 20 years, allowing free flow of data among RCEP members, alongside prohibiting data localization for Electronic Commerce.

As of today, the nomenclature of the RCEP and its rules are still relatively alien to some segments of the business community in Southeast Asia. They are more well versed in the respective FTAs. The coexistence of FTAs and the RCEP rules has in several instances resulted in the so-called

noodle bowl problem where some ASEAN entrepreneurs get confused and entangled in the diverse tariffs under the multiple FTAs and RCEP.

Understandably, these are part of the teething problems that have surfaced after the RCEP came into effect. The RCEP is the brainchild of ASEAN. It was initiated by the regional bloc amid rising protectionism, geopolitical tension and pandemic shock. It is a mammoth endeavor of economic integration in the Asia-Pacific region, rooted in ASEAN centrality. It's no exaggeration to say that the RCEP represents an important step toward creating an ideal framework of global trade and investment rules, as was proclaimed by the ASEAN leaders in the Joint Leaders' Statement on the RCEP.

In retrospect, the RCEP is inseparable from the evolving ASEAN Economic Community. One of the key pillars of the latter — "Integration into the global economy" — is now embodied in several ASEAN+1 FTAs and the full implementation of the RCEP.

Although the RCEP is now widely hailed as the first mega FTA for East Asia, where rapid economic growth gravitates, the 15-member deal owes its origin to intra-ASEAN economic cooperation. The ASEAN Economic Community was no doubt the special purpose vehicle dedicated to realizing the ideal of creating a single market and production base, where goods, services, investments, skilled labor and capital are free to flow within the region.

The AEC Blueprint has been evolving from the 2015 version to that of the present due next year (2025). Certain quarters are optimistic that the RCEP looks set to propel the AEC ideal into traction. Nonetheless, the ongoing progressive tariff elimination merely clears the path for the ultimate creation of a single market and production base. It is not as easy as a walk in the park. The present stage of RCEP implementation surely necessitates ample governmental intervening guidance alongside private sector involvement. While celebrating enhanced trade among the RCEP signatory countries, doubling down efforts to promote the use of RCEP rules is of utmost urgency in some ASEAN member states where the level of utilization is relatively low.

Parallel to this, given that most if not all the ASEAN member states share the same grave concern of supply chain disruption, China alongside developed economies in the RCEP, namely Japan,

the Republic of Korea, Australia and New Zealand, should perhaps endeavor collectively to hedge against such a potentially disruptive crisis in the interest of keeping supply chains resilient. The endeavor should be above geopolitical dynamics. None of the ASEAN member states should be left out of the endeavor as their concerns and interests are intertwined in the face of challenges.

This calls into question the inclusivity of the US-sponsored "Indo-Pacific" Economic Framework for Prosperity supply chain agreement that encompasses seven of the ASEAN member states, leaving out the three least developed member states, namely Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos. Alongside this, China, the second-largest economy with a full gamut of supply chains, is also conspicuously left out on the pretext of averting overdependence on China.

Yet, an alternative supply chain without China is nowhere to be seen. The Supply Chain Agreement merely promised to form a "Crisis Response Network" to give early warnings to IPEF countries of potential supply chain disruptions, but is devoid of viable contingencies that can deliver in times of crisis.

In retrospect, the lack of coherent global governance and just leadership manifested by the unipolar power in the distribution of medical equipment and vaccines at the height of the COVID-19 outbreak is still fresh in our minds. It could be glossed over as "an elephant in the room" but the bitter experience should certainly serve as a good reminder to us.

Given that 11 out of the 14 member states of the IPEF are RCEP signatories, ASEAN should be confident enough to proactively commission a similar if not better "Crisis Response" mechanism under the watch of the RCEP. Since picking sides in the prevailing big-power geopolitical rivalry is not an option for ASEAN, henceforth better inclusivity is anticipated to prevail in the proposed mechanism. And the RCEP — a genuine vehicle dedicated to fostering regional integration — is certainly a better bet for spearheading the endeavor.

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SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

DATO MAJID KHAN

## Dynamic propulsion

Building on past achievements, Malaysia and China are driving the trajectory of relations higher

In 1974, when Malaysia and China bridged the ideology gaps and formally established diplomatic relations, it was at the height of the Cold War and the times of uncertainty. With the strong commitment by leaders of the two countries, issues relating to the legacy of

the Cold War were gradually resolved, allowing for mutual trust and bilateral ties to grow from strength to strength. It became a demonstration that despite different political and social systems, Malaysia and China could exist and develop meaningful and mutually beneficial cooperation in many sectors benefiting their two peoples.

For Malaysia, engagement with China provided it an opportunity to reset its foreign policy toward non-alignment. It signaled the importance of China to Malaysia's development and well-being, which remains the case today.

Looking back at this visionary decision now, we can be proud that it had not only benefited Malaysia and China but also the Association of Southeast Asian Nations region too. Today, ASEAN-China cooperation has bloomed, which covers all sectors, contributing to regional prosperity, peace and stability.

Over the past five decades, Malaysia-China relations have expanded and deepened to the current level of a comprehensive strategic partnership, despite leadership changes in both Malaysia and China. The current Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim is following in the footsteps of all his predecessors in building upon and strengthening the legacy of Najib Tun Razak's Malaysia-China policy. In his meetings with Chinese leaders, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim reaffirmed Malaysia's commitment to further deepening existing ties and seeking new areas of cooperation.

The consensus reached by President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim on the building of a China-Malaysia community with a shared future has brought the bilateral relations to a higher level. This development is expected to be an additional bonding platform between the two peoples and an important contribution to the building of a harmonious, peaceful and interconnected world. The visa waiver arrangement introduced by both Malaysia and China for travel by their respective citizens was indeed a historic and strategic move to facilitate people-to-people exchanges. It reflects the mutual trust and friendship that have been forged over the past 50 years.

Relations between Malaysia and China have been carefully nurtured and managed over the years, and today the two countries enjoy a healthy and robust relationship. The initial atmosphere dictated by suspicion in governing the relationship in the formative years has been transformed into one of trust, respect and a key partnership. It is one of the most successful stories of Malaysia's foreign policy. All the nine prime ministers of Malaysia after Tun Abdul Razak shared his vision on the strategy and importance of having good relations with China. Each of these leaders during their respective administrations have made a positive contribution to further consolidating Tun Abdul Razak's legacy. As the date of the anniversary of the establishing of diplomatic relations between the two countries approaches, Malaysians are in a festive mood looking forward with great expectation to an even brighter future for Malaysia-China relations.

In the past five decades, Malaysia and China have benefited from each other's developments and national policies that particularly boosted economic ties, especially trade and investment. China's reform and opening-up policy, membership of the World Trade Organization, good-neighborly policy, the China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement and other platforms such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership have had positive effects that have helped to consolidate bilateral ties and deepen economic integration over the years.

Since 2009, China has been Malaysia's largest trading partner, the total value of bilateral trade is 450.8 billion yuan (\$62.3 billion) or 17.1 percent of Malaysia's total external trade. A review of the snapshot of Malaysia-China economic linkages provides a clear demonstration of the success of the two countries' relations since 1974, resulting in mutual prosperity and harmony. It also provides clear evidence that upholding free trade and multilateralism are important policy tools for the Global South for its modernization and development goals.

As the Malaysia-China relationship embarks on the next phase, there is immense potential for deeper collaboration, enhanced connectivity and shared prosperity, with several developments likely to shape the future upward trajectory of bilateral ties.

Economic integration through platforms such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the ASEAN-China Free-trade Agreement, and the RCEP will enhance connectivity, infrastructure development, trade facilitation, supply chain linkages, industrial diversification and economic growth.

Malaysia should seize the opportunity that China offers through cooperation in innovation and technology, in particular, in artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and new businesses associated with emerging green industries such as electric vehicles.

Malaysia can also learn from China's experiences in its successful modernization programs, such as in the field of poverty eradication, project delivery and implementation, talent and technical skills training, upgrading of SME skills in trade promotion, modern agriculture, food security and public health.

Opportunities for cooperation in R&D, education, tourism, structured student exchanges and other fields could further intensify people-to-people exchanges, strengthening mutual understanding and friendship.

The promotion of civilization dialogue values, in parallel, Malaysia's core values of "Madani" and promotes progress toward a Malaysia-China community with a shared future, as agreed upon by the leaders of both Malaysia and China.

Both Malaysia and China are to remain committed to the principles guiding bilateral relations as stipulated in the joint communique between Malaysia and China signed on May 31, 1974, particularly on the provision relating to peaceful coexistence despite the differences in social systems as well as holding the one-China Policy.

Malaysia-China relations have traversed a remarkable journey since 1974, evolving from historical connections to a strategic partnership and comprehensive cooperation. The seeds planted in 1974 have grown to a healthy tree as the two nations celebrate the five-decade long diplomatic ties. The resilience and dynamism of bilateral relations have reflected the common aspiration, mutual respect, and interest of both countries.

Based on the trust and goodwill that Malaysia and China have enjoyed over the past 50 years, there is no doubt that relations will remain robust in the many years to come. Both Malaysia and China must seize opportunities, address challenges, and further build upon the foundation of trust and friendship built by our leaders. By fostering more dialogue, innovation, and connectivity, both countries can unlock new avenues for collaboration and realize their shared vision of prosperity and an interconnected future.

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JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

## LIFE

In 2009, a year after the country was swept by sports fever following Beijing's hosting of the 2008 Summer Olympics, Yu Shi, a teenager from Liaoning province, set out on a journey to pursue his dream. Despite his parents' reservations, Yu, also known as Yosh Yu, chose to veer off the conventional education path, opting instead for a basketball school, a local institution that nurtures future athletic talent for the Chinese Basketball Association.

Little did he anticipate that the years ahead would resemble a life akin to that of an ascetic monk. Every winter morning at 5:30, amid the harsh chill of northeastern China with temperatures frequently dropping below -20 C, he would commence his training, occasionally concluding the session clad only in a gym vest and shorts, sweat crystallizing into ice on his lashes. He and his comrades often longed for rain the following day to provide a brief reprieve from the arduous laps around the field.

As Yu saw friends depart one by one due to the demanding regimen, he persisted for five years and ultimately secured admission to Liaoning Technical University based on his sporting prowess.

Despite once envisioning his future as a basketball coach or an office worker, the young man's fate took an unexpected turn.

In 2018, amid more than 15,000 hopefuls, he emerged as one of the 30 young talents groomed for director Wuershan's fantastic epic trilogy, *Creation of the Gods*, one of the most financially endowed projects in the annals of Chinese cinema.

The epic, loosely inspired by the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) novel *Fengshen Yangyi* (The Investiture of the Gods), recounts the collapse of a tyrant at the end of the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC) and the rise of an army of justice led by Ji Fa, who founded the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-771 BC), portrayed by Yu.

A subversive adaptation differing from most previous TV dramas and cinematic remakes of the novel, *Creation of the Gods I: Kingdom of Storms*, which would later captivate audiences upon its July 2023 release, Yu marked his cinematic debut as a daring test pilot in the action-studded blockbuster, *Born to Fly*.

Three months prior to the release of the franchise's inaugural chapter, *Creation of the Gods I: Kingdom of Storms*, which would later captivate audiences upon its July 2023 release, Yu marked his cinematic debut as a daring test pilot in the action-studded blockbuster, *Born to Fly*.

However, it is his portrayal of Ji Fa, the valiant and benevolent warrior, his role in *Creation of the Gods I: Kingdom of Storms*, that propelled Yu swiftly into the limelight, solidifying his status as one of the country's most sought-after young stars.

The acclaim was further bolstered by his subsequent success in the popular TV series, *To the Wonder*, a lyrical narrative that features him as a herder of the Kazak ethnic group in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

The discerning gaze of major international studios also fell upon him. Disney's *Wish* extended an invitation to him to lend his voice to Valentino, a pajama-wearing pet lamb, while the legendary Japanese maestro Hayao Miyazaki's classic *Howl's Moving Castle* entrusted him to bring to life the character of the enigmatic wizard Howl in the Mandarin version.

Earlier this year, Yu embraced a swift transition from a young actor to a mentor for aspiring actors when he was invited to serve as a jury member for the ReelFocus Fresh Blood Short Film Program, a segment of the 14th Beijing International Film Festival.

"I'm the kind of person who truly believes in fate. It feels like everything is intricately connected, one piece leading to the next," Yu told China Daily during an exclusive interview.

Now, amid a jam-packed schedule that scarcely allows the 27-year-old actor a few days off throughout the year, Yu takes a moment to reflect during the interview, contemplating the pressures, confusion, and perseverance through tough times, and the valuable lessons gleaned from sports and early acting training.

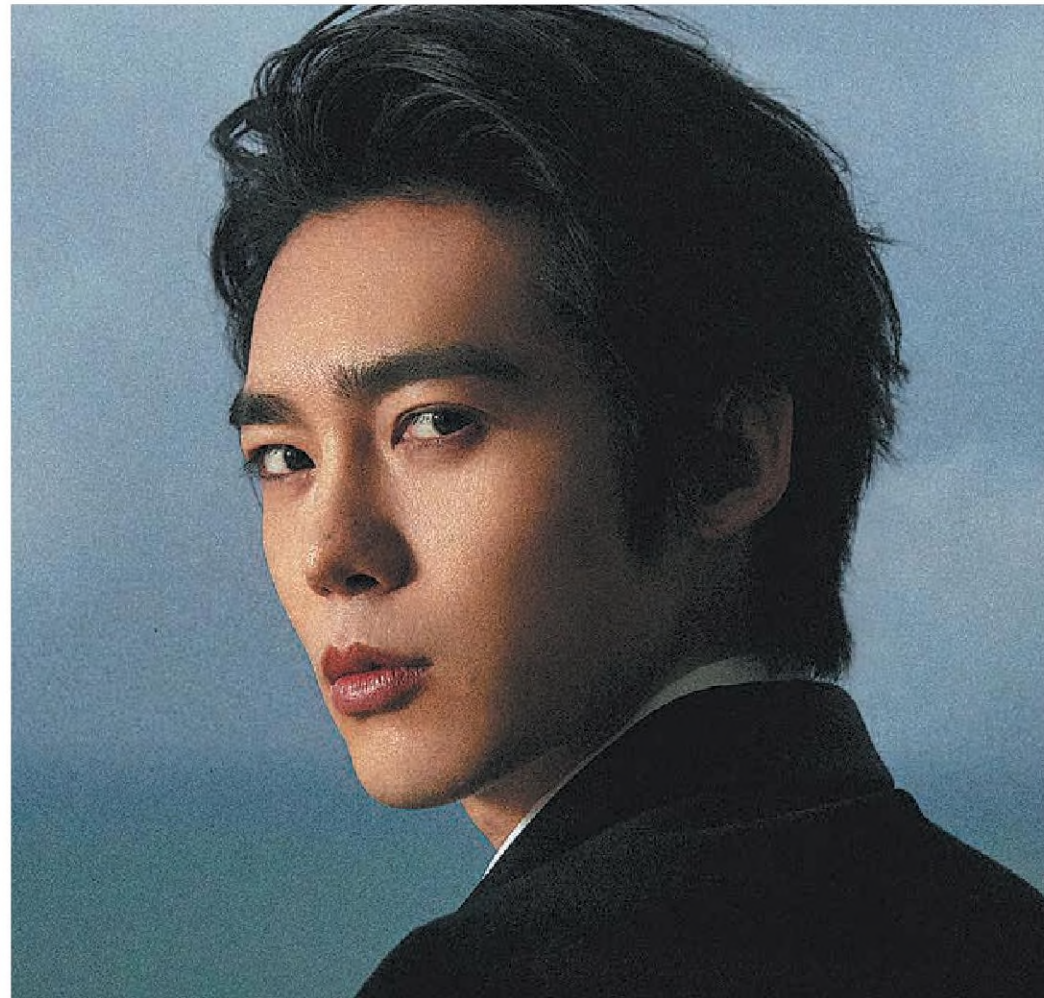
## A life changed

Marking the latest endeavor set to catapult Yu's popularity to new heights, *To the Wonder*, an eight-episode series adapted from writer Li Juan's essay collection, *My Altay*, concluded its initial run on China Central Television's CCTV-1 on May 13.

The show obtained 8.8 points out of 10 on the major review aggregator Douban, making it the highest-rated drama on the platform this year. It also received praise for its contribution to boosting tourism in Altay, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, from the National Radio and Television Administration during a seminar on May 30.

Li, the writer, spent her childhood and youth in Altay, a picturesque region in northern Xinjiang that she was intimately acquainted with, featuring vast grasslands, desert landscapes and hospitable locals. In a way, *My Altay* serves as her autobiographical account.

The series, *To the Wonder*, set against a poetic backdrop, unfolds the story of Li Wenxiu, a woman of the Han ethnic group, who aspires to become a writer. She struggles as an unskilled waitress in Urumqi, Xinjiang, before returning to her mother and grandmother who reside in a Kazak nomadic region in Xinjiang. When she decides to



## SPORTING CHANCE GIVES ACTOR HIS BIG ROLE

Self-discipline and training provides leading man with qualities to conquer the screen, **Ku Fan** reports.



Actor Yu Shi (top) has emerged as one of the most sought-after young stars, with popular roles, such as Batay, a Kazak youth in *To the Wonder* (above, and left, in middle row), test pilot Deng Fang in *Born to Fly* (center), and Ji Fa in *Creation of the Gods I: Kingdom of Storms* (right, in middle row). PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

assist the family in managing a small convenience store, an unexpected encounter with Batay, the youngest son of a local Kazak nomad, sparks a blossoming affection between the two young people.

Batay, portrayed by Yu, is depicted as a modern Kazak youth, who is open-minded and harbors a deep love for horses. In the series, the character undergoes training in Qingdao, Shandong province, and works at a horse ranch before returning home to aid his father in tending a sizable herd of 300 sheep, seven camels and 20 horses.

During an earlier interview, director Teng Congcong reflected on her decision to cast Yu. "Initially, I came across a photo of Yu riding a horse and I was captivated. It had been a while since I had seen such masculine power and upright handsomeness," she recalls.

In June 2022, Teng met Yu for the first time. At that point, due to the delayed release of *Born to Fly* and the uncertain scheduling of the first movie of *Creation of the Gods*, Yu was navigating one of the most challenging periods in his acting career.

Yu recommended his account on Douyin, a popular short video-sharing platform, to the director, sparking Teng's curiosity to browse his over 300 posts, with many showcasing his horseback riding and archery skills.

"When I first learned horse riding, the greatest challenge was overcoming my fear when releasing the reins, like a driver letting go of the steering wheel," Yu recalls.

His equestrian skills were a pivotal part of the 6-month-long training required by director Wuershan for the *Creation of the Gods* trilogy, which was filmed consecutively over 18 months, mostly in Qingdao.

"I systematically learned equestrian and archery for three years in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, after wrapping up the shoot," Yu recalls.

The curriculum spans a range of subjects, from the history of horse domestication to the distinctive characteristics of war horses in different dynasties, as well as the evolutionary chronicles of cavalry armor and weaponry.

With a wealth of knowledge and practical experience, Yu also serves as the equestrian and archery instructor for *To the Wonder*, executing his own intricate stunts while ensuring the safety of the other horse riders and assisting in guiding the cinematography aesthetics of such action scenes.

"It's not just about riding fast and aiming to shoot the target accurately. The actors need to know when they should pause for a close-up shot or when they should make some movements," he explains.

Meanwhile, he dedicated six months to learning the Kazak language to vividly portray his role. "In those days, my script often consisted of three lines: Chinese, Kazak and pinyin. The pinyin was a mnemonic aid for mastering pronunciation. I can't read Kazak, so I had to use this 'simple' method. If they revised the lines, I had to memorize them all again," he adds, laughing.

But his memories in Altay, the filming location, are full of vitality and breathtaking beauty. Joining other cast members, he arrived in Altay in late April last year, during the transition from winter to spring.

"Back then, the snow up on the mountains hadn't melted all the way and the grass was just poking through the dirt. Taking it all in, there was this sort of lonely, yet peaceful beauty," he recalls, adding that during the shoot, he visited the families of herders to delve deeper into his role. "The locals were so welcoming, kind and genuine. Those days really stuck with me. Even back in Beijing, I still love that grassland vibe, keeping it simple and focusing on what truly matters to me, avoiding all the unnecessary noise."

Now, being busily engaged in shooting a new project, Yu is also nurturing his dream of becoming a director.

"I want to helm a film that discusses societal norms surrounding success. This movie revolves around a group of exceptional individuals mistaken for mentally disturbed patients, living within the confines of a psychiatric facility. I aim to explore the blurred lines between madness and genius," he says.

Revealing that his directorial debut will be a dark comedy, Yu says he hopes the audience will laugh their way into questioning life itself. "Through this film, I hope viewers grasp a profound concept: Everyone should be true to themselves, undeterred by external pressures."

From an unknown university freshman to finding himself at the center of the luxuriously budgeted epic trilogy, *Creation of the Gods*, the journey to the release of the first movie was fraught with challenges. He has endured a roller-coaster life and weathered three years of solitude.

During that period, he faced doubts, turned down offers for two online series with themes he disliked and even contemplated a career as a professional equestrian. His directorial debut, which is still in the planning stage, in a sense, reflects his contemplation on life.

"There's a Chinese saying, 'When the cart reaches the mountain, there will be a way forward,' meaning there's always a path out of adversity. But the key is: You must prepare extensively for that journey ahead," he concludes with a bright smile.

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LIFE

# Exhibition highlights maritime cultural fusion

Visitors step into the Baba Nyonya world on display in Hainan, exploring the rich history of its heritage, **Chen Bowen** reports in Haikou.

A silver engraved cigarette case from Singapore is on display in Qionghai, South China's Hainan province, where it serves as a poignant reminder of Lim Boon Keng's enduring legacy and the lasting friendships and goodwill that transcend borders and time.

Manufactured in 1925 by the London firm Henry Perkins & Sons, the cigarette case is inscribed with the heartfelt message: "Presented to Dr. Lim Boon Keng, Xiamen University, in tribute to his friends and well-wishers — Singapore, February 25, 1926."

Lim, a prominent Peranakan activist in the early 20th century, was not only a champion of educational reform but also a bridge between Southeast Asian Peranakans and their cultural roots in China.

In 1921, Lim took on the role of the second president of Xiamen University in China, a position he held until 1937. He was dedicated to fostering cultural and philanthropic ties between Singapore and China, which was endorsed by his friends and well-wishers who presented him with the sterling cigarette case.

Thanks to the generosity of his grandson Lim Kok Lian, this treasured cigarette case is now one of the exhibits of the *Exploring the World of Baba Nyonya* exhibition. Showcasing the Maritime Silk Road and Peranakan culture, it is being held at the China (Hainan) Museum of The South China Sea from March 26 to June 26.

The Peranakan, also known as the Baba (male) and Nyonya (female), are mixed-race descendants of immigrants from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) of China who intermarried with indigenous Southeast Asians. This unique community is a vibrant blend of Chinese and Malay cultures, resulting in a rich and distinctive Baba Nyonya heritage.

Han Junyuan, a Malaysian-Chinese descendant living in Hainan, visited the exhibition in late March. "I've heard of Lim Boon Keng's legacy as an exceptional Straits Chinese. It was a special moment for me to finally see his related item showcased in the exhibition," he says.

The exhibition has curated a collection of 124 pieces and sets of cultural relics from the Asian Civilisations Museum and the Peranakan Museum in Singapore, along with 13 pieces of Peranakan furniture from the China (Hainan) Museum of The South China Sea.

Drawing on cultural relics and historical materials, the exhibition balances both popularity and professionalism to showcase the important cultural elements from a variety of perspectives. From Peranakan portraits to traditional clothing, household items, wedding customs and architectural styles, the exhibition offers a comprehensive view of the vibrant and intricate Baba Nyonya world.

stand as the hallmark cultural representatives of the Baba Nyonya culture. They serve as a bridge between the past and present, blending traditional aesthetics with contemporary styles to create a unique sartorial expression.

One of the most iconic examples of Baba Nyonya fashion is the traditional attire of the Nyonya, known as the Kebaya. This traditional blouse-dress encapsulates the rich cultural heritage of the community, featuring intricate embroidery, vibrant colors and delicate patterns that tell stories of tradition and craftsmanship. The Kebaya not only preserves traditional cultural elements but also evolves with the times, inspiring contemporary fashion trends in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, notes WeChat public account Museum Headlines.

Beyond clothing, accessories play a vital role in enhancing the beauty and storytelling of Baba Nyonya fashion. Intricately beaded shoes, ornate jewelry and delicate hair ornaments are just a few examples of the accessories that adorn Baba Nyonya garments, adding an extra layer of detail and symbolism to the overall look.

The food culture of the Baba Nyonya community is a testament to the intricate fusion of Chinese traditions and local influences. Their dishes often incorporate aus-

picious elements drawn from Chinese culture in the hope of bringing luck, prosperity and good fortune to the dining table.

The architecture of the Baba Nyonya community also reflects the unique fusion of Chinese and Malaysian traditions.

In the exhibition area, visitors are greeted with a palette of colors that include white, red and green, each carrying its own significance and cultural heritage. White and red are prominent colors in traditional Chinese Hokkien architecture, symbolizing purity, prosperity and good fortune. Green, on the other hand, is considered an auspicious color in Malaysian culture, representing growth, harmony and balance.

By incorporating these colors into the exhibition space, visitors can connect with the themes of Baba Nyonya culture and deepen their immersion in the world being showcased.

Through the vibrant hues and diverse color palette of Baba Nyonya architecture, visitors are invited to appreciate the diversity and harmonious blend of traditions that define the community's unique identity, according to Museum Headlines.

Xin Lixue, director of the China (Hainan) Museum of The South China Sea, says that the exhibition serves as a bridge for deepening cultural



exchanges and fostering mutual understanding between China and Southeast Asia.

"Through the exploration of cultural relics and artifacts, visitors are transported back in time to envision the bustling scene of maritime trade routes, witness the rich legacy of Peranakan traditions and appreciate the harmonious integration of Chinese, Singaporean and Malaysian cultural influences," Xin says.

Clement Onn, deputy director of Curatorial and Research of the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore, highlights the Peranakan's

deep-rooted connections to both Chinese traditions and the diverse local communities of Southeast Asia.

"They have not only preserved the customs and practices of their Chinese ancestors but also actively engaged with and assimilated into the multicultural fabric of the regions where they settled, resulting in a vibrant fusion of cultures that is uniquely their own," Onn says.

Onn hopes that through this exhibition, audiences will gain a better understanding of the Baba Nyonya culture, which will also serve as a catalyst for promoting cultural awareness and cross-cultural appreciation among Chinese audiences.

"By showcasing the integrated cultures of Singapore and other countries in Southeast Asia, the exhibition aims to foster a spirit of curiosity, dialogue and exchange, encouraging audiences to embrace the diversity and richness of Southeast Asian heritage," he says.

Liu Yuzhu, head of the China Foundation for Cultural Heritage Conservation, underscores the significance of the Baba Nyonya culture as a testament to the vibrant fusion of Chinese and Southeast Asian influences along the ancient Maritime Silk Road.

"The Peranakan culture is celebrated for its uniqueness, richness and colorful tapestry. It stands as a living embodiment of the enduring people-to-people connections and friendships that have flourished among the diverse peoples of Asian countries over the centuries," Liu says.

Han, the visitor, says that witnessing the intricate details of the traditional costumes, the relics' exquisite craftsmanship and the stories captured in old photos was truly a profound experience.

"By providing a platform for showcasing the cultural heritage of the Baba Nyonya community, the ongoing exhibition serves as a means for dialogue, understanding and appreciation of the interconnectedness of cultures," Han adds.

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From top: Accessories, porcelain and clothing, symbols of the vibrant Baba Nyonya culture, take center stage at the *Exploring the World of Baba Nyonya* exhibition in Qionghai, Hainan province, from March 26 to June 26. From top above: At the opening ceremony, traditional Baba Nyonya outfits are displayed. A section of the exhibition features ceramics. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# Australian teens learn Chinese to broaden horizon

SYDNEY — For many teenagers in culturally diverse Australia, mastering a new language other than English opens up an avenue to bond with friends of a different background in the same community, explore alternative ways of life and view the world with a broader horizon.

The Australia Final of the 17th "Chinese Bridge" Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign Secondary School Students wrapped up in Sydney on May 27, with 12 young contestants from all across the Oceanic country.

After taking a written test on basic knowledge in the opening round, the Australian teenagers walked onto the stage, delivering speeches that echoed the theme of "Fly High with Chinese".

In the final round, a spectrum of talent shows brought the competition to a climax, where the contenders dressed up in elaborate Chinese traditional clothing, such as *hanfu*, *qipao* and an entire set of Peking Opera costumes, to demonstrate their understanding of Chinese culture.

Among these skilled polyglots, some sang classical Chinese songs, like *Tian Mi Mi* (*Cherie*, originally by Teresa Teng), while others showcased their gifted musical instrument skills. They were not only adept at interpreting Chinese music with instruments such as the violin, flute and piccolo but also excelled in playing the cucurbit flute, known as a *hulusi*.

The final round also featured performances of both traditional Chinese dance and modern hip-hop, and some contestants displayed their calligraphy abilities.

Hallie Richards from Methodist Ladies' College eventually emerged as the winner of this year's Australia final.

With the support of her mother, Richards has been studying Chinese since the age of five.

This year marks her second time competing in the Chinese proficiency competition.

"That was crazy. After all this time I finally did it. I always thought maybe I could get first place but when it happened, it was kind of a surprise," the lively 15-year-old girl said post-match.

Richards says that what drew her toward Chinese culture was not only because she's been studying the language for the past decade.

"Once you can have a con-

versation with people in Chinese, you're more encouraged to keep learning the language, because you can actually converse with people," she says, noting that the language helped her experience the rich culture and history of China.

Growing up in Australia, a melting pot of diverse cultures, Richards has numerous Chinese friends and often visits their homes, during which she can speak with their parents and familiarize herself with Chinese customs.

"Learning about their lives gives you a broader perspective on the world," says Richards, who aspires to become an ambassador to boost communication between Australian and Chinese cultures.

Learning about their (the Chinese people's) lives gives you a broader perspective on the world."

Hallie Richards, winner of the year's Australia final of Chinese proficiency competition

During the event, China's acting Consul General in Sydney Wang Chunsheng pointed out that the Chinese language embodies the extensive and profound history and culture of China, with the number of people learning Chinese in Australia having surged to 190,000.

He hopes that more Australian friends will learn Chinese, pay more visits to China, share their firsthand experiences of China-Australia exchanges, and help enhance mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples.

"To understand a culture and its people, it is important to have cross-cultural experiences. This includes not only language but also knowledge of customs, history, geography and arts," says Robert Kok, deputy mayor of Sydney.

"I think all of you are the best ambassadors for Australia when you represent us in China," Kok adds.

According to the Chinese Consulate General in Sydney, the organizer of the event, top performers will travel to China for the global championship.

XINHUA



Top: One contestant of the Australia final of the "Chinese Bridge" Chinese proficiency competition gives a speech in *hanfu* costume in Sydney on May 27. Above: Another shows his skills in calligraphy. PHOTOS BY MA PING / XINHUA

## LIFE

## Postal worker delivers better lives

National May 1 Labor Medal winner goes above and beyond to overcome obstacles, committing to the development of his hometown, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

Lhalung Dorje, a 17-year China Post staff member in his hometown Ruogai county in Sichuan province, has not only overcome the demanding conditions of the plateau over the years to deliver to residents, but also helped promote the area's produce via livestreaming.

He recently drove five hours from his hometown to Wenchuan county in the northwest of the province to sell cherries.

"It's the season for local cherries and I go there at this time each year to help promote their sales through livestreaming," says the 40-year-old man.

During preparations for the broadcasts, he is a man of few words who appears to be a bit reserved when meeting strangers.

Yet, once the camera rolls, he is charged with the energy to vigorously explain the details of the local specialty.

The five-hour drive late last month didn't seem to deter his enthusiasm. "I'm used to being on the road," he says.

Years of delivering packages across the county and interactions with the residents have given him a deep understanding of the local produce and knowledge to find high-quality products at affordable prices.

In March 2021, he started his first livestreaming sales event, selling dried yak meat, milk powder, local pickled vegetables, dried mushrooms, buckwheat noodles and fruits.

"I tried to help my fellow villagers in pastoral areas sell their high-quality products so they can receive extra income," he says.

To date, he has broadcast about 10 livestreaming sessions, with sales reaching approximately 4 million yuan (\$552,000).

Yet, Lhalung Dorje's main responsibility still lies with his postal service.

Ruogai sits in the Aba Tibetan and Qiang autonomous prefecture on the northeastern edge of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

The special geographical conditions make for stunning landscapes, yet pose challenges for travelers, especially postal service workers like Lhalung Dorje.

His routine routes are on average 3,500 meters above sea level and run more than 100 kilometers in their entirety through pastoral and forest areas that are full of hazards.

To date, he has covered more than 500,000 km and delivered more than 5 million documents and packages, without a miss.

His dedication to the industry has won him numerous awards, including the National May 1 Labor Medal in 2021, one of the most prestigious awards for working people in China.

Influenced by his father, who also worked as a postal delivery man, Lhalung Dorje considers it a huge honor to live up to his responsibilities.



Clockwise from top: Lhalung Dorje delivers a college admission notice to a student in Ruogai county in Sichuan province; Lhalung Dorje in his van. He has covered more than 500,000 kilometers and delivered more than 5 million posts in the past 17 years; he discusses deliveries with his colleague. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"I felt like my father was a hero, wearing the uniform, carrying his bag and traversing the mountains and valleys," he recalls.

He remembers loving to sit on the front of the bike as a child and feeling the warmth of his father behind him, even during the wintertime.

The sight of the villagers sharing joy with his father when receiving their letters and packages has long been etched in his mind.

In 2007, Lhalung Dorje followed in his father's tracks.

"He told me on the first day that now that I had made my choice, I had to see it through," Lhalung Dorje says.

One of the hardest routes runs through five villages and includes about 12,000 people of the Tibetan, Hui, Qiang and Yi ethnic groups. It used to be part of the Long March (1934-36) by the Red Army and is

full of revolutionary marks.

The high altitude is a hotbed for fickle weather while the complex plateau landforms make things all the more difficult for Lhalung Dorje.

He has had many close calls over the years as he has often encountered blizzards, mudslides, landslides and rockfalls.

The worst one happened in March 2018.

"It was spring but the temperature still lingered around zero and dropped to dozens of degrees below zero at midnight," he recalls.

"I was on my way home and suddenly a blizzard hit and the postal van slipped into a deep pit at the side of the road, causing the oil pipe to leak and freeze," he adds.

There was no cellphone signal, so he couldn't call for help.

"I had to rely on my experience to crawl under the van for repairs. I

worked on repairing it for a while and then got back into the van to warm up. I must have done it a dozen times or so," he says, adding that the last time he crawled under the van, his clothes and pants were frozen to the road surface.

However, it didn't work, so he curled up in the driver's cabin, tired, hungry and cold, eventually falling asleep.

His colleague Sun Ping, who came to his rescue, still feels a chill when speaking about the situation.

"When we finally found him, it was already midnight. ... He looked as if he had been frozen, covered all over with black oil and his hair stuck together," Sun recalls.

Those setbacks didn't hold Lhalung Dorje back and he continued on the road soon after.

"My job is ordinary. But within my abilities, there is nothing more

meaningful than this," he says.

The three postal vehicles he previously wore out serve as proof of his commitment, which has also enabled him to witness the significant changes in Ruogai's development.

"In the past, the roads on the grassland were uneven and full of potholes. It took four hours to travel 3 or 4 km. But now it's just a 30-minute round trip," he says.

Reflecting on his experiences of delivering parcels by motorcycle in the past, Lhalung Dorje has noticed that almost every household now has a vehicle.

The local households' improved living standards are also shown by the increasing number of packages from online orders.

"The period before the Spring Festival is our peak season and we usually handle 4,000 to 5,000 par-

cels daily. It's common to work until 1 or 2 in the morning," he says, adding that the items are becoming more diverse, including guitars, cosmetics and pet food.

Additionally, he can sense the education level on the rise, as he has delivered more college admission notices in recent years.

His own two daughters were admitted to college a couple of years ago.

"I delivered the notices for them myself," Lhalung Dorje says with pride.

He has come to see that his bag carries "a better life" for the locals.

Liu Zongpeng, general manager of China Post's operations in Ruogai, says Lhalung Dorje's good deeds have been known to many of the county's residents.

"Most of them call him 'brother,'" Liu says.

He often works overtime to deliver medicines for the senior residents and keeps shovels and oxygen tanks in the postal vehicles for travelers he meets who might have their car break down or suffer altitude sickness.

"It's not too much to say his service has covered all the local villages (in the county) and serves as a bridge between the local herders and the outside world," Liu says.

Local herdsman Lokhor still feels indebted to Lhalung Dorje, who helped him sell more than 80 yaks in 2022 when the pandemic cut the county off from the outside.

"It was November and I couldn't go out and the buyers couldn't come in, and the yaks were losing weight," Lokhor says.

His whole family was counting on the sales of the yaks, with a mortgage to pay and children to feed.

After learning of Lokhor's plight, Lhalung Dorje made inquiries for potential buyers during his work trips and eventually connected him to a local pastoral company.

Lhalung Dorje says he has come to realize there's a lot more he could do as the country's rural vitalization strategy was fully implemented.

He is now in charge of the overall postal service quality across the county, as well as the cooperation agreements with private delivery service providers in the area.

He has also been invited to government organs and institutes of higher learning to give lectures about his experiences of rural development and his work.

To better live up to his responsibilities as a national model worker, Lhalung Dorje has used his spare time to pick up new skills and has finished administrative management studies at the Open University of China.

"I was born and raised here. I love this land very much and I hope to contribute to the development of my hometown," he says.

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## Violinist strings together anecdotes and classical music

By CHENG YUEZHU  
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In a lighthearted yet serene ambience, Chinese American violinist Chenyi Avsharian, formerly known as Chen Yi, shared the anecdotes behind each piece she was about to perform, in hopes of drawing the audience nearer to classical music and eliciting emotions deep within their hearts.

The *Boundless Horizon* violin recital on May 17 at the Beijing Concert Hall, with accompaniment by Hong Kong pianist Cheng Wai, marked the beginning of Avsharian's solo concert tour.

Launched in Beijing, the tour includes several other cities in China, including Shanghai, Shandong province's Weihai, Jiangsu province's Nanjing and Fujian province's Xiamen. The tour's finale will be held in October at Carnegie Hall in New York in collaboration with Sri Lankan pianist Rohan De Silva.

According to Avsharian, the recital's arrangement follows the style popular among violinists back in the 1910s, predominantly featuring technically demanding

pieces. The program encompasses a wide range of music genres that showcase the violin's versatility.

Most of the selected pieces span from 1834 to 1982, covering over a century of music.

"Different historical epochs can share similar spirits and sometimes history can provide us with many answers to our lives. I've chosen this period of slightly more than 100 years that is neither too close nor too distant from us, hoping to offer some inspiration to everyone," she says.

Apart from classical music pieces written for the violin, the program features genres representing different countries and regions, including *Summertime* from *Porgy and Bess*, a jazz-inspired opera by American composer George Gershwin, *Le Grand Tango* by Argentine composer Astor Piazzolla, and Chinese folk song *Jasmine Flower*.

For this tour, she also adopts an unusual storytelling format. Before each piece, she introduces it and tells background stories to integrate music and storytelling and to offer the audience an



Left: Chinese American violinist Chenyi Avsharian begins her 2024 tour at the Beijing Concert Hall on May 17. Right: Avsharian adopts an unusual storytelling format for the tour. PHOTOS BY LUO WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

enriched concertgoing experience.

"In this era of the internet and new media, people's attention spans are getting shorter and their interest in classical music might be waning," Avsharian says.

"I have meticulously prepared the background stories for each

piece, hoping that through this approach, everyone can gain a deeper understanding of the life stories of the composers when they wrote them. I believe that each composition and each story has its unique highlight."

Her violin journey started under

the guidance of her father Chen Yonggang. Later, she was recognized and taken in as a student by prominent violin educators including Lin Yaoji.

As a young violinist, she garnered multiple awards, such as a silver prize at the sixth Chinese



Golden Bell Award for Music in 2007 and a gold medal at the second China International Violin Competition in 2008.

Now 40 years old, she has been serving for 10 years as the chief operating officer of Shar Music, a US-based company supplying instruments and accessories.

"What moves people about her is not just her skilled technique. The delicate music and rich poetic tones give her performances a unique brilliance," says Li Xincuo, a renowned conductor.

In the future, Avsharian hopes to bring more excellent music and better narratives to the audience, allowing them to see classical music from a different perspective.

"Many people may find classical music distant but in reality, many fascinating stories lie behind the pieces. So, I hope to use my meager strength to bring classical music closer to everyone," she adds.

"The violin is an instrument very close to life itself. I believe that if we use the violin to express our deepest emotions, everyone might find a serene corner within for self-reconciliation."