

New momentum

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CHINA DAILY

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Exchange of letters boosts China-UAE ties

President Xi replies after schoolchildren write to him about nations' friendship

By MO JINGXI
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Du Qiangwei, a Chinese-language teacher in the United Arab Emirates, once thought that the belief that all foreigners love giant pandas was just a myth. But she reconsidered this notion after meeting Hamdan Shakhbutoo Al Nahyan, an Emirati pupil who named himself "Giant Panda" in Chinese.

In 2022, Hamdan transferred from a private school to the Hamdan Bin Zayed School, a public school in the UAE that introduced Chinese-language classes in 2006.

Du was impressed by the 11-year-old's keen interest in a book about how giant pandas are born and raised. "Sometimes I have to call him Da Xiongmao (Giant Panda) to get his attention," Du said.

Recently, Hamdan directly expressed to President Xi Jinping his wish to visit China to see giant pandas. On a piece of paper on which he had drawn several green bamboo plants, the Emirati pupil wrote: "This year marks the 40th anniversary of China and the UAE holding hands. I want to go to China to see giant pandas eating bamboo, and I also want to climb the Great Wall to become a hero."

"When I grow up, I hope to become the UAE ambassador to China," he added.

Hamdan is one of 40 elementary and middle school student representatives from Hamdan Bin Zayed School and Yas School in the UAE who wrote letters to President Xi in Chinese, expressing their admiration and love for Chinese culture.

Like Hamdan, the children shared their various wishes with Xi, including wanting him to visit the UAE to taste authentic Emirati cuisine and hoping to play a soccer match with Xi. Saif, a 10-year-old student at Yas School, the largest public school in the UAE, shared his favorite Chinese poem with "Grandpa Xi".

"A bosom friend afar brings a distant land near," he wrote, explaining that "even though China and the UAE are thousands of miles apart, we are the best of friends".

Late last month, they were thrilled to learn that President Xi had replied to their letters.

"I have read each letter from you," Xi said in his reply. "From the lines and drawings, I felt all your love for Chinese culture and your expectation for friendship between the two countries." The president also encouraged them to master the language, learn about China and contribute to promoting friendship between the two countries.

Hamdan, who was very excited and moved upon receiving the reply, said, "I can't wait to go to China tomorrow."

In July 2019, the two countries, in a ceremony witnessed by Xi and Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who was then crown prince of Abu Dhabi and is now the UAE president, signed a memorandum in Beijing to officially launch the Hundred Schools Project to expand Chinese-language education in the Arab country.

Du, the Chinese teacher, said: "Over the past five years, the number of schools offering Chinese courses and students learning Chinese has been increasing year by year. When I first came here in 2019, only about 20 public schools were offering Chinese-language classes."

Currently, 171 schools in the UAE offer such courses, with 71,000 students — from kindergarten to Grade 12 — learning Chinese. Both Hamdan Bin Zayed School and Yas School are demonstration schools for the project.

As Xi mentioned in his reply letter, learning Chinese has become a new trend in the UAE.

Fatma Al Bastaki, project manager of the Hundred Schools Project with the Emirates Schools Establishment, said that learning Mandarin in school broadens the knowledge and horizons of young Emiratis.

"This decision to include Mandarin teaching is creating UAE citizens who become global citizens, as they are better able to understand and absorb traditions of another culture while maintaining the UAE heritage," she said.

According to the project manager, the Chinese Bridge Club Abu Dhabi branch was established in October at Hamdan Bin Zayed School and Yas School.

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Museum of memories



Students from China and the United States appreciate exhibits at Hebei Museum in Shijiazhuang, the capital of Hebei province, on Sunday. A group of 51 students and teachers from the US state of Iowa is visiting Hebei as part of China's five-year program to invite 50,000 US youths to the country for exchanges and study. ZHAI YUJIA / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Experts call for more measures to expand demand

By LIU ZHIHUA
and OUYANG SHIJIA

Overall price levels in China are likely to rise, from moderately to significantly, as domestic demand is expected to improve amid a series of policy measures aimed at boosting consumption and increasing investment, experts said.

They also said the decline in the nation's producer price index, or PPI, which gauges factory-gate prices, is expected to have further slowed down, perhaps on a large scale, in May. However, they have called for more measures to expand aggregate demand, highlighting the persistent imbalances of supply and demand in the economy.

Their comments came as the National Bureau of Statistics is scheduled to announce on Wednesday the latest readings of the consumer price index, which is a key indicator of inflation, and the PPI.

"As economic recovery is on track and gathering pace, CPI growth is likely to speed up while the drop in the PPI will narrow," said Cai Hanpian, a researcher at Peking University's National Economy Research Center.

Considering factors such as expansion of economic activities, stable pork prices and an uptick in the prices of utilities, Cai said she expects that the CPI in May will have risen 0.6 percent year-on-year, up 0.3 percentage point compared with the growth in April.

Wen Bin, chief economist at China Minsheng Bank, estimated that the core CPI, which excludes volatile food and energy prices and is deemed a better gauge of the supply-demand relationship, will have risen moderately on both a monthly and a yearly basis in May.

The CPI will have climbed 0.5 percent from a year ago in May while staying flat from April, Wen said. Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International, said he expected that the CPI will grow by around 0.4 percent year-on-year in both May and June.

As for the PPI, Cai, the Peking University researcher, said it is likely to have registered a 1.6 percent decline in May, which would be about 0.9 percentage point slower compared with a month earlier.

The expected slowdown in the decline will probably be driven mainly by faster growth in prices of

key manufactured goods, Cai said. Wang, from Golden Credit Rating, estimated that the PPI in May will likely have increased on a monthly basis and showed a much slower decline on a yearly basis.

Experts warned that the current low levels of prices reflect insufficient demand compared with supply in the real economy, and they said more supportive measures should be released to further boost market expectations and expand demand.

According to the NBS, the PPI stayed negative for the 19th consecutive month in April, dropping 2.5 percent year-on-year, following a 2.8 percent fall in March.

The CPI, on the other hand, rose 0.3 percent year-on-year in April after a 0.1 percent gain in March.

"The supply of goods and services is stable, and insufficient demand is a main cause of current low-level prices, which justifies recent policy measures boosting demand, like the promotion of large-scale equipment replacement and trade-in deals for consumer goods," said Wang. "The key is avoiding a cycle of low prices, low income and low consumption."

Stabilizing the property market will be critical to boosting consum-

er confidence, he said, adding that measures including handing out consumption vouchers and enhancing the consumption environment are also important.

Xiong Yuan, chief economist at Guosheng Securities, said that more efforts should be made on the demand side to stabilize prices.

He suggested that the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, further cut the reserve requirement ratio and interest rates. Furthermore, the government should accelerate the implementation of recently released support policies for the real estate industry, speed up issuance of ultra-long special treasury bonds, and intensify trade-in deals for consumer goods, he said.

Qi Xiangdong, chairman of Chinese cybersecurity company Qi-Anxin Technology Group, said that supportive policy measures have been helping enterprises pursue high-quality development, but more efforts are expected to further enhance financing for private enterprises and remove invisible market barriers for them.

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Making a splash



Paddlers splash water as part of a ritual between races during Dragon Boat Festival celebrations in Hong Kong on Monday. Dragon Boat Festival, also known as Duanwu Festival, falls on the fifth day of the fifth month in the Chinese lunar calendar. TYRONE SIU / REUTERS

US pushed off center stage in West Asia

Without much fanfare, the United States is slowly being maneuvered off center stage in West Asia. With the US having dominated geopolitical primacy in the region for decades, its failure to deliver security has seen a "vacuum for peace" emerge. Into this vacuum has stepped, tentatively and cautiously, the Arab League, supported by China and Russia.

A new style of regional, and even global, statecraft is emerging and it recognizes that indivisible and mutual security is achieved by dialogue, through which consensus is secured. This ethos contrasts starkly with the "gun barrel" unilateral approach that has been the hallmark of American primacy, particularly in the past 30 years.

WORLD WATCH By Warwick Powell

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the US straddled the world stage as the unrivaled hegemon. Paradoxically, it was during this period, when the US was most secure, that the US embarked on its most intense and sustained period of military intervention. An ethos of "kinetic first", a foreign policy approach that prioritizes military action and the use of force, dominated US foreign policy. According to Duffy Toft and Sidita Kushi, in their 2022 book *Dying by the Sword*, between 1991 and 2019 the US initiated on average 3.7 military interventions per year, more than the 2.4 per year average initiated between 1946 and 1990.

According to the Costs of War project, these interventions have caused an estimated 3.6 million to 3.8 million indirect deaths in the US post-9/11 war zones, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria,

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BITTERSWEET CEREMONIES MARK TROUBLED TIMES ON US CAMPUSES

Walkouts, cancellations, threats to pro-Palestinian students mar commencement celebrations

By MINGMEI LI in New York
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This year's commencement ceremonies at many universities across the United States were marred by walkouts, pro-Palestinian students being threatened with expulsion and suspension of their degrees, and cancellation of a number of celebrations due to administrations' "safety concerns".

However, despite the majority of the commencement ceremonies — a day for conferring degrees or diplomas

— now being completed, tension is still simmering between school officials and students over the rights and wrongs of campus protests.

Donned in kaffiyeh scarves and waving Palestinian flags, some students used their commencement ceremonies as protest platforms and urged their schools to take stronger action to end the Palestine-Israel conflict.

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PAGE TWO



A graduate waves a Palestinian flag during the UC Berkeley Law School commencement in Berkeley, California, on May 10. JESSICA CHRISTIAN / POLARIS

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Many students and pro-Palestinian protesters also arranged walkouts to oppose school presidents who have not yet agreed to discuss plans for disclosure of interests and divestment from Israel and Israeli companies.

However, celebrations to mark the completion of academic degrees went ahead peacefully at other US universities. This year's cohort, including both undergraduate and graduate students, is the same generation that missed their high school and undergraduate graduation ceremonies due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Harvard walkout

More than 1,000 students walked out of Harvard University's commencement ceremony on the morning of May 23 attended by over 9,000 graduates and their families. Thirteen students who participated in a protest encampment were not allowed to take part in the ceremony after a vote the previous day by Harvard Corporation, the university's governing body. Faculty members had earlier recommended the 13 be allowed to receive their degrees despite participating in the encampment.

Even though the pro-Palestinian protest at Harvard's campus was voluntarily dismantled under an agreement reached by students and the school — seen as a peaceful resolution compared to other schools where police made arrests — tensions remained high.

"As our ceremony proceeds, some among us may choose to take the liberty of expressing themselves to draw attention to events unfolding in the wider world," Harvard's interim president Alan Garber said at the commencement ceremony.

"It is their right to do so," he stated, as he asked the crowd to observe a minute's silence.

However, Garber was loudly booed by students and some faculty members during his speech.

"This semester, our freedom of speech and expressions of solidarity became punishable, leaving our graduation uncertain," Shruthi Kumar, the undergraduate student speaker, said to cheers and applause, while acknowledging the students who had been barred from the ceremony.

Over 1,500 students had petitioned to allow the banned students to participate, and nearly 500 staff and faculty members had spoken on their behalf.

"These are my peers and friends, and I can't in good conscience celebrate when their families are in pain," Kumar said. "This is beyond politics — it's about civil rights and civil disobedience. We're not intending to be disruptive or violent. But it's making a statement, as a community, as the class of 2024."

On the same day, intense protests also took place at the University of California, Los Angeles. Pro-Palestinian protesters rebuilt an encampment on the college grounds, occupied a hall, erected wooden barriers, and effectively blocked access to a small section of the campus.

Around noon, tensions escalated as police and other law enforcement officers arrived at the campus to dismantle the encampment. Clashes between the protesters and the authorities quickly ensued, resulting in several altercations.

Cancellations spread

Another school in Los Angeles, the University of Southern California, was one of the first universities to announce the cancellation of its main graduation ceremony. The event was scheduled for May 10 and more than 65,000 students and guests were expected to attend.

The cancellation followed campus protests over the Israel-Palestine conflict, during which five students were arrested. There was also controversy over the selection of pro-Palestinian student Asna Tabassum as class valedictorian, which was opposed by pro-Israel groups.

Columbia University in New York City, the epicenter of the pro-Palestinian protests, canceled its main university-wide commencement ceremony set for May 15, and instead held smaller ceremonies for each of its 19 colleges. The smaller ceremonies were mostly held at its athletics facility, the Baker Athletics Complex, situated 100 blocks north on 218th Street in Inwood. Columbia's main campus had been locked



Hundreds of students walked out of the 2024 Commencement in Harvard Yard in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to call attention to the plight of Palestinians on May 23. CRAIG WALKER / THE BOSTON GLOBE VIA GETTY IMAGES

Campuses: Protests shake graduation season

down since April 30, after student protesters occupied Hamilton Hall.

Minouche Shafik, the president of Columbia University, called in police to remove the student protesters, with 46 pro-Palestine protesters inside the hall and more than 100 people gathered outside the campus.

Shafik said her decision was based on the school's desire to host the graduation ceremony on campus and to remove the tent encampment, which had occupied the central lawn for two weeks. However, despite two rounds of police intervention, the main commencement ceremony had to be canceled.

"Holding a large commencement ceremony on our campus presented security concerns that unfortunately proved insurmountable," Ben Chang, a university spokesman, said.

In a statement issued by the university on May 1, Shafik said the "drastic escalation of many months of protest activity pushed the university to the brink, creating a disruptive environment for everyone and raising safety risks to an intolerable level."

Darializa Avila Chevalier, an alumna of Columbia University who supports the student protesters, said the students had their priorities straight. "They have been witness-

"This is beyond politics — it's about civil rights and civil disobedience. We're not intending to be disruptive or violent. But it's making a statement, as a community, as the class of 2024."

Shruthi Kumar, a student speaker of Harvard University

ing a genocide for the last seven months," she told China Daily.

Chevalier said she has friends who were at the encampment who were due to graduate this year. "But a graduation (ceremony) is such a small price to pay," she said.

Visual dissent

The graduates not only wore gowns and caps but also donned kaffiyeh scarves,

carried signs, and waved Palestinian flags to call for further divestment by Columbia and to express their anger over the police arrests.

Tarsis Salome, a Columbia social work graduate student, can be seen in a video walking on stage with zip ties on her hands and tearing up a diploma during her graduation ceremony.

At other schools, students came up with other ways during commencement ceremonies to condemn what they considered the inaction of university officials.

New York University held its all-school commencement ceremony at Yankee Stadium on May 15 as scheduled. However, students walked out of the ceremony when NYU president Linda Mills gave her address to the graduates.

While Mills urged being open to people with "whom you might not usually agree," she did not directly address the ongoing tension between the school and students, despite having authorized the arrests of scores of protesters at an encampment set up at Gould Plaza and 14 student protesters outside another encampment at the Paulson Center.

"What would it look like to stretch and to



A student stands in support of Palestine during Washington University's graduation ceremony on May 13, on Francis Olympic Field in St. Louis, Missouri. AP

bridge, to learn from those you might otherwise judge, even reject? Today, as we face a world of war and polarization, this is as important as ever," Mills said, adding there is "enduring desire to be open to those most unlike us".

Outside the stadium, students lined up in the rain to enter the stadium, with only two gates open and increased security measures in place.

"I got there around 9:30 ... it was about 12 o'clock when we ultimately got in," an international relations graduate at NYU, who identified himself as Sammer, told China Daily. He said that despite the "logistics" issue, everything else was great, and he had a good time celebrating with his family.

"This is my first time doing an all-university commencement in person," he said, noting that his undergraduate ceremony was canceled due to COVID-19 precautionary measures.

"It is a time when people are challenging a lot of the institutions we have in place here in the US," he said, adding that he will continue to watch how the protests unfold over the summer and the actions of the students.

Next step

Many students view commencements as formal events where they can hear school board members and officials not only address current situations in the community, but also the next steps the school will take.

Despite student protesters' demands for disclosure and divestment, no university in the US has yet reached an agreement with a student body to end the billions of dollars that college endowments are claimed to have invested in companies that support Israel. School presidents have stated that they have no authority over investment decisions, as they are handled by trustees or investment boards.

Some institutions have reached partial agreements with protesters in recent weeks in relation to issues such as calling for a cease-fire in Gaza, providing financial aid to Palestinian students, and expanding the Palestinian studies curriculum.

Christina Paxson, president of Brown University in Rhode Island, reached an agreement with student representatives to clear a campus encampment on April 30.

The agreement stipulated that students would "refrain from further actions that would violate Brown's conduct code through the end of the academic year, which includes commencement and reunion weekend."

"The devastation and loss of life in the Middle East has prompted many to call for meaningful change, while also raising real issues about how best to accomplish this," Paxson said in a letter issued to the campus community.

"Brown has always prided itself on resolving differences through dialogue, debate and listening to each other. I cannot condone the encampment, which was in violation of university policies. Also, I have been concerned about the escalation in inflammatory rhetoric that we have seen recently and the increase in tensions at campuses across the country. I appreciate the sincere efforts on the part of our students to take steps to prevent further escalation."

The university agreed to invite five students to meet with five members of the Corporation of Brown University last month to present their arguments for divesting Brown's endowment from "companies that facilitate the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory".

Paxson also said she would request that the Advisory Committee on University Resources Management provide a recommendation on divestment by September 30, which will then be taken to the corporation for a vote at its meeting in October.

The New School, a private research university in New York City, has also reached an agreement with students to hold a vote on divestment from Israel.

According to a university announcement issued on May 20, the Investment Committee of the Board of Trustees will make the decision on or before June 14.

The university concluded its schoolwide commencement on May 17. The New York Police Department confirmed it arrested 43 students from the university on May 3.



Top left: Alumni of Columbia law school carry out a silent pro-Palestinian protest with kaffiyehs and banners, calling for a cease-fire during their graduation ceremony in New York on May 13. FATIH AKTA / ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES

Top right: Police clash with pro-Palestinian demonstrators at the Shrine Auditorium, where a commencement ceremony for graduates from Pomona College was being held on May 12, in Los Angeles. RYAN SUN / AP Above: Harvard graduates block off Massachusetts Avenue during a demonstration in Cambridge, on May 23. DAVID RYAN / THE BOSTON GLOBE VIA GETTY IMAGES

TOP NEWS



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (center), who is also the lead candidate for the European People's Party, speaks on Sunday during an event at the EPP headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. GEERT VANDEN WIJNGAERT / AP

Right-wing surge rattles traditional EU powers

Centrists retain majority, but Europe's major economies face political headwinds

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels
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The elections to the European Parliament, which ended on Sunday, resulted in a dramatic shift to the right in several major economies across the 27-member European Union, although the centrists managed to retain their majority.

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French President Emmanuel Macron's Renaissance party suffered an especially humiliating defeat in the hands of Marine Le Pen's National Rally party, prompting Macron to dissolve the National Assembly in a

knee-jerk reaction on Sunday night and announce snap legislative elections on June 30, with a second round on July 7.

Le Pen's National Rally won 31.8 percent of the vote, more than double the share of Macron's Renaissance, which scraped into second place with 15.2 percent, just ahead of the Socialists in the third spot with 14.3 percent.

In his address to the country, Macron said he could not ignore the warning from voters. "This is an essential time for clarification," he said. "I have heard your message, your concerns, and I will not leave them unanswered."

On Monday, in a post on social media platform X, Macron said he is confident "in the capacity of the French people to make the right choice for themselves and for future generations."

"My sole ambition is to be useful

to our country that I love so much," he said.

Le Pen, Macron's archrival in the past two presidential elections, has her eyes on the upcoming legislative elections. If her party wins, Jordan Bardella, president of the National Rally, is likely to become the premier.

"We are ready to take power if the French people have confidence in us in these forthcoming legislative elections," Le Pen said after Sunday's victory. "We are ready to put the country back on its feet."

In Belgium, Prime Minister Alexander De Croo announced his resignation on Sunday after his Flemish Liberals and Democrats party was defeated by right-wing parties.

In Germany, the EU's most populous nation, Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition suffered a stinging defeat in the European elections, with all three parties in his government trailing the conserva-

tives and the far right, preliminary results showed.

Scholz's center-left Social Democrats won 13.9 percent, less than the 15.8 percent it received in the 2019 elections, while the far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, won 15.9 percent, compared with 11 percent in 2019.

The Greens and the Free Democrats, two other parties in the coalition, captured only 11.9 percent and 5.2 percent of the vote, respectively.

"Profound political challenges obviously lie ahead in the two largest EU member states," Carl Bildt, co-chair of the European Council on Foreign Relations and former Swedish prime minister, said in a post on X, with two maps showing Le Pen's domination in France and AfD's dominance in much of former East Germany.

Right and far-right parties also surged in Spain, Italy, Austria and the Netherlands.

Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni's far-right Brothers of Italy won 28 percent of the vote, while the center-left Democratic Party secured 23.7 percent. The Italian populist leader is now widely regarded as kingmaker in the next European Parliament.

Meanwhile, the centrist majority in the European Parliament remains, with the center-right European People's Party scoring top place.

"We won the European elections," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, a member of the EPP, said on Sunday night. "We are by far the strongest party. We are the anchor of stability."

Provisional results after all polls closed showed the EPP with 185 of the 720 seats in the European Parliament, the center-left Socialists and Democrats with 137, and the liberal Renew grouping with 79, according to the official website of the EU.

"We will build a bastion against the extremes from the left and from the right," Von der Leyen said.

While she is likely to secure a second term, the situation is complicated with the French snap elections to be held only two days after the EU summit on June 28, when leaders of EU member states would appoint the next European Commission president.

"Given how much she's vilified in France, it's hard to see how he can sign off on her reappointment two days before the French elections," Dave Keating, a journalist and frequent commentator on EU affairs, said on X.

Modi begins third term with challenges ahead in consensus-building

By APARAJIT CHAKRABORTY in New Delhi
For China Daily

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was sworn in on Sunday for a rare third consecutive term, will face challenges in building consensus at both home and abroad on contentious policy and political issues, analysts said.

President Droupadi Murmu administered the oath of office and secrecy to Modi and his council of 71 ministers at Rashtrapati Bhavan, the presidential palace, in New Delhi. The heads of state of several neighboring countries, including Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, were among special guests at the impressive evening ceremony, which featured over 9,000 attendees.

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Editorial, derived from ancient Hindu scriptures and, according to the Constitution of India, is one of two official names of the country.

Modi is the only other Indian politician, after former prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, to be elected for a third term after completing the full tenure of each of his previous terms.

However, his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, which saw landslide victories in 2014 and 2019 general elections, failed to secure a majority to govern on its own this time, although the National Democratic Alliance — a coalition of the BJP and other parties — won enough seats for a slim parliamentary majority.

The Lok Sabha, or the lower house of the Indian Parliament, has 543 seats and a party or coalition needs to win 272 seats to form a majority government. The BJP won 240 on its own, falling short of the magic number, but the coalition led by the party scored 293. The opposition grouping, the Indian National Developmental Inclu-

sive Alliance, won 234.

"To run the government, a majority is necessary. But to run the nation, a consensus is necessary. The people want us to deliver better than before," Modi told his coalition partners at a meeting on Friday.

Needing support from regional allies to maintain power means the Indian prime minister may have to adapt to a style of governance he has little experience with. Modi has always led governments with a majority, including when he was the chief minister of the western Indian state of Gujarat between 2001 and 2014.

The important question is whether he can turn into a consensus-builder, which he has not been throughout his more than 24 years in public office, analysts said.

"Modi, as we know, is not used to building consensus. He may face challenges in keeping his allies together," said Tanvir Aejaz, a professor of Ramjas College at the University of Delhi.

Modi's projection of Hindutva sentiments is expected to take a back seat this time, which means he may frustrate his core supporters, Aejaz said, adding that one of the biggest challenges Modi will face is the constant demand for accountability from a now visibly strong opposition alliance, led by the Indian National Congress.

Swaran Singh, a professor of international relations at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, said a third term in office is the time when leaders become more conscious about their legacies, about how they will be remembered.

In the Modi 3.0 government, 30 lawmakers hold cabinet ranks, 36 are ministers of state and five have independent charge. As many as 11 lawmakers from the NDA coalition partners have been inducted into the government.

Modi convened the first council of ministers meeting on Monday evening, where he announced the key cabinet portfolios.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

Schools: More Arab states include Chinese courses

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"This activity, in addition to the cultural exchange programs we have continuously conducted over the years, allows students to experience traditional and modern Chinese civilization and visit different universities in China," Al Bastaki said.

Du said she believes that the friendly relations between China and the UAE since their establishment of diplomatic ties 40 years ago have greatly contributed to the development of the Hundred Schools Project.

"The UAE is one of the countries that are most friendly toward China. Every year during Spring Festival, people in the UAE are keen to learn about Chinese culture and participate in Spring Festival activities," she said.

On the social media accounts of Hamdan Bin Zayed School and Yas School, people can also see videos of Emirati students writing calligraphy and singing Chinese songs during the Chinese New Year.

Lin Xiuqin is a Chinese expert sent to the UAE Ministry of Education by the Center for Language Education and Cooperation of China's Ministry of Education.

She not only helps formulate the UAE's national Chinese curriculum syllabus and framework, but also coordinates the compilation of a series of middle school Chinese textbooks involving experts from both countries.

The 12 volumes of the textbook series, titled *Crossing the Silk Road*, have been incorporated into the official textbooks of the UAE Ministry of Education.

Lin said that besides the UAE, more Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, have included Chinese courses for their young students. She also said she believes that the trend in Arab countries of learning the Chinese language reflects the increasingly warm relations between China and Arab countries.

To date, China has forged comprehensive strategic partnerships or strategic partnerships with 14 Arab countries and the Arab League.

"The friendly cultural exchanges between China and the Arab countries enjoy a long history, as the ancient Silk Road closely links Chinese civilization and Arab civilization," Lin said, adding that the enthusiasm for learning the Chinese language is a natural result of the course of history.

Lin said that President Xi's reply letter is an important encouragement for children at the initial stage of learning Chinese, "because they will think that learning Chinese is useful and rewarding."

The reply from the Chinese president will also create a great desire to explore China and plant a seed of aspiration to engage in work related to China when they grow up, she added.

Hamdan, the big fan of giant pandas, said, "If I become the UAE ambassador to China in the future, I want to promote exchanges and cooperation between the UAE and China in technology, especially in the space field, hoping that astronauts from our two countries can explore the universe together."



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (center, front) greets the audience during his swearing-in ceremony at the presidential palace in New Delhi on Sunday. ADNAN ABIDI / REUTERS

Conflict: US provides support for Israel amid overwhelming regional, global opposition

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and Yemen. A further 38 million people or more have been displaced.

West Asia has borne the brunt of this human tragedy. The eruption of hostilities in Palestine is another episode in the long tawdry record of settler aggression, occupation, military aggression and attempted genocide on the part of the US-backed Israelis. Israel's military has killed over 36,000 people, the overwhelming majority being civilians, and over 81,000 people have been wounded as of the end of May, according to health authorities in Gaza. The ruthlessness of Israel's military action killings has led to the International Court of Justice to conclude that Israel's actions are prima facie genocidal.

US President Joe Biden urged Israel not to press ahead with its attack on the southern Gaza city of Rafah, but Israel did so anyway.

Despite the US administration's eye-on-the-election posturing, it has continued to provide missiles and

other military and financial support to Israel amid the overwhelming global and regional opposition to what Israel is doing. The US has also vetoed efforts to bring a ceasefire resolution through the United Nations Security Council. That Israel's campaign has caused untold human hardship is recognized by most countries; indeed, the US has conceded that humanitarian aid was needed. In the face of blockades to humanitarian assistance entering Gaza, the US even built a pier, which was washed away but later reconnected, for aid to be delivered from the sea. But the US has been playing catchup with humanitarian aid for the besieged Palestinian civilians while it has been on the front foot supplying Israel with military aid. That bitter irony has not been lost on observers in the region.

In January 2024, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi floated the idea of an international peace conference to bring gravitas to the table, in an effort to stop the carnage and work toward a lasting peace. Progressive-

China's style and approach to statecraft was already on show last year, when it played an active role in facilitating the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia. More recently, it has hosted the two Palestinian factions for talks aimed at a reconciliation conducive to creating the conditions that would make an international peace conference viable.

ly, diplomatic efforts through back channels and through the forums of the UN have seen the building of a head of steam behind the idea. The Arab League in mid-May endorsed such a conference. The King of Bahrain embarked on a diplomatic shuttle mission to progress the idea. He visited Russia last week, and met with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The King of Bahrain joined other heads of state from West Asia in Beijing on May 30, to take part in the 10th Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum. There's little doubt that the question of Palestine was a key topic of discussion. In his address to the conference, President Xi Jinping made it clear that China supports the convening of an international peace conference, as such a meeting would have the necessary authority to overcome barriers and inertia toward resolving the conflict and to secure peace by way of a two-state solution based on 1967 boundaries. China's style and approach to state-

craft was already on show last year, when it played an active role in facilitating the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia. More recently, it has hosted the two Palestinian factions for talks aimed at a reconciliation conducive to creating the conditions that would make an international peace conference viable.

China has also proposed a framework that would contribute to the resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. That was in early 2023. While it was rejected by the Western powers at the time, the lesson from the West Asia experience is that resolution of conflicts takes time and effort. Creating the conditions necessary for parties to come together and be willing to enter into dialogue with sincerity doesn't happen overnight, and it certainly doesn't happen at the "end of a gun barrel".

China's approach recognizes that conflicts are only resolved when the parties involved can become part of the solution. The US and the collective West generally seem to hold the view that solutions can somehow

be unilaterally imposed.

The proposed international peace conference on the question of Palestine stands in stark contrast to the Ukraine conference promoted by the collective West, which will be held in Switzerland. In the latter case, Russia has not been invited. It is evidently expected to accept a *fait accompli* proposition.

Enough is enough. Decades of US domination of West Asia's geopolitics have delivered war and destruction. The unilateral methods of the US haven't worked. The Arab powers have now coalesced around the new process and approach, which is focused on getting an international peace conference together. Such a conference in effect pushes the US off center stage, and could mark the beginning of a new era of consensus-based regional statecraft.

The author is adjunct professor at Queensland University of Technology and a senior fellow at Taihe Institute. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

BUSINESS

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Expert predicts positive export outlook for H2

Orders expanded to more regions to hedge against trade uncertainties

By ZHONG NAN and WANG KEJU

At Jiangsu Dongcheng Power Tools Co Ltd, a Qidong, Jiangsu province-based manufacturer, in early June, spare parts flow seamlessly along an assembly line where they are processed, assembled into electric tools and packaged in an efficient process.

This batch of electric tools will be shipped to countries including Vietnam, Algeria and Brazil within the month.

"Since initiating our international expansion in 2013, our electric tools have developed a vast marketing network that covers more than 60 countries and regions across Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and Latin America," said Shen Yunyun, head of the company's sales unit for overseas markets.

With the rapid evolution of cross-border e-commerce, Shen said that the Chinese company is strategically focusing on this area to seek more customers.

Following the market trend, Jiangsu Dongcheng, supported by 5,000 engineers and workers, will also continue to invest in the research and development of cord-

less electric tools and battery storage business-related electric tools to support its export business this year, according to information released by Nanjing Customs.

Market observers said that China's ongoing optimization of its export goods structure and expansion of its trading partnerships will help mitigate the effects of rising trade barriers and other external challenges.

Thanks to these factors, China's exports surged 6.1 percent year-on-year to 9.95 trillion yuan (\$1.37 trillion) in the first five months, said the General Administration of Customs.

China has been enhancing its industrial framework by transitioning from primarily processing raw materials to increasingly focusing on greener, advanced high-tech products. This shift underscores the country's evolving competitive edge in the next phase, said Lin Jiantian, director of the General Administration of Customs' Department of Enterprise Management and Audit-based Control.

China's export growth between January and May was attributable to the nation's production capabilities, market potential and tech-



A view of Qingdao Port in Shandong province. ZHANG JINGANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

tensive green products. A positive outlook is maintained for the coming months, said Guo Lei, chief economist at GF Securities.

A recent survey conducted by the Beijing-based China Council for the Promotion of International Trade showed that 81.6 percent of foreign trade-oriented businesses predict stable or increased exports in the first half.

The World Trade Organization also forecast in April a rebound in global trade, expecting goods trade to expand 2.6 percent in 2024 and 3.3 percent in 2025 after dipping 1.2 percent in 2023.

Li Muyuan, executive vice-president of the China Container Industry Association in Beijing, warned that geopolitical tensions and supply chain disruptions remain key factors affecting China's foreign trade in the second half.

Disruptions in shipping routes, particularly those related to security issues in the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, could lead to increased shipping costs, extended travel times and supply chain interruptions, said Li.

Influenced by anticipated uncertainties of new trade policies due to the US general elections later this year, many US retailers and businesses from other sectors have been rushing to order products from Chinese exporters to replenish their stocks, said Yang Changyong, a researcher with the Academy of Macroeconomic Research under the National Development and Reform Commission.

Also, the European Union has recently launched a series of discriminatory investigations against Chinese electric vehicles, wind power and photovoltaic products,

leading to an increasing risk of economic and trade frictions between China and the EU, said He Yadong, spokesman for the Ministry of Commerce.

Liang Ming, director of the Institute of International Trade, which is part of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, emphasized enhanced trade cooperation with a broader array of partners, including economies of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Arab League countries.

This diversification will assist China in addressing the challenges arising from "decoupling" efforts conducted by the United States and certain European countries, said Liang.

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Weak yen a double-edged sword, say mkt mavens

By SHI JING in Shanghai shijing@chinadaily.com.cn

The depreciation of the Japanese yen has created ups and downs in China, both promoting outbound tourism and the value of renminbi and Chinese assets while also presenting some problems for Chinese exporters, said industry experts.

Ever since the beginning of the year, the Japanese currency has depreciated by over 10 percent against the US dollar due to wider interest rate gaps between Japan and the United States, rising volatility in the international market and the loose monetary policy adopted in Japan for a very long time. The yen has also depreciated by over 75 percent against the renminbi, or yuan currency.

Chinese outbound trips to Japan have been boosted by the cheaper yen. Experts from Trip.com, China's largest online travel agency, said that Japan has been the top tourist destination for Chinese travelers so far this year, largely due to the depreciation of the yen.

Despite Dragon Boat Festival only lasting for three days, Chinese tourists' passion for outbound trips proved quite high this time around, with searches for overseas hotels on online travel agency Trip.com spiking 50 percent compared to the same period in pre-COVID 2019. Japan has been one of the most popular destinations.

Meanwhile, China assets in general may benefit. Zhou Wenqun, an equity portfolio manager at Fidelity International, said most Asian currencies, especially the yen, have been depreciating. Global investors may thus divert to the Hong Kong bourse to hedge against foreign exchange risks.

Zhou Junzhi, chief macroeconomic analyst at China Securities, said that the direction of foreign capital flow in the Japanese stock market has been undergoing significant changes so far this year. While foreign investors were pouring money into the Japanese stock market at the start of this year, they have been gradually pulling out, reporting the first net capital outflow in March.

But on the other hand, international investors have been increasing their exposure to Hong Kong shares ever since March. It can be inferred that foreign capital focusing on asset allocation in the Asia-Pacific region has turned to Hong Kong to avoid the impact of the depreciating yen and the possible downward adjustment of the Japanese stock market, she said.

On top of that, the A-share market's appeal to international investors will also increase, as pricing of yen-denominated assets will be impaired by the lower yen. The capital allocated to yen-denominated assets will look for new targets globally, said Zhou.

According to a recent report from the Shanghai Stock Exchange, the average price-to-earnings ratio of companies listed there was 14.02 times as of market close on May 20, which was lower than the reading of 16.53 times on the Tokyo Stock Exchange.

The lower valuation of SSE companies, combined with their improving fundamentals, point to much growth potential, said bourse experts.

The RMB's role in global payments has been consolidated against the backdrop of the weaker yen. According to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, or SWIFT — a global financial messaging services provider — ever since the Chinese currency overtook the yen to become the world's fourth most active currency for global payments by value, the yuan has retained its position for six consecutive months as of April.

However, Zhou of China Securities pointed out that the yen's depreciation will exert some short-term impact on China's exports, especially in sectors where there is competition between Chinese and Japanese firms, such as electronics and automobiles. But product competitiveness is mainly determined by performance and the country's manufacturing capability. Foreign exchange can only disrupt export trends temporarily.

Battery makers decry US protectionism, false accusations

By CHENG YU chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Any attempt at protectionism or false accusations will not hinder Chinese electric vehicle battery makers from going global, as major battery firms Contemporary Amperex Technology Co Ltd and Gotion High-Tech rejected US lawmakers' allegations of so-called forced labor at their units.

A group of US Republican lawmakers have said that the two Chinese firms should be immediately added to the "entity list", accusing their supply chains of using forced labor, according to The Wall Street Journal.

CATL said the accusation is "groundless and completely false" and that information about some suppliers is inaccurate and misleading.

"With some suppliers, business relations ceased long ago. With other suppliers, business relations have been conducted with different subsidiaries and with absolutely no connection to forced labor or anything that violates US applicable laws and regulations," the company said.

CATL said it adheres to the highest business and ethical standards and has effective policies in place to ensure a responsible and sustainable supply chain according to the highest global standards.

According to South Korean market consultancy SNE Research, China dominates the global power battery market with a 63.9 percent share as of the first four months this year. CATL remains the largest, while Gotion is ranked ninth globally.

Gotion High-Tech said any allegations suggesting it engages in forced

labor or is related to that practice are "completely unfounded and absolutely false".

"Gotion High-Tech has consistently upheld the values of respecting human rights and protecting employee rights. Our selection of partners is also based on a rigorous audit mechanism and evaluation standards," it said.

The latest accusations from US lawmakers are yet another protectionist attempt after the previous one on China's so-called overcapacity problem, and come after recent tariff hikes by the US government on Chinese batteries and other EV products.

In terms of the latest tariffs on Chinese batteries, Ray Chen, vice-president of Gotion's US business, told China Daily that globalization is an irreversible trend and any protectionism policies or geopolitical effect

will only be short term.

"They won't stop us in going global," Chen said, adding that the new tariffs on Chinese batteries will have limited impact on the country's battery sector.

"No matter how much tariffs the US imposes, Chinese battery makers still have an obvious cost advantage there. In other words, the tariffs will not weaken the competitiveness of Chinese batteries in the US market in the short term," he said.

Gotion, which is backed by Volkswagen Group, plans to have 100 GWh of capacity in each of its major overseas markets, namely the Americas, Europe and Africa, and the Asia-Pacific region, by 2030.

Zhang Hong, a member of the expert committee of the China Automobile Dealers Association, said the US tariffs will have limited impact on the upstream and down-

stream EV industry chain firms, but US counterparts will suffer from rising costs.

"Many US automakers are now forced to adjust their battery supply chain structures, resulting in rising car manufacturing costs. Even with federal tax credits, according to US media calculations, US car companies will lose \$6,000 for every \$50,000 EV they sell," Zhang said.

Wei Wei, assistant professor at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (Guangzhou), said that China's NEV industry and related supply chains like batteries have made indispensable contributions to the world.

"They have been continuously offering affordable, high-quality capacity, which will make a significant contribution to global green and economic development," Wei said.

Briefly

Bank hikes lending for green sectors

The Bank of Communications, one of China's largest commercial banks, has strengthened financial support for the green and low-carbon transformation of traditional sectors and the expansion of green sectors. By the end of 2023, the lender's outstanding loans for green development reached 822.04 billion yuan (\$115.6 billion), up 29.37 percent compared with the end of 2022, data from the bank showed.

Nation's natural gas consumption up

China's natural gas consumption saw strong growth in the first four months of this year, with the country intensifying its green development efforts, official data showed. The apparent consumption of natural gas during the period totaled 143.73 billion cubic meters, up 11.9 percent year-on-year, according to the National Development and Reform Commission.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

Long-term prospects of photovoltaics seen bright

By ZHENG XIN zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese solar companies say they remain optimistic about the long-term prospects of the photovoltaic sector, despite its complex industry environment at home and abroad, including profit cuts and trade policy adjustments.

Longi Green Energy Technology, one of the largest solar panel manufacturers in the world, said it will continuously adjust its production plans in response to market changes.

"We acknowledge the challenges brought by price declines, technology evolution and trade policy shifts. Longi remains optimistic about the long-term prospects of the solar PV industry and will continue to invest in talent cultivation, innovation and new manufacturing systems," it said in a statement.

The solar power sector has been facing a significant reduction in prices, driven by technological advancements that lead to high-performance photovoltaic cells, economies of scale achieved by leading Chinese solar companies, global supply chain improvements and increased competition among manufacturers.

In response, Longi said the company has upgraded digital technolo-



An employee works on a photovoltaics production line in Hefei, Anhui province. RUAN XUEFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

gy across multiple sites all over the world in order to deploy next-generation solar PV technology and digital systems, and that it is firmly optimistic about the long-term uptrend of the global photovoltaic industry.

The United States last month unveiled steep tariff hikes on Chinese imports, including solar panels, electric vehicles and batteries. Meanwhile, the sector's rapid expansion in China has led to overcapacity and fierce competition, weighing down prices and companies' profits.

Leading solar companies have

been stepping up investment in research to stand out from fierce competition through technological advantages.

After Longi said in November that the efficiency of its crystalline silicon-perovskite tandem solar cells had reached 33.9 percent, a world record, another solar giant JA Solar Technology introduced earlier this year its latest n-type modules designed for offshore photovoltaic applications, featuring a 635W power output and 22.8 percent module efficiency. This is expected to cater to the evolving needs of the solar industry, a strategic step toward

providing efficient and reliable solutions for offshore solar power.

The company has been continuously improving its digital management at its large-scale wind and photovoltaic bases, especially in the Gobi Desert and wasteland areas, to facilitate the development and utilization of renewable energy, it said.

According to an analyst, China is offering more options to the global market and ensuring equal opportunities for everyone to access green energy as it promotes green energy development worldwide.

"China's ample production capacity has alleviated the burden on other countries and regions by lowering production costs and aiding technological development," said Ma Yinqiong, a senior analyst specializing in materials supply chains at global consultancy Rystad Energy.

She pointed out that while costs remain the biggest challenge, particularly for underdeveloped regions, China's raw materials have enabled these regions to lower expenses and expedite the construction of green production capacity.

China's large-scale and standardized industrial technology has also accelerated the greening process in developed countries and regions, she added.

BUSINESS

Chinese robotic vacuums sweep up overseas mkt

Makers like Roborock, Dreame given 'red carpet' treatment among customers

By FAN FEIFEI
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Chinese robotic vacuum cleaner manufacturers are accelerating steps to expand their footprint in overseas markets, with a key focus on upgrading products and improving technological innovation capacities amid a broader push to bolster global sales and enhance international influence and brand recognition, industry experts said.

According to a report released by Beijing-based market consultancy All View Cloud, which specializes in home appliances research, sales revenue of robotic vacuum cleaners in China reached 3.1 billion yuan (\$427.9 million) during the January-April period, an increase of 22 percent year-on-year, while sales volume stood at 1.02 million units, up 17 percent on a yearly basis.

The report said although the average price of robotic vacuum cleaners is 3,080 yuan, products with prices ranging from 3,500 to 4,000 yuan witnessed the fastest growth in terms of market share. The proportion of high-end and smart vacuum cleaners priced above 5,000 yuan also increased significantly.

AVC said Chinese-made robotic vacuum cleaners have gained popularity among overseas consumers, especially those in Germany, the United States, Japan and Australia, as major Chinese cleaning appliance makers have invested heavily in promoting technological advances and optimizing product functions to cater to the diversified and personalized needs of shoppers overseas.

Guo Renjie, president of Chinese intelligent home appliance company Dreame Technology, said the company's export revenue surged more than 120 percent year-on-year in 2023, with global sales of robotic vacuum cleaners surpassing 2.4 million units, skyrocketing 300 percent from a year earlier.

Currently, Dreame Technology's products are available in more than 100 countries and regions, including Europe, North America, the Middle East, Africa and South America, and about 65 percent of its revenue comes from exports, Guo said.

He said the company is eyeing huge growth potential from the high-end robotic vacuum market, and the compound annual growth rate of its revenue has surpassed 100 percent from 2019 to 2023. Guo emphasized that they will increase investment in research and development, expand retail channels overseas and bolster global operating capacity.

The number of its brick-and-mortar stores reached over 4,000 across the globe, and its robotic vacuum cleaners have captured the top spot in Germany, Italy and Singapore by market share. Guo said the annual expenditure in R&D accounts for more than 10 percent of its total revenue and over 65 percent of employees are now engaged in R&D.

Guo Meide, president of AVC, said, "China's cleaning appliances

China's cleaning appliances industry is expected to witness speedy growth fueled by advances in technology and product iteration, as well as the gradual release of immense consumption potential from smaller cities."

Guo Meide, president of All View Cloud

industry is expected to witness speedy growth fueled by advances in technology and product iteration, as well as the gradual release of immense consumption potential from smaller cities."

Experts said a slew of cutting-edge digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence-powered algorithms, voice control capability alongside intelligent mapping and navigation to avoid collisions with obstacles, have been increasingly applied in smart vacuum cleaners to meet evolving consumer needs.

Chinese tech company Roborock is speeding up its globalization push, with its robotic vacuum cleaners having been sold in more than 170 countries and regions. Data from market research firm Euro-monitor International showed that Roborock has become the top-selling brand of smart vacuum cleaners worldwide in terms of global sales last year.

Quan Gang, president of Roborock, said the company has invested over 1.9 billion yuan in R&D in the past 10 years and will continue to pour capital into this area. At present, the global penetration rate of robotic vacuum cleaners is very low, which presents huge development potential, he added.

Roborock said it emphasizes technological innovation and plans to expand its global footprint by introducing more innovative products that cater to the needs of global users.

Competition in the robotic vacuum cleaner sector is intensifying as high-tech companies are improving their in-house innovation capacities and applying AI-powered large language models to make the products more intelligent, said Liang Zhenpeng, an independent consumer electronics analyst.

Liang said Chinese intelligent home appliance makers are stepping up their operations in the global market to improve competitiveness and foster a new growth engine for their long-term development, which will also give a big boost to the transformation and upgrading of traditional manufacturing.



A CR14G employee supervises tunneling work of the Beijing-Tangshan Intercity Railway last week in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Beijing-Tangshan rail construction gears up for enhanced regional links

By BINAN and ZHUANG QIANG

Construction of the Beijing-Tangshan Intercity Railway — an infrastructure project aiming to boost integration of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei cluster — has been making rapid advances, reflected by faster tunneling progress reports from participating State-owned builders.

During a recent media event, China Railway 14th Bureau Group Corp Ltd, a unit of China Railway Construction Corp, said its major tunnel boring machine Jingtong is inching closer to completing its mission — digging the Yunchao-jian River Tunnel — which is currently 30 meters underground in Beijing's Tongzhou district.

Taking into account the geological and environmental conditions in the capital city, CR14G's shield machine design team customized the domestically produced super-large diameter Jingtong TBM.

Weighing some 3,200 metric tons, Jingtong is the 1,388th shield machine manufactured by CRCC. For the tunneling project, Jingtong is equipped with a cutter head of 13.3 meters in diameter.

"This project runs parallel to the Beijing-Harbin Railway, with the

closest proximity of only 11.7 meters. Ensuring operational safety is extremely important and any mistakes cannot be tolerated," said Sun Lijun, from CR14G, who is in charge of the Beijing-Tangshan Intercity Railway project.

With a total length of about 138 meters, Jingtong, driven by 16 motors, is cutting through soil and rock, extending the tunnel toward the destination in Tongzhou.

According to the State builder, the tunneling work is expected to be completed this month, extending the intercity railway to Beijing's outskirts, a breakthrough in the integrated development of the region.

The Beijing-Tangshan Intercity Railway is a rapid transportation corridor between Beijing and Tangshan. The section from Tangshan to Yanjiao, Hebei province, was opened and put into operation on Dec 30, 2022.

China is banking on massive railway construction to boost regional integrated development. Two sections of railway in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area were put into operation in late May, marking the opening of the longest intercity railway route in the area.

The line, linking cities including Huizhou, Dongguan, Guangzhou, Foshan and Zhaoqing from east to west, is 258 km long with a total of 39 stops for ordinary trains, but fast trains only make 14 stops. The maximum speed of trains is 200 kilometers per hour, while the average interval between trains is 26 minutes.

The nation recorded 360.15 million railway passenger trips in April, up 9.6 percent year-on-year, said the National Railway Administration.

During the first four months, railway passenger trips amounted to 1.37 billion, surging 22.9 percent from a year ago, the administration said.

In April, 407.59 million tons of goods were transported by rail, down 1.9 percent year-on-year.

From January to April, China's railway cargo delivery volume reached 1.65 billion tons, a fall of 1.4 percent year-on-year.

China's fixed-asset investment in railways totaled 184.9 billion yuan (\$26.02 billion) during the four-month period, up 10.5 percent year-on-year, the administration said.

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State power supplier ramps up output for local specialty businesses

By LI JIAYING and LIU ZIZHENG

Shandong province's Laiwu has pulled out all stops to boost its burgeoning mugwort industry in the harvest season during the Dragon Boat Festival period.

The festival, one of China's four major traditional holidays and part of UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage, features customs such as eating *zongzi* and hanging mugwort.

While *zongzi* is a traditional Chinese dish made of glutinous rice stuffed with different fillings and wrapped in bamboo leaves, mugwort harvested during this period is highly valued for its medicinal properties, including hemostatic, anti-inflammatory, anti-asthmatic and anti-allergic effects.

The leaves and stems of mugwort are also believed to contain volatile aromatic oils that repel insects and purify the air. Additionally, dried and crushed mugwort leaves produce "moxa", which is used in traditional Chinese moxibustion to warm the meridians, expel dampness and cold and support overall health.

Qishan Aixiang rural complex, a Laiwu-based hub for mugwort production, processing and sales, is poised for a bumper season with over 8,000 mu (533.3 hectares) dedicated to its cultivation.

The base produces more than 100 kinds of refined mugwort products, including patches, tea and moxa items, generating an annual output of over 10 million yuan (\$1.38 million), creating over 400 jobs for surrounding villages and increasing farmer households' annual incomes by more than 10,000 yuan, said the company.

"The current peak production season for mugwort has a lot to do with stable power supplies. The local power supplier has proactively checked our electrical equipment and guided us in adjusting our power usage plan according to our production schedule and load, helping save over 1,000 yuan in electricity costs each month," said Liu Weihao, general manager of the rural complex.

Given that mugwort processing is heavily influenced by seasonal factors, Laiwu has tailored electricity plans to accommodate the fluctuating power needs of enterprises. By optimizing power usage strategies based on production capacity, the company has helped reduce electricity costs while ensuring reliable power supply for production.

"To ensure reliable power supply for the development of the local mugwort industry, we completed the rural network upgrade for two stations in two villages last year, extending over 800 meters of low-voltage lines to meet the irrigation and production needs of the mugwort planting base," said Xu Shulong, an executive with State Grid Laiwu Power Supply Co.

Laiwu is not alone in witnessing a local specialty industry boom amid early summer. At a greenhouse in Mashang township of Anyang, Central China's Henan province, farmers are busy utilizing smart equipment to irrigate and water sweet melon plantations, and look forward to embracing a bountiful harvest.

Over the past few years, such smart greenhouses have been widely built across the town, which has

not only accelerated the development of local specialty agriculture, but also significantly contributed to farmers' livelihoods.

Bai Wenyong, a local sweet melon grower, said the smart equipment — such as the integrated water and fertilizer equipment, and the automatic vent openers — improves both the quality and yield of the fruit, and makes their products more popular in the market.

Bai said currently more than 2,667 hectares of greenhouses in Mashang are utilized to grow sweet melon plants, which are expected to produce 240,000 metric tons of fruit and generate more than 500 million yuan in revenue per year.

With plenty of smart greenhouses in place, demand for electricity has surged in the town. Thanks to the local power supplier, farmers have no worries on the power front.

Cooperating with the local government, State Grid's Anyang Power Supply Co said it has actively improved customer service based on the development plan of Mashang's sweet melon planting industry.

The company said it regularly sends staff members to visit local greenhouses to collect feedback from farmers, inspect electrical devices, and eliminate safety hazards promptly.

In addition, efforts will be intensified to upgrade and transform the local power grid, thus helping foster more specialty industries in Mashang, the company added.

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Mushroom farmers on cusp of green transition

By LIU ZIZHENG
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At a factory in Xixia county, Henan province, workers are installing high-temperature and high-pressure sterilizers that will be utilized to make mushroom spawn bags.

"With these six sterilizers in place, all the nearby shiitake mushroom growers will be able to make spawn bags in our factory every spring, with a daily output of nearly 50,000 bags," said Sun Jianfeng, director of the factory.

Sun said electrical devices have been widely utilized over the past few years in local mushroom farming, in order to advance the industry's green transformation and reduce carbon consumption.

In the past, the farmers could only burn coal to dry the shiitake mushrooms and sterilize the mushroom spawn bags, which not only hampered quality control, but also resulted in severe environmental problems.

"Now these tasks can be effectively accomplished with the help of the electrical devices," said Sun.

In addition, a large number of smart greenhouses in the county are helping farmers control temperature, humidity, ventilation and sunlight in real time, Sun added.

The local power supplier has played its part, by expanding three 110 kilovolt substations and building a new 35 kV substation, to better meet surging demand for electricity in Xixia.

With these six sterilizers in place, all the nearby shiitake mushroom growers will be able to make spawn bags in our factory every spring ..."

Sun Jianfeng, mushroom factory owner in Xixia county, Henan province

Efforts have also been made to renovate 14.7 kilometers of 35 kV transmission lines and 275.29 km of 10 kV transmission lines.

With a history of over 30 years in shiitake mushroom farming, Xixia is currently home to more than 200,000 mushroom growers and the industry contributes to 60 percent of the county's total income.

After the green transformation, the use of electrical devices in sterilization alone will help the county save more than 40 million yuan (\$5.52 million) in production costs and reduce its carbon dioxide emissions by 70,000 to 90,000 metric tons.

Their efforts conform to China's action program on peaking carbon emissions before 2030.

The action program urges rural areas to reduce carbon emissions by promoting the application of renewable energy — such as biomass and solar — in agricultural production and farmers' daily lives.

It also stresses efforts to ensure the reasonable use of fertilizers, pesticides and agricultural films, and further upgrade power grids in rural areas.

Sun Hongwu, vice-president of Jiangsu Academy of Agricultural Sciences, said advancing the low-carbon transition of agriculture could help China allocate production factors more effectively and thereby accelerate its economic growth.

Sun said China should invest more in the research and development of low-carbon technologies targeting agriculture, including big data and cutting-edge storage and processing technologies that could reduce pollution.

"Polyculture practices such as integrated rice-fish farming should also be widely promoted across the country," said Sun.



A saleswoman addresses customer queries on Dreame robotic vacuums at a store in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Environmental change bringing joy to people

Nanbeishan Greening Project a vivid example of Xizang's efforts in ecological civilization



The success of planting trees in Nanshan Park marks a breakthrough in artificial afforestation in semiarid areas at an altitude above 3,900 meters. DAQIONG / CHINA DAILY

By YUAN SHENGGAO

More residents in Lhasa, the capital city of Southwest China's Xizang autonomous region, are enjoying tours of Nanshan Park.

Despite some efforts to climb them, people like to stand on the hilltops and have a view of the Potala Palace, the Lhasa River and the city, under the blue sky dotted with white clouds.

Chodron, a Lhasa resident, said a trip to the park can give people a clear picture of how the environment has improved in Lhasa and its neighboring areas in recent years.

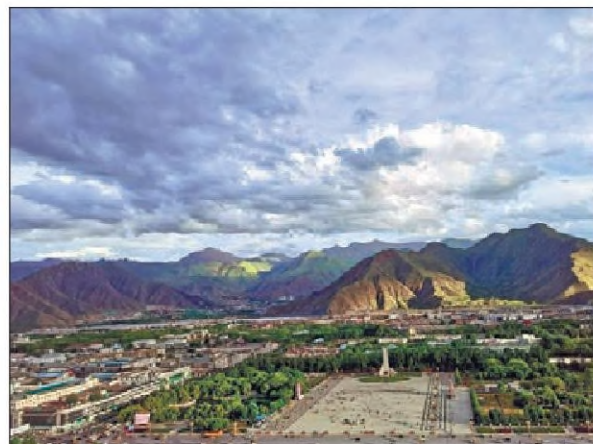
"Over two years, the once barren mountains are now cloaked in lush greenery and the overall appearance of Lhasa has improved a lot," Chodron said. "While there are more trees in the mountains and gullies, there are fewer sandstorms and the air is more humid," she said.

What makes this change possible is the Xizang autonomous region's efforts to afforest its land in recent years, especially the project in the South and North Mountains in Lhasa and its neighboring Lhokha city, which was launched in 2021.

The South and North Mountains project — which is known as Nanbeishan Greening Project among locals — is Xizang's first large-scale ecological repair project implemented in the area.

The project, launched in 2021, is viewed by local residents and officials as a vivid example of Xizang's efforts in ecological civilization, aiming to transform this region into a place with a more livable environment by adding nearly 140,000 hectares of trees in about 10 years.

The South and North Mountains are two mountain ranges called Nanshan and Beishan surrounding



From left: Lhasa has become a greener city after years' of efforts in afforestation. KELDAN YANGKEE / FOR CHINA DAILY Tourists enjoy lush vegetation and clear waters in a mountain valley in Lhasa. DAQIONG / CHINA DAILY

the Lhasa River valley. While their majority is located in Lhasa, the southern slopes of Nanshan, facing the Yarlung Zangbo River in the south, belong to Lhokha city.

Planting trees in Xizang, especially in high-altitude areas of more than 3,900 meters, is a challenging task, according to local officials.

Lhasa began its tentative efforts in greening mountains in 2008, with Nanshan Park, which stands at the southern side of the Lhasa River, as a pilot project.

According to local reports, Lhasa began to plant trees on the hillsides near the Lhasa River Bridge that year, initiating a greening project in Nanshan Park.

In 2011, researchers began tree sapling breeding studies on Palding Mountain, a part of the park. In 2012, a higher-altitude tree-planting project was launched in Nanshan Park. Then a greening project in Beishan — or Northern

Mountains — started in 2018.

An official at the Lhasa forestry and grassland bureau said more than a decade's efforts in afforestation in Nanshan lay a foundation for the Nanbeishan Greening Project.

"The success of planting trees in Nanshan Park marked a breakthrough in artificial afforestation in semiarid areas at an altitude above 3,900 meters," the official said.

"It has accumulated valuable experience for our efforts in this Nanbeishan greening initiative."

More importantly, he said, the trials of tree planting in Nanshan Park have led to the selection of more than 30 plant varieties suitable for the region, like Chinese pine, sea buckthorn, apricot, locust and sabina vulgaris.

140,000 hectares

of trees to be planted for the Nanbeishan Greening Project in about 10 years

In addition to breakthroughs in breeding, researchers engaged in the pilot project in Nanshan Park acquired crucial technical data for tree planting in mountainous areas. This includes the influence of geological conditions, atmospheric temperature, soil humidity, and amount of sunlight on plant growth.

Li Baoping, another official at the same bureau, is an expert with 30 years of experience in afforestation research in Xizang. He said that both breeding research and tree planting are painstaking missions.

"To select the right plant varieties, we have traveled across the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau as well as regions in Northwest China," Li said.

"Over the past 10 years, we have brought back more than 170 plant varieties and determined about 30 varieties as suitable for the region."

He added that to ensure a higher survival rate, more soil should be retained on the roots of a sapling when it is moved to the mountain slope sites for planting.

"With so much soil attached to the roots, a pine sapling with 2.5 meters in height can weigh up to 40 kilograms," Li said.

"This calls for great effort when workers move it to a mountain slope at an altitude of more than 4,000 meters."

Despite the efforts, Li said he and his colleagues are pleased with the transformation of the region.

"More than a decade ago, Lhasa was surrounded by barren mountains," Li said.

"Because of the low coverage rate of vegetation, natural disasters like soil erosion and landslides took place sometimes."

He recalled that there used to be sandstorms between December and April.

But nowadays, Li said there has been a drastic drop in the occurrence of sandstorms, as well as other disasters like soil erosion and landslides.

"This is a result of our greening efforts, which have changed the ecological environment of the mountains and valleys for the better," Li said.

Local officials also have great expectations for the Nanbeishan Greening Project. They said once the project is completed in 10 years time, it will add green space equal to 600 Nanshan Parks to Lhasa and Lhokha cities.

Over the past two years, more than 25,000 hectares of forest were added to the Lhasa section of the greening project, according to Lhazin, who added that the overall survival rate of the trees was more than 85 percent.

An official at the Lhokha forestry and grassland bureau, said the city gained more than 8,700 hectares of forests in the past two years thanks to the greening project.

Local forestry experts predict that when the entire project is completed, it can bring about great ecological benefits. These include an additional 49.8 million metric tons in water reserve, 229,100 tons of emissions captured by carbon sink and 190,300 tons of oxygen created.

When commenting on the greening project, a senior official in Xizang said that he expects the efforts can create a pleasant living environment for the public. "I hope our residents, either in the urban or rural areas, can enjoy an ambience with 'flowers in spring, shade in summer and greenness in all seasons,'" he said.

By YUAN SHENGGAO

While engaging residents, the Northern and Southern Mountains Greening Project in the cities of Lhasa and Lhokha in the Xizang autonomous region, is bringing tangible benefits.

The project, also known as Nanbeishan Greening Project among locals, was launched in 2021 and covers 35 townships across nine counties and districts of the two cities.

Poma village in Lhasa's Doolungdechen district, for instance, has more than 670 hectares of mountain slopes dedicated to this project.

A project manager in charge of the village's tree planting said a tree farm of more than 150 hectares is in place. The ongoing project will require dozens of workers to plant trees and take care of them.

Yeshe Dorje, a local villager, was hired by the farm as a forest management worker.

"I've been working with the tree farm for more than a month," Yeshe Dorje said. "I'm paid 250 yuan (\$34.53) on a daily basis and last month I earned 7,500 yuan. That's almost the highest pay for a farmer in my neighborhood nowadays."

Tree planting helps boost rural workers' incomes



From left: A worker measures a pine sapling before it is planted. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Residents in Lhokha city plant trees on the slopes of the Southern Mountains. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A road shaded with trees in the suburbs of Lhasa. DAQIONG / CHINA DAILY

Tashi Tsering, head of the local villagers' committee, said the greening project has led to a substantial increase in farmers' revenue.

"A tree-planting worker is paid 250 yuan and a vehicle driver transporting saplings is paid 400 yuan a day," Tashi Tsering said. "Last year, residents in Poma vil-



"The historical barren hills are now covered with lush vegetation. It helps to retain water in the soil and reduce soil erosion, creating better conditions for farming."

Tashi Tsering, an official in Poma village



lage got a total additional income of 9.8 million yuan for their labor in the greening project."

What makes Tashi Tsering and his fellow villagers even happier is the improved environment as a result of the project.

"The historical barren hills are now covered with lush vegetation," Tashi Tsering said. "It helps

to retain water in the soil and reduce soil erosion, creating better conditions for farming."

The village official said local residents are now aware of the benefits of the improved environment and have reached consensus to protect the trees.

Even those from regions other than Lhasa and Lhokha are benefiting.

At an afforestation site in the Palding Mountain of Lhasa, Dorje, who is from Namling county in Shigatse city, is busy planting saplings of sea buckthorn.

He got himself employed in Lhasa, thanks to a collaboration forged by Namling county in 2022 with tree-breeding research institutes for the Nanbeishan Greening Project. Through such partnerships, hundreds of farmers from the county have gained access to employment, broadening their income streams beyond traditional activities such as cultivating highland barley and raising livestock.

"At first, it didn't occur to me that planting trees could also generate income, but now I find many people like me are living off ecological conservation," said Dorje, adding that the job yields a monthly income of more than 6,000 yuan.

WORLD

US urged to stop Taiwan provocations

Experts slam Biden's actions, saying blurring of red line detrimental to ties

By YIFAN XU in Washington
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The recent words and actions of the United States, including those of President Joe Biden, on the Taiwan question have been detrimental to cross-strait and US-China relations, and the US should stop its provocations, experts said.

"The US knows that China's red line is Taiwan. Yes, don't cross it. Just do not cross it," Anthony Moretti, associate professor and department head of Communication and Organizational Leadership at Robert Morris University, told China Daily.

"The US has been blurring the one-China policy, trying to remove the core elements, and actually provoking the one-China principle recognized by the whole world," Wu Huiqiu, chairman of the board of the Washington China Unification Promoting Association, said.

In an interview with Time magazine, Biden said US military involvement in Taiwan would "depend on the circumstances." When asked whether he would deploy troops if necessary, Biden said he was "not ruling out using US military force."

The Defense Security Cooperation Agency, under the US Department of Defense, announced last week that the US State Department had approved two potential arms sales of \$300 million to Taiwan, including the sale of F-16 fighter jet spare parts and maintenance jets.

Moretti said the US calculation has to include a series of factors when deciding whether to use US military force.

First, the Taiwan Strait is geographically far from the US. Second, "basically, you're playing on China's home turf" if the US sends troops to the Strait. Third, the US public would consider "the recent failures" because military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq ended poorly. And the cost cannot be ignored, Moretti said.

"You put it all together, and to presume that the US would send troops, I think, is a bad suggestion," he said.

Wu described Biden's comment as "a hypothetical, vague and tactical expression" and another move of "playing the Taiwan card."

"What's bad is that he's sending misinformation that the 'Taiwan independence' forces in the island would see as a statement that the US is going to act on. And that is negative for cross-strait relations," Wu said.

Wu also said he was concerned more about the "actions," including arms sales.

A delegation of 27 US defense contractors, including Lockheed Martin and Raytheon, visited Taiwan and held a closed-door "Taiwan-US Defense Industry Forum" with companies and organizations of the island in Taipei last week. Steven Rudder, former US Navy commander of the Marine Corps Forces Pacific, attended the opening ceremony.

"This is another example of the Biden administration's recent inconsistency in its words and deeds on the Taiwan question, which has made cross-strait mutual trust even more fragile, and US relations even more fragile," Wu said.

said. "The US has been 'playing the game' for a long time, and it is actually unwilling to see the two sides of the Taiwan Strait come together."

Responding to Biden's comments on not ruling out military force, Mao Ning, spokeswoman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, urged the US to stop arming Taiwan and stop sending any wrong signals to "Taiwan independence" separatist forces.

Arms sales opposed

Commenting on the latest US plan for arms sales, Zhang Xiaogang, spokesman for China's Ministry of National Defense, urged the US to revoke its plan and stop arming the region.

Zhang said supporting "Taiwan independence" separatist forces will only escalate tensions in the region, push Taiwan into a dangerous situation, and ultimately harm the US itself.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army has intensified military training and enhanced combat preparedness to resolutely safeguard China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity, Zhang said.

Wu said the US wants to turn Taiwan into a "self-defense island" that "defends itself, rushes ahead, and serves as cannon fodder," while the US will hide far away when there is a real cross-strait conflict.

"It is unbelievable and impossible for the US to engage in a head-on conflict with another major nuclear power," Wu said. "The more Taiwan provokes, the faster the reunification process will be."

Moretti said he hoped the US could acknowledge that it would be good for people in the US and China, and for all of Asia and the world to have a cooling of tensions and act accordingly thereafter.

But he said he does not expect the political leadership in the US to take action to dial down the situation because the existing political climate in Washington would see such behavior as a "weakness."

"We can hope that there is not an accident of some kind that requires a response that could be very dangerous for all parties involved," Moretti said.

He suggested that the US can pursue more conversations with China. "Common sense has to guide the conversation, and we're not seeing enough of that," Moretti said.

Wu also said the initiative to end the "vicious cycle" of US-China relations as a whole and the Taiwan question lies more on the US side.

"It is the US that is constantly provoking, creating momentum and sending wrong signals to the 'Taiwan independence' forces and the world. The initiative lies with the US because the US is the provocative side," Wu said.

"US politicians should not be influenced by anti-China forces. They should have their own calm consideration about how to get along with another major power," he said.

"The good thing is that the mainland is very strategic in encouraging cross-strait integration, development and more exchanges, especially among the youths."



Palestinians conduct a search and rescue operation among the rubble after Israeli warplanes targeted a house in the Nuseirat refugee camp area, Gaza, on Sunday. ASHRAF AMRA VIA GETTY IMAGES

Pressure mounts on Israel as Gantz quits

JERUSALEM/GAZA — A key member of Israel's war cabinet quit Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government on Sunday, heaping domestic pressure on the Israeli leader as the conflict in Gaza rages.

Benny Gantz, a former Israeli general and defense minister, announced his resignation from the emergency government after failing to get a postwar plan for Gaza approved by Netanyahu, which he demanded in May.

Although his departure is not expected to bring down the government, it marks the first political blow to Netanyahu eight months into the Gaza assault against Palestinian Hamas militants.

"Netanyahu is preventing us from progressing to a real victory. That is why we are leaving the emergency government today with a heavy heart," Gantz said.

Netanyahu responded within minutes, saying: "Benny, this is not the time to abandon the battle — this is the time to join forces."

It came after Israeli special forces fought gunbattles with Palestinian militants over the weekend in central Gaza's crowded Nuseirat refugee camp area as they swooped in to free the four captives.

The health ministry in the Hamas-run territory said 274 people were killed and 698 wounded, in what it labeled the "Nuseirat massacre."

Among those were at least 64 children, 57 women and 37 elderly people, the ministry said.

"People were screaming — young and old, women and men," said

Nuseirat resident Muhammad Thabet, 35.

"Everyone wanted to flee the place, but the bombing was intense and anyone who moved was at risk of being killed due to the heavy bombing and gunfire."

Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh on Sunday condemned the "horrific massacre" in Nuseirat and insisted that "any agreement reached must include a permanent cessation of aggression, a complete withdrawal from the strip, an exchange deal and reconstruction."

On Monday, Palestinian residents said tanks had been trying to thrust deeper toward the north in the early hours of Monday, edging Shaboura, one of the most densely populated and militant stronghold neighborhoods at the heart of the city.

Israel's retaliatory military offensive has killed at least 37,124 people in Gaza, in response to Hamas' surprise attack on Israel on Oct 7, which has killed about 1,200 people.

Domestic discontent

Adding to the domestic discontent over Netanyahu's handling of the eight-month conflict, a senior military commander, Brigadier General Avi Rosenfeld, also resigned on Sunday over what he called his failure to prevent the Oct 7 attack.

National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir demanded to join the war cabinet in place of Gantz.

Netanyahu is also under growing pressure from his far-right coalition allies, who have threatened to

quit the government if he goes ahead with a hostage release deal outlined by US President Joe Biden last month.

Ben Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich have insisted that the government should not enter into any deal and continue the assault until the end goal of destroying Hamas has been achieved.

A senior Hamas official urged the United States on Monday to pressure Israel to end the conflict in Gaza, ahead of a planned visit on Monday by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to the region to push forward cease-fire efforts.

"We call upon the US administration to put pressure on the occupation to stop the war on Gaza and the Hamas movement is ready to deal positively with any initiative that secures an end to the war," senior Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri said.

Blinken arrived in Egypt on Monday at the start of a regional tour to push for a much-awaited Gaza cease-fire. He also aims to ensure the conflict does not expand into Lebanon.

Two members of the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah were killed and three civilians injured on Sunday in Israeli airstrikes on Lebanese villages, Xinhua reported, citing Lebanese military sources.

In his eighth visit to the region since Oct 7, Blinken met Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Cairo before heading to Jerusalem later on Monday to meet Netanyahu.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Raft rescue

Rescuers help children in an inflatable dinghy to escape from floodwaters after heavy rain in Vietnam's northern Ha Giang Province on Monday. Flooding and landslides have killed three people, state media said, after days of heavy rain partially submerged thousands of homes.

TRONG HAI / AFP



Study shows African elephants call each other by name

By EDITH MUTETHYA

in Nairobi, Kenya
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A new report on African elephants has revealed the wild animals, just like humans, use "names" to address each other, findings that will help in conservation efforts of the endangered animal.

The study published on Monday by Save the Elephants, a conservation group based in Nairobi, Kenya, Colorado State University and conservation organization Elephant Voices, provides unprecedented insights into animal cognition and the evolution of language.

Researchers collected audio recordings of wild female-calf groups in Kenya's Amboseli National Park in 1986 to 1990 and 1997 to 2006 and Samburu and Buffalo Springs National Reserves in November 2019 to March 2020 and June 2021 to April 2022.

The recorded vocalizations from the elephants indicated that they

address each other with individually specific calls dubbed "vocal labels". The calls were uncovered using a machine-learning algorithm known as Random Forest.

The ultimate dataset comprised 469 distinct calls, of which 101 unique callers and 117 unique receivers were identified.

When these calls were played back, the elephants responded energetically to those addressed to them, approaching the source and vocalizing in response — further supporting the existence of "vocal labels".

Joyce Poole, scientific director of Elephant Voices, said over the years she often observed a particular elephant's contact call answered excitedly by one family member, yet a second contact call was answered by a different elephant.

Mickey Pardo, a postdoctoral research fellow in the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Conservation Biology at Colorado State University, said the study not only shows that elephants use specific vocalizations

for each individual, but that they recognize and react to a call addressed to them while ignoring those addressed to others.

"This indicates that elephants can determine whether a call was intended for them just by hearing the call, even when out of its original context," he said.

Deeper understanding

The study findings will help in a deeper understanding of elephant cognition, offering invaluable insights for their conservation, according to the experts.

George Wittemyer, senior author of the study, said it promotes fascination and interest in elephants, which hopefully translates to empathy for the species and support for conservation efforts.

"The hope is that if we can decipher how they communicate, we may be able to communicate more effectively and directly with them," he said in an email to China Daily. He told China Daily the study find-

Briefly

PAKISTAN

7 soldiers killed in terrorist attack

Seven soldiers were killed when terrorists targeted security forces in Pakistan's northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, an army statement said on Sunday. The Inter Services Public Relations, the media wing of the Pakistani military, said an improvised explosive device exploded near a vehicle of the security forces in the Lakki Marwat district of the province, killing seven army personnel, including a senior officer. A clearance operation was carried out to eliminate any terrorists found in the area, the statement said.

JAPAN

Q1 economy revised to 1.8% contraction

Japan's GDP shrank an annualized real 1.8 percent in the January-March quarter, revised up from the preliminary reading of a 2 percent decline, government data showed on Monday. The negative growth was the first contraction in two quarters due to sluggish domestic demand and the effects of a safety data-rigging scandal at a Toyota Motor group that dented production and exports, according to the Cabinet Office. Meanwhile, the transport ministry on the same day conducted an on-site inspection of Honda Motor's headquarters in Tokyo, local media reported.

IRAN

Presidential election candidates unveiled

Iran announced on Sunday the names of six qualified candidates for the country's early presidential election scheduled for June 28. The final nominees include current parliament speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Tehran Mayor Alireza Zakani and Vice-President Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi. After the announcement, the candidates can start their electoral campaigns, which can last until June 27. The 14th presidential election, originally scheduled for next year, was brought forward due to the unexpected death of President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash on May 19.

BULGARIA

Conservatives lead in 6th vote in 3 years

Barely a third of Bulgarians voted in the country's sixth parliamentary elections in three years on Sunday, with the party of conservative former prime minister Boyko Borissov coming in first. Borissov's GERB party won almost 25 percent, according to projections published by polling institutes on Sunday on the basis of a partial count. Reformist grouping PP-DB slumped to between 14 and 15 percent, down from the almost 25 percent they got in the last snap polls last year. The vote was held alongside EU elections. Both votes were marked by apathy that kept turnout at a record low of about 30 percent.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

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CULTURAL JOURNEY

Editor's Note: China Daily launched Vision China in 2018 as a bridge for communication between China and the rest of the world. Focusing on developments in both China and abroad, Vision China invites well-known opinion leaders to share their ideas on a wide range of topics. The latest edition of Vision China was held on Sunday in Jinzhou, Liaoning province. Themed "Treasuring the Past, Enriching the Future", the event saw experts share their thoughts on the inspiration that stems from cultural heritage.

NATION'S TREASURED HISTORY ENRICHING MODERNIZATION

Legacies of Chinese civilization continue to resonate, pointing the way ahead for country's great rejuvenation

In evolving world, China must tell its stories well

By WANG RU wangru@chinadaily.com.cn

The five prominent characteristics of the Chinese civilization have enriched the building of a modern civilization for the Chinese nation, according to Qu Yingpu, publisher and editor-in-chief of China Daily.

Speaking at a Vision China event in Jinzhou, Northeast China's Liaoning province on Sunday, Qu said the growing situation the world faces involves an evolution of changes with a magnitude unseen in a century, and so it's important to enhance international communication.

"We need to tell China's stories well, such as the story of the modern civilization of the Chinese nation, and showcase the glorious chapter of China's modernization through vivid practice and diversified cultural heritage on this land, including Liaoning," said Qu.

He cited the example of Liaoning and analyzed how its past reflects the five prominent features of the Chinese civilization: consistency, originality, uniformity, inclusiveness and peacefulness. Liaoning boasts many sites of Hongshan culture, a key Neolithic culture that covered parts of today's Liaoning and Hebei provinces, as well as the Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

In the early 1980s, archaeologists discovered the Niuheliang Site dating back 5,000 to 5,500 years in Chaoyang, Liaoning, marking a milestone in the study of Hongshan culture.

"Hongshan culture, hailed as 'one of the most important tap roots in the total root system of Chinese culture', is one of the cradles of Chinese civilization," said Qu.

"With various archaeological discoveries of Hongshan culture such as dragon-shaped jade artifacts and the head sculpture of a goddess, as well as related sites, the verifiable history of Chinese civilization can be traced back much earlier than previously believed."

Moreover, Yiwulu Mountain in Jinzhou is where a lot of historical stories spanning more than four millennia were written, from the



Qu Yingpu, publisher and editor-in-chief of China Daily. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

"We are striding forward toward promoting cultural prosperity, building up China's cultural strength and constructing a modern civilization for the Chinese nation."

Qu Yingpu, publisher and editor-in-chief of China Daily

time of the early legendary ruler Shun to the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

As a result, in Liaoning, people can see the dawn of China's 5,000-plus years of civilization and trace its continuous development to this day, reflecting the consistency of the Chinese civilization, he said.

Since Hongshan culture is renowned for its exquisite jade artifacts, they embody the wisdom and creativity of our ancestors, as a reflection of the originality of the Chinese civilization, Qu said.

The industrial progress of modern Liaoning also demonstrates this feature, as the province became the "first industrial base of New China" with symbolic innovative achievements, according to Qu.

Liaoning is home to many "firsts" in New China, including being the place where the first high-powered internal combustion locomotive and first fighter jet were built, and where the first synthetic petroleum in China was

made. The first domestic aircraft carrier and first underwater glider also came from the province. "Liaoning, the fast-changing traditional industrial area, is vigorously developing new quality productive forces and promoting overall revitalization with comprehensive innovation," said Qu.

The inclusive nature of Chinese civilization is evident in Liaoning's diverse population, which includes all 56 ethnic groups in China. The province has fostered interaction and integration among these groups, with ethnic minorities accounting for over 15 percent of the total population, he said.

He also mentioned the similarities in Liaoning's and southern China's cultural elements, and that the Liaoning people's fight against imperialist aggression in the 20th century was vivid testimony to the uniformity and peacefulness of the Chinese civilization.

"We have drawn strength and confidence from cultural inheritance and development. We are striding forward toward promoting cultural prosperity, building up China's cultural strength and constructing a modern civilization for the Chinese nation," said Qu.

These days, Liaoning is accelerating the construction of a new northeastern land and sea channel to Mongolia and Russia, and integrating itself deeply into the grand picture of the high-quality joint construction of the Belt and Road Initiative. "China is offering the international community a constant stream of new opportunities in the new era with its higher level of opening-up and high-quality development," said Qu.



Guest speakers receive souvenir portraits after sharing their insights on exploring and protecting Chinese culture at a Vision China event in Jinzhou, Liaoning province, on Sunday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Youths hail importance of protecting role of diverse cultural heritage

By XING WEN xingwen@chinadaily.com.cn

The youth dialogue segment of Vision China invited young representatives from various countries, who had just completed a two-day tour of historical attractions and scenic areas across Liaoning, to share their insights on exploring Chinese culture and protecting cultural heritage.

Reflecting on the tour, Aleksandra Antonenko, a Russian youth representative who holds a master's degree in Chinese politics from Shanghai Jiao Tong University, said that Liaoning made her feel at home.

"China is offering the international community a constant stream of new opportunities in the new era with its higher level of opening-up and high-quality development," she said.

media channel with her boyfriend, a native of Shanghai, last year. "Through the channel, we can tell China's stories, share our personal perspectives and create a more understandable image for our fellows from other countries," she said.

Similarly, Benec Lengyel, a post-graduate student from Renmin University of China, has traveled to more than 30 cities across China. Since 2022, he has been sharing his travel logs and photos in a monthly online column for The China Cultural Center in Budapest, Hungary.

"Throughout my stay in China, one of my main goals should be to represent this beautiful country to my people back home as much as possible," he said.

When asked about the most important factors in telling China's story, he said, "The most important thing is to

stay trustworthy and be open, to communicate with people, especially those whose opinions differ from ours." Throughout the two-day trip, Lengyel was impressed by the strong sense of pride the local people in Liaoning have for their cultural heritage and history.

"Our tour guide at the Wuyushan Mountain scenic area was a woman from the Manchu ethnic group. As we hiked, she not only talked about the history of the mountain but also shared her own life stories with us. I think it's very important for us to understand how important it is to protect our cultural heritage. It represents not just our country, but also who we really are," he said.

He emphasized the need for international students in China to understand not only their own cultural heritage but also that of other countries. He



Young guests share their thoughts on exploring Chinese culture and protecting cultural heritage. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Speakers piece together stories of civilizations



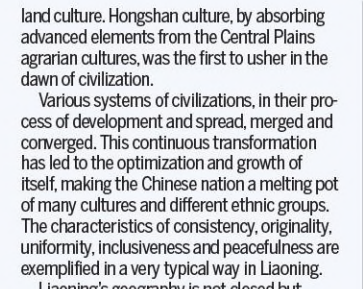
Marcella Festa, associate professor at the School of Cultural Heritage of Northwest University. As an archaeologist, it is my privilege to uncover the secrets of ancient civilizations and piece together the stories that have shaped our world. These stories are shared histories, which foster a deeper appreciation for the diversities and commonalities that define humanity, and by doing so, enriches our understanding and educates and inspires future generations.



Zhu Yong, research librarian at the Palace Museum, director of the Palace Museum Cultural Communication Researcher Institute. Chinese civilization is essentially a diversified and integrated civilization. Dating back 6,000 years, from the present-day Liaoning province in the north to Liangzhu in today's Zhejiang province in the south, the sparkles of civilization shone across the vast land of China. Su Bingqi described it as a "sky full of stars." Among these "stars," the Hongshan culture in Liaoning shines particularly brightly.



Steve Brown, senior research fellow at the University of Canberra's Centre for Creative and Cultural Research. Australia has a rich heritage that expresses the story of migration working and living in Australia. For example, the Huawang Chinese Temple and Museum, located in the tropical region of Far North Queensland, is the last timber and corrugated iron Chinese temple in Australia.



Erik Nilsson, senior journalist, core member of the Edgar Snow Newsroom, China Daily. Exchanges and innovations bring diversity to the DNA of cultures that evolve, in every sense, like species that must adapt to changing environments or face extinction. For example, in today's China, Spring Festival hongbao are still red envelopes containing cash — albeit they are increasingly digital packets containing digital currency sent by WeChat.



Zhong Lina, professor from the Beijing International Studies University. Imagine if time were to flow backward like a river, 5,000 years ago, there existed a primitive civilized society with the rudiments of a state structure in this region. At that time, Niuheliang was one of the few regions in the entire Chinese landmass to have reached



this stage of development. There are traces of agriculture, fishing, hunting and nomadic mixed cultures. The land of Liaoning was always in a state of endless vitality and change. Liaoning is not just the connection between Northeast China and Central China, but more importantly, it is the key that connects Northeast Asia with the inland Eurasian world and even the Western world. It is the land-sea key that links the Eurasian continent of Northeast Asia and the Pacific Plate.



Geography played a very important role in the development of human history. The location of Liaoning determined that Liaoning's story influenced China and the world on a larger scale. Right now, coastal and border areas in Liaoning are further opening up and cooperating with Northeast Asian countries, and smart manufacturing based on a complete industrial chain is taking off. The profound culture came from the unparalleled geographical environment, and the geographical environment also determined Liaoning's unique value in countless takeoff processes of China.

What they say



Jinzhou is striving to become a cultural city and a top tourism destination. We are committed to preserving the treasures of Chinese culture and continuing the city's historical heritage. We warmly invite everyone to visit Jinzhou and experience the unique charm of the historic cultural hub, coastal leisure destination and culinary haven.



Cultural heritage carries the precious wealth and collective memory of our nation. May everyone work together, pass on the torch and safeguard the light of civilization.



Culture, like music, has the power to transcend time and space, connecting people and places. With a long and rich history, the Chinese civilization has deep roots, and every one of us Chinese people takes immense pride and joy in our profound cultural heritage. Culture serves as the soul of a nation.



Liu Huiyan, member of the Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China Liaoning Provincial Committee and head of the committee's publicity department. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Liaoning's foundation provides springboard for prosperous future

By LI YINGXUE liyingxue@chinadaily.com.cn

Liaoning's cultural undertakings and industries are exhibiting unprecedented vigor and vitality, ushering in a dynamic phase of great development and prosperity, a senior official said at a Vision China event held on Sunday in Jinzhou, Liaoning province.

Liaoning's socioeconomic development presents a positive outlook that has not been seen in many years, said Liu Huiyan, member of the Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China Liaoning Provincial Committee and head of the committee's publicity department, adding that cultural revitalization is an integral aspect of Liaoning's comprehensive revitalization.

"Guided by the objective of 'building a high-quality model for the integrated development of culture, sports and tourism', we adhere to the principles of culture shaping tourism, tourism promoting culture, and the comprehensive and coordinated development of culture, sports and tourism," Liu said.

Liaoning is celebrated for its long history and profound cultural heritage. For example, Niuheliang, a famous archaeological site in the province, is a key piece of ancient Chinese history. It pushes the benchmark of the origins of Chinese civilization back a further 500 to 600 years, highlighting Liaoning's importance in the story of human

development, according to Liu. He highlighted that Liaoning is home to many ethnicities, each contributing to its uniquely charming Sanyan culture, Liao-Jin culture, and pre-Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) culture. The region is renowned for its multiple World Heritage Sites. "These sites, alongside the province's unique Red culture and leading tourism, tourism promoting culture, and the comprehensive and coordinated development of culture, sports and tourism," Liu said.

"With its mountains and seas, Liaoning, this fertile cultural land, has countless cultural treasures waiting to be unearthed."

Liu Huiyan, head of the publicity department of Liaoning province

See more on Jinzhou, page 17

CHINA

Plan focuses on carbon footprints

Effective management to contribute to country's emission reduction efforts

By **HOU LIQIANG**
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The Ministry of Ecology and Environment, in cooperation with 14 other national government bodies, has announced a comprehensive plan on carbon footprint management, with the aim of contributing to the development of international rules for carbon footprints by 2030.

The plan clarifies the objectives and management of product carbon footprints in China, according to a news release issued by the ministry last week.

Product carbon footprints refer to the total amount of carbon emissions generated by a product throughout its life cycle, including processes such as raw material production, transportation, distribution, use and disposal.

The release said the plan aims to promote the green and low-carbon transformation of production and lifestyles in China, and enhance exchange and mutual trust in carbon footprint management on the global stage.

By 2027, China aims to establish a preliminary unified national system for managing carbon footprints, according to the plan.

The country aims to develop national guidelines for calculating product carbon footprints in accordance with international standards, and will establish calculation rules and standards for

approximately 100 key products by that time, the release said.

The plan includes setting up an institutional system for product carbon footprint labeling, authentication and tiered management.

At a recent news conference, ministry spokesman Pei Xiaofei said that product carbon footprints are the most widely used concept in carbon footprint management.

"It is a crucial indicator for measuring the green and low-carbon levels of production enterprises and products," he said.

Pei said the effective management of carbon footprints is expected to contribute to the country's efforts to peak carbon dioxide emissions before the end of this decade and realize carbon neutrality before 2060.

The ministry will prioritize electricity, coal and fuel oil in its research on carbon footprint management, hoping that the work will provide solid foundations for product footprint accounting, he said.

By 2030, the national carbon footprint management system will be refined and applied in more scenarios. The number of key products with specific carbon footprint calculation rules and standards will increase to 200, according to the plan.

China expects to engage in the development of international product carbon footprint rules by that time.

Wuhan group wedding both lean and green

By **LIU KUN** in Wuhan
and **CHEN MEILING**

Grooms and brides wearing white T-shirts were greeted with applause and blessings when they arrived by public bus late last month for a "carbon neutrality" group wedding in Wuhan, Hubei province.

Such weddings shun traditional Chinese customs that often involve complex processes and luxurious feasts, sometimes costing hundreds of thousands of yuan. More new couples are now opting for environmentally friendly, simple and sustainable weddings, something the country is also encouraging.

The eight couples arrived at Ziyang Park at 6 am to have their makeup done and get changed. They then boarded a decorated bus to head to the Tanhualin block of the city's Wuchang district.

During the ceremony, they shared their love stories, sang a song about environmental protection, made vows to their partners and received their wedding certificates.

They then visited the Wuchang City History Museum and the Yangtze River beach, before having a buffet at noon. All services were free of charge.

Zhu Panjin, a 34-year-old dentist from Huangshi, Hubei, and his now wife signed up for the group wedding after seeing information about it online.

"We found it fashionable, fun and cost-effective," he said. "Our parents were very supportive, but they couldn't come as they were in our hometown. We didn't invite any relatives or friends, although we could have. Instead, we shared videos and photos in our family and friend groups, and they all thought it was great and meaningful."

"Both my wife and I didn't care about wearing wedding finery or hosting a banquet. Everyone has different perspectives, but we believe that what matters most is living well together in the future."

Li Shuying, 27, a finance worker

"We didn't invite any relatives or friends, although we could have. Instead, we shared videos and photos in our family and friend groups, and they all thought it was great and meaningful."

Zhu Panjin, 34-year-old who signed up for the group wedding with his now wife

from Wuhan, said both she and her husband agree that such a wedding is a meaningful way to convey the importance of environmental protection.

"Besides, we both don't like complexity and trouble," she said. "I think this kind of wedding will become more popular in the future."

Wuchang is the only national-level experimental area for wedding customs reform in Hubei. It has been hosting marriage and family cultural festivals for three years, and the low-carbon group wedding is part of efforts to offer high-quality services to residents, said Wei Fen, director of the district's civil affairs bureau, which was one of the event's organizers.

"The newlyweds highly appreciate this wedding format for several reasons," she said. "First, the low-carbon and environmentally friendly ceremony holds significant meaning that resonates with their inner beliefs. Second, the sense of ceremony in a collective wedding is quite trendy, showcasing individuality within their social circle. And lastly, it does indeed help save costs."

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Horsing around



Riders perform equestrian stunts at the opening ceremony of this year's Dechen-Shangri-La Horse Racing Festival in Shangri-La, Dechen Tibet autonomous prefecture, Yunnan province, on Monday. A total of 294 horses are taking part in the three-day event.

LI JIAXIAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

CITIC Group's deputy general manager under investigation

By **YANG ZEKUN**
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Xu Zuo, deputy general manager of CITIC Group, a State-owned financial conglomerate, is being investigated on suspicion of severe violations of Party discipline and national laws, the Communist Party of China Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and the National Commission of Supervision, China's top anti-graft watchdogs, announced on Sunday.

Xu, a 58-year-old native of Hubei province, once served as the general manager, Party chief and vice-chairman of CITIC Dicastal, a large supplier of aluminum wheels and aluminum chassis parts headquartered in Qinhuangdao, Hebei province.

In October 2016, he served as the assistant general manager of CITIC Group and chairman and Party secretary of CITIC Dicastal

at the same time. In September 2019, he became the deputy general manager of CITIC Group.

Xu is an expert in the field of aluminum alloy metallurgy. In 2019 he received the second prize in the National Science and Technology Progress Award for being one of the main contributors to the key technology for making large aluminum alloy wheels. He also received the 2022 Hebei Province Science and Technology Outstanding Contribution Award, among other honors.

Xu is the 31st official under the management of the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee to undergo disciplinary review and investigation this year. Others have included Lou Wenlong, former vice-president of Agricultural Bank of China, and Li Jiping, former vice-president of China Development Bank.

The third round of inspections

by the CPC's 20th Central Committee commenced in April, with 15 inspection teams conducting routine disciplinary inspections of 34 economic departments and financial units, including CITIC Group.

The 12th central inspection team was stationed in the group in mid-April, with its inspection work expected to last for about three months.

In recent years, financial units and State-owned enterprises have been major focuses of anti-corruption efforts.

A communique issued at the Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection in January emphasized the need to intensify efforts to address corruption in the financial sector, State-owned enterprises, the energy, tobacco and pharmaceutical industries, infrastructure projects and bidding processes.

International commercial launch center preparing for maiden mission

By **ZHAO LEI**
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Construction of the Hainan International Commercial Aerospace Launch Center has been completed in Wenchang, a coastal city in Hainan province, after nearly two years of work, the center said in a news release.

The center's second launch service tower was completed on Thursday, and engineers have begun to prepare it for its maiden launch mission — the debut flight of the Long March 12 carrier rocket.

Construction of the No 2 tower started in October 2022. It is capable of servicing more than 10 types of liquid-propellant carrier rockets, including those in the Long March family and models developed by private companies, the center said.

The No 1 service tower was completed in late December, and is specifically tasked with servicing Long March 8 carrier rockets.

The center is a joint venture of the Hainan provincial government and three State-owned space conglomerates — China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp, and China Satellite Network Group. Construction, which began in July 2022, was undertaken by China Aerospace Construction Group.

When put into operation, the complex will become the fifth ground-based launch complex



Workers put the final touches on the second launch service tower at the Hainan International Commercial Aerospace Launch Center in Wenchang, Hainan province, on Thursday.

LUO YUNFEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

in China and the first dedicated to serving commercial space missions — generally paid for by a business entity — rather than government-funded programs.

The Wenchang Space Launch Center, the other launch complex in Hainan, is, like the three other such centers in China — Jiuquan, Taiyuan and Xichang — administered by the central government and primarily tasked with serving State programs such as lunar explorations and manned spaceflights.

Developed by the Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology, a subsidiary of China Aerospace Science and Technology

Corp, the Long March 12 will be the latest model in the Long March family and will become the first Chinese rocket with a diameter of 3.8 meters — wider than the 3.35-meter diameter of most Chinese rockets. It will have two stages with a combined height of more than 60 meters.

Propelled by six liquid oxygen-kerosene-fueled engines, the model will be capable of transporting spacecraft with a combined weight of at least 10 metric tons to a low-Earth orbit or six tons of satellites to a typical sun-synchronous orbit at an altitude of 700 kilometers, according to designers.

Taiwan mediation center established

By **HU MEIDONG** in Fuzhou
and **ZHAO RUNAN**

A district in Xiamen, Fujian province, established a Taiwan-related dispute resolution center on May 31 to better serve Taiwan compatriots living there.

Staffed by Taiwan compatriots, it is the first of its kind in Fujian. In addition to mediating Taiwan-related disputes, the center will also provide legal consultation, notarization and legal education services. The mediators are primarily Taiwan assistants from the community with extensive grassroots mediation experience.

"They are better able to understand the psychological needs of Taiwan compatriots, allowing them to mediate disputes more effectively and practically," said Fang Xuming, the head of Huli district's Taiwan Affairs Office.

In recent years, the number of Taiwan compatriots living, working and studying in Fujian has been increasing, with the trend especially evident among young people.

Around 1,700 young Taiwan people are working or have started businesses in Huli, according to official data.

"There are also over 3,500 Taiwan businesspeople living in Huli and, in total, more than 11,000 Taiwan compatriots," Fang said. "With such a large population and differences in systems across the strait, it is inevitable that some friction and disputes will arise among neighbors."

He said that without a dispute resolution center, small conflicts could escalate.

"For example, if there's a water leak, residents may feel their rights are being infringed and might go straight to court or file complaints," he said. "These minor neighborhood issues, which could be addressed easily through communication, may become major problems."

Fang said the mediation center has contact points in 21 communities and six Taiwan youth entrepreneurship bases. It will also hire professional lawyers to provide legal training for Taiwan compatriots to enhance the professional skills of Taiwan mediators and foster a favorable business environment and harmonious community for living and working.

In September, the State Council issued a regulation on expanding the involvement of Taiwan compatriots in Chinese mainland society, encouraging them to take on roles as arbitrators, mediators and judicial assistants, and to contribute to the establishment of the rule of law in Fujian.

Yang Jie contributed to this story.

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COMMENT

Editorials

Instead of virtue signaling, Washington should stop enabling Tel Aviv's Gaza action

While Tel Aviv tried to compare its "successful" rescue of four hostages from Hamas in Gaza's Nuseirat camp on Saturday morning to the "Entebbe raid" of 1976, when Israeli commandos rescued more than 100 hostages in Uganda, many Israeli people are more realistic about the exploit that according to Hamas claimed at least 274 Palestinian lives including 64 children.

The haste with which the Israeli military disclosed the details of the "heroic" rescue, following the four hostages arriving home safe and sound on Saturday afternoon, shows how eager the Netanyahu government is to convince the Israeli people that it can deliver on its promise to free the hostages held by Hamas.

Yet despite some fleeting euphoria over the rescue, nationwide anti-war protests continued. Such protests have become a regular occurrence in Israel over the past months. The protesters are demanding Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu step down accusing him of continuing the war in Gaza to hold on to power.

While the Netanyahu government's intention was to use the hostage rescue to boost support and ease the public's growing war weariness, the continuing protests are a telling sign that his government has not only lost the initial sympathy of the international community but also the support of more and more Israeli people, as the bloody military operations are increasingly seen as a means for the Israeli leader to remain in office.

Israeli war cabinet minister Benny Gantz quit the emergency government on Sunday over his

dispute with Netanyahu's post-conflict plans for Gaza. "Unfortunately, Mr Netanyahu is preventing us from approaching true victory, which is the justification for the painful ongoing crisis," said Gantz, whose influence is widely seen as a counterbalance to that of the far-right members of Netanyahu's coalition.

That far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir demanded a place alongside Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant in the war cabinet immediately after Gantz's announcement is a worrying sign that the war cabinet will become even more bloodthirsty as Ben-Gvir is part of the right-wing Otzma Yehudit party that has threatened to quit and bring down the coalition government if Israel accepts a cease-fire proposal put forward by US President Joe Biden.

By launching the rescue less than two days before US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's eighth visit to the region, which sees him travel to Egypt, Israel, Jordan and Qatar from Monday to Wednesday to push for a cease-fire agreement that secures the release of all the Israeli hostages, the Netanyahu government is evincing Washington that it can rescue the hostages without a cease-fire.

That the US' intelligence assistance and military support are believed to have been indispensable for the bloody rescue mission on Saturday makes a mockery of Blinken's professed pro-peace visit.

That being said, instead of showboating, the top US diplomat should play his part in stopping the US from supplying weapons and other military assistance to Israel.

India will not be a willing pawn of US

Given it is the US administration's consistent policy to push India to act as a "counterbalance" to China in the region, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's win in India's general election, which guarantees him a record third straight term, offers a good chance for Washington and its allies to strengthen their anti-China alliance in the strategic "Indo-Pacific" region.

The deepening defense relationship between the US and India was at the top of US President Joe Biden's agenda when he congratulated Modi on the election results. In a call, the two leaders emphasized "deepening the US-India comprehensive and global strategic partnership" and "advancing their shared vision of a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific region", the White House said. US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan is also due to visit New Delhi soon "to engage the new government on shared US-India priorities".

Indeed, having formed the Quad security dialogue that also includes Japan and Australia, the US and India have in recent years bolstered their defense and security partnership through information sharing and technology transfer, with the two countries regularly participating in joint military exercises obviously messaging China.

The 2020 China-India standoff along their disputed border seems to have pushed India-US military collaboration to a new high, with the two sides agreeing in 2023 to jointly develop and produce defense equipment to "strengthen the

shared security" of the two countries.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said at the Shangri-La defense conference, held recently in Singapore, that "the relationship that we enjoy with India right now is as good or better than our relationship has ever been".

Despite this, it would be unrealistic and even naive to think that India will play the role of a willing pawn in the US-orchestrated geopolitical game against China. The country has always been cautious about not being drawn into any direct confrontation with China.

Just days prior to voting starting in the general election, Modi, in an interview, emphasized the importance of India's relations with China. He said the two countries should urgently address the "prolonged situation" on their border. "I hope and believe that through positive and constructive bilateral engagement at the diplomatic and military levels, we will be able to restore and sustain peace and tranquility at our borders."

A sound and stable China-India relationship serves the common interests of both sides and is conducive to peace and development of the region and the world at large. So long as the two countries proceed from their fundamental interests and those of their people, and bear in mind the overall situation, they will be able to maintain the development of their relations on a healthy and stable track. The US is daydreaming if it wants to use the differences that exist between the two countries to pit India against China.

Dialogue antidote to clash of civilizations

Monday was the first International Day for Dialogue among Civilizations after the United Nations General Assembly on Friday adopted a resolution to designate June 10 as such. The resolution was proposed by China and 14 other countries.

The urgency for dialogue between different cultures is an evident need, so designating a day for dialogue among civilizations is of great significance for promoting harmony among peoples.

With geopolitical conflicts becoming increasingly severe and rivalry between major countries intensifying, addressing the deficits in global development, security and peace is a pressing concern. The military conflict between Russia and Ukraine shows no sign of even a temporary cease-fire, and neither does the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. Instead, both are intensifying and have the potential to spread.

When there is growing global uncertainty and volatility, dialogue is indispensable if countries with different cultural backgrounds are to understand each other, or at least come to a consensus that there should be enough latitude for tolerance.

Conflicts, military conflicts in particular, will only widen division and aggravate differences, and finally give rise to even more problems.

It is natural that countries should have differences, and it is possible for such differences to develop

into conflicts. But that should not mean that such differences cannot be shelved or ironed out through dialogues and exchanges. Nor should it mean that cultural differences inevitably lead to conflict.

Rather as the ancient Silk Road highlights, it is exchanges between different cultures that help promote the development of human civilization. Cross-cultural dialogue is the basis for cultural exchanges.

Beijing put forward the Global Civilization Initiative, along with initiatives for global security and development, in 2023. That reflects China's understanding through experience that security is a prerequisite for development, and development is a guarantee for security. Rather than seeing the differences among different civilizations as the inevitable cause of a clash, it sees them as a means for civilizations to learn from each other for the good of humanity as a whole.

China has long sought to promote dialogue among different cultures, and it has been doing what it can to broker dialogues and negotiations between parties in conflict. It is through China's brokerage that Iran and Saudi Arabia have realized political reconciliation after many years of confrontation.

The UN's designation of June 10 as the International Day for Dialogue among Civilizations should serve to increase the world's awareness of the importance of dialogue in addressing cultural differences and thus promoting world peace.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Opportunities and growth, but still challenges for trade

China's total imports and exports of goods in the first five months of this year reached 17.5 trillion yuan (\$2.41 trillion), up 6.3 percent year-on-year, and those in May far exceeded market expectations, with exports increasing by 11.2 percent and the import rising by 5.2 percent.

The export of China's high value-added commodities such as mechanical and electrical products have grown rapidly, accounting for nearly 60 percent of total exports, making them an important engine of China's foreign trade growth. The shift from traditional labor-intensive products to high-end manufacturing products and the continuous optimization of the

structure of export commodities reflect the high-quality development of China's economy and its industrial upgrading.

While registering rapid growth in its exports, China's imports have also maintained a good growth momentum. The diversified and high-end trend of import demand, from raw materials to consumer goods, from traditional goods to high-tech products, all reflect the unleashing of China's demands in different fields and levels. Expanded imports have effectively promoted the deep integration of the Chinese and world economy, lubricating the development of global trade.

However, China's foreign trade

still faces numerous challenges, because of rising trade protectionism, increased import tariffs imposed by some countries, and the accelerating reconstruction of the global supply chain, to which China needs to actively respond. On the one hand, it should promote industrial upgrading and innovative development, and accelerate the cultivation of new growth drivers for foreign trade. On the other hand, it should strengthen international cooperation, promote trade and investment liberalization and facilitation, and create a sound environment for the steady development of foreign trade.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

Far-right win will increase uncertainties

The big gains made by far-right parties in the European Parliament elections will shape the European Union's stance on a range of international issues in the coming five years.

The right-wing ideology will have the most impact on immigration, as most, if not all, radical right-wing parties are opposed to the EU's immigration policies. The rise of the radical right may weaken the EU's ability to formulate more collective responses to immigration issues, and lead to changes in domestic policies across various countries.

While most right-wing parties acknowledge the reality of climate change, many of their members

and followers question the European Green Deal and the Fit for 55 legislative package, which aims to reduce the EU's emissions by at least 55 percent by 2030. The radical right criticizes this scheme as an elitist project that ignores the economic and social costs for citizens, infringing upon personal freedoms.

Right-wing parties often emphasize traditional Christian values. That stance may lead the EU to revise its liberal foreign policy and focus more on internal issues, while avoiding interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Similar to former US president Donald Trump's "America First" policy, with the rise of the right

wing in Brussels, there may be a wave of "Europe First" sentiments. However, such a stance may weaken the EU's potential for multilateral cooperation.

The results of the European Parliament elections are likely to deepen existing global uncertainties. Combined with the possibility of Trump's reelection as US president, the right-wing shift in the EU can have wider global geopolitical implications. However, by strengthening its strategic autonomy, Europe can position itself as a constructive participant and mediator in international affairs, which is also needed by the rest of the world.

— GUANCHANG

What They Say

Trend of friendly cooperation cannot be held back

Editor's note: The Philippines' immigration department has taken a series of actions recently that are obviously targeted at Chinese people in the country amid the rising tensions between the Philippines and China over their maritime disputes in the South China Sea. The following are excerpts from a speech that Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Huang Xilian delivered at a ceremony for the fourth annual Award for Promoting Philippines-China Understanding (APPCU) on Saturday, which also marked the 49th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the Philippines and the 23rd China-Philippines Friendship Day.

The APPCU was born during the hard days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks to the support of those with a broader view, the APPCU has become a flagship program to enhance traditional friendship, mutual understanding, and affinity between our two countries, whose friendship spans over more than a millennium. In the mid-1970s, the older generation of leaders made a strategic decision to open up a new era of diplomatic ties. Forty-nine years have passed and our commitment to the millennium-old friendship and affinity has kept us inspired as always.

The APPCU is a shining example of such inspiration. Over the past four years, 33 Philippine friends have received this award. They are those who have contributed to China-Philippines friendship as a way of life, and who endorse and cham-

panion the traditional friendship in the new era. They are those who bear witness to and actually work for mutual understanding and amity between our two countries.

History gives perspective. As Honorable Senate President Francis "Chiz" Escudero said just now in his video message, it's natural for China and the Philippines to have differences. But despite having different positions on some specific issues, these should not be cause for misunderstandings, misjudgments or even conflicts.

China always advocates that the two countries should, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect, properly manage and handle our differences through dialogue and consultation, and promote the sound and stable development of our bilateral relations. Despite the ups and downs

in relations since the establishment of diplomatic ties, China-Philippines relations have remained tenacious and forged ahead against all odds.

This follows the defining trend of the times, reflects the will of the two peoples, and is also inseparable from the tireless efforts of people from different walks of life, including all of the guests present here today. Greater efforts have always been made each time bilateral relations have encountered difficulties.

At present, China-Philippines relations are once again at a crossroads. We hope that more and more people from different sectors of society will join the great cause of promoting mutual understanding and amity between China and the Philippines and contribute to and safeguard the millennium-old friendship.

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COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Yangtze River Delta Region

Editor's note: The Yangtze River Delta region, one of China's most economically innovative regions, is of strategic significance to the country's modernization. Two experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Liu Dongmei

G60 corridor to boost innovation

Since its inception in 2016, the G60 Science and Innovation Corridor in the Yangtze River Delta region, which includes nine cities such as Shanghai, Hangzhou of Zhejiang province and Hefei of Anhui province, has developed into an important national platform driving the integrated development of the region.

The number of G60 corridor-based companies listed on the Shanghai Stock Exchange Science and Innovation Board exceeds one-fifth of the national total. These companies have formed a cross-regional integrated platform centered on "science and technology innovation plus industry". The corridor has pioneered a new development path driven by innovation.



The author is secretary of the Party Committee of the Chinese Academy of Science and Technology for Development.

Leveraging the expressways and high-speed railways in the region such as the Shanghai-Suzhou-Hangzhou railway, the corridor has expanded from Shanghai's Songjiang district to nine cities along the major transportation arteries. What began as the "Songjiang Corridor 1.0" later became the "Shanghai-Jiaxing-Hangzhou Corridor 2.0", the "G60 Science and Innovation Corridor", and ultimately the G60 Science and Innovation Corridor, which now comprises nine cities in the Yangtze River Delta region.

The focus of the G60 corridor is now on "integration" and "high quality". It aims to synergize the industrial and governance systems, in order to transform "Made in China" into "Created in China" based on technological and institutional innovation.

To address challenges such as loose organizational forms and local governments' lack of motivation for cooperation, and to leverage China's unique advantages in government leadership and boost intergovernmental cooperation, the G60 corridor has built a multilayered governance network.

First, the interactions between central and local governments guide multilevel government coordination. Empowered by the central government, local governments and the G60 corridor employ a "top-down interactive" strategy to coordinate with relevant ministries to enhance the corridor's policy advantages.

Second, to boost cross-regional cooperation and intergovernmental cooperation, the nine cities have adjusted and integrated their administrative mechanisms, breaking the administrative barriers. The Ministry of Science and Technology, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the People's Bank of China, the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission and the China Securities Regulatory Commission have formed a special working group to help build the G60 corridor, with the group being jointly led by the Ministry of Science and Technology and relevant Shanghai government departments.

In addition, after its establishment, the operational office of the G60 Science and Innovation Corridor Joint Conference in the Yangtze River Delta. The nine cities, too, have established G60 promotion offices, boosting information and cadre exchanges, and promoting resource sharing and win-win cooperation.

The G60 corridor will establish a mechanism to address the problem of homogeneous industrial development in adjacent regions, make regional resource utilization more



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

efficient, boost collaborative industrial development, and promote the integration of industry chains across regions.

Besides, coordinated planning has led to rapid industrial development in the nine cities. Aiming to build advanced industrial systems, the nine cities have jointly issued the "14th Five-Year Plan for Advanced Manufacturing Collaborative Development in the Yangtze River Delta region" and a list of core technology research subjects to realize differential development across regions.

Spatial layout planning plays a key role in industrial development and project landing. To promote resource integration and share high-quality scientific and technological resources, the nine cities are focusing on strategic emerging industries and "specialized and new" small and medium-sized enterprises, establishing 16 industrial (park) alliances and 13 industrial cooperation demonstration zones. They have also taken measures to ensure the high-quality development of industry chains in sectors such as auto parts, biomedicine and intelligent logistics equipment.

Playing a significant role in directly meeting market demands, linking upstream and downstream resources in industry chains, and enhancing the stability and competitiveness of regional industry chains, leading enterprises are driving the free flow

of elements in the region, prompting thousands of enterprises in the nine cities to join the G60 large aircraft supplier reserve pool and build a cluster of hundreds of industry chain cooperative enterprises for SMIC International.

To boost the advantage of the Yangtze River Delta region in innovations, address the problem of cross-regional R&D in technology, and promote the scientific and technological resource sharing, the G60 corridor has developed a diversified scientific and technological innovation matrix.

National-level science hubs in Hefei, Anhui province, national biopharmaceutical technology innovation centers in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, and other major R&D platforms, as well as the Songjiang G60 Brain Intelligence Science and Innovation Base, the Cohen Laboratory and the Uto Laboratory have been turned into innovation centers.

The implementation of the "Action Plan for Jointly Tackling Key Technologies" in the G60 corridor, and the strategic cooperation projects between the nine cities and the Shanghai Institutes for Advanced Studies of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and the Shanghai Academy of Sciences have resulted in major scientific and technological achievements.

While the first cross-regional scientific and technological achievement transformation fund in the

Yangtze River Delta region has been created, the five auctions for the products created in the G60 corridor have cumulatively yielded 18 billion yuan (\$2.48 billion).

To prevent local governments from formulating different investment attraction policies with varying degrees of preferential treatment and subsidies, the G60 corridor has strengthened the unified policy to ensure the smooth cross-regional flow of innovation elements. What has helped the process is the establishment of the "One Network Office" mechanism, which covers all the nine cities and comprises 89 comprehensive service windows, and its designation by the State Council, China's Cabinet, as the first batch of pilot areas for comprehensive government service in the Yangtze River Delta region.

The three provinces and one city — Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Anhui provinces, and Shanghai — in the Yangtze River Delta region have jointly issued 28 financial support policies, improving the matrix of financial products such as G60 science and technology loan, park loan, quality loan, standard loan, and talent loan, using the Shanghai Stock Exchange's capital market to promote the development of the G60 corridor.

As such, the future of the G60 corridor looks bright.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Dan Steinbock

Integrated megapolises next stage of reform

After record rapid urbanization, China is moving to the next stage with the development of integrated and coordinated multi-city clusters. The Yangtze River Delta region is a case in point.

To identify the best ways to advance the integrated development of the Yangtze River Delta region, President Xi Jinping chaired a symposium in Shanghai in November 2023. Half a decade before that, the president had championed an initiative that made the integrated development of the delta region a national strategy.

From the standpoint of development, I believe China has entered the next stage of reform and opening-up, essential to propel Chinese modernization.

The Yangtze River is China's longest waterway. Running more than 6,300 kilometers, it encompasses a set of economic powerhouses and megacities, including the provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Anhui, and the megapolis of Shanghai.

Between 2018 and 2022, the Yangtze River Delta region's GDP grew at an average annual rate of about 5.5 percent, accounting for 24 percent of the national total — the region's GDP exceeds that of Japan's.

Recently, Tesla inaugurated its new megapack battery factory in Shanghai, which highlighted the US carmaker's increasing investment in China amid intense competition. Among other industrial ecosystems, the Yangtze River Delta (YRD) region is a major automobile production base, and a hub of new energy vehicles (NEVs), including a variety of electric vehicles. With chip and software sourced from Shanghai, batteries from Jiangsu, die-casting machines from Zhejiang, an NEV factory in the YRD region can reportedly acquire all the auto parts within a four-hour drive.

From microchips to large aircraft, and cloud computing to artificial intelligence, coordination among these locations fosters industrial transformation and upgrading in the region. Because of its status as one of the most economically vibrant regions in China, the YRD city cluster has attracted major State-owned and private enterprises, and a large number of Fortune 500 companies for setting up headquarters in China.

As an increasingly diversified industrial, financial, retail and corporate hub, Shanghai can drive regional clusters while benefiting from their complementary strengths. But Shanghai is not alone. It is developing in tandem with China's other major regional growth engines.

Consider these important facts of development. In 1950, only 13 percent of the Chinese people lived in cities. By 1980, just after China launched reform and opening-up, the figure had increased to 19 percent. Since then, it has soared to a stunning 66 percent, with the initial urbanization drive taking off in the special economic zones of the largely coastal first- and second-tier cities. Now, urbanization is intensifying even in third- and fourth-tier cities.

Moreover, the development momentum is shifting from urbanization toward the integration of major regional city clusters.

China has several major "megapolises". In addition to the Yangtze River Delta region, the megapolises and economic hubs include the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the Jing-Jin-Ji (Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei city cluster), and the Chengdu-Chongqing dual-city hub.

Furthermore, some emerging multi-city clusters have the potential to develop into new regional growth engines in a decade or two.

Internationally, China's emerging megapolises also face competitive threats and cooperative opportunities from the regional engines of the advanced economies.

As the world's leading global financial center, the New York Metropolitan Area hosts the headquarters of more than one-third of Fortune 500 companies in the United States. The San Francisco Bay Area is the heart of global innovation, which is coupled with Boston and its Ivy League research-oriented universities, such as Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Austin's energy cluster, Raleigh's Research Triangle and Seattle's Microsoft engine.

These dynamic US regions compete with Western Europe's innovation-driven cities such as London, Berlin, Paris and the Nordic hubs.

However, what makes Chinese cities unique is their ability to combine world-class innovation at affordable prices in a way that the rich economies can't. Over time, some major multi-city clusters in India, Brazil, Mexico and Indonesia have the potential to follow in the footsteps.

But whenever new challengers emerge, they face entrenched incumbents, some of which seek to retain their monopoly. From New York City to Los Angeles, farsighted Western metropolises and their mayors understand that businesses compete, whereas cities and countries cooperate, whereas cities and countries cooperate. By contrast, governments that prioritize win-lose geopolitics can't benefit from win-win cooperation.

Some portray the rise of regional multi-city clusters as threats, rather than opportunities. They have tried to contain China's rise by targeting successful Chinese companies, such as Huawei, the information and communications technology giant, and ByteDance, the parent of TikTok.

That has little to do with the "competition" they claim to tout. Instead, such efforts are reminiscent of colonial protectionism and imperial preferences that once legitimized monopolies in the name of Western supremacy.

Today, terms differ, but goals don't. It is a geopolitical ploy to avoid real competition with the Global South. Today, it targets China. Tomorrow, it will target India, Brazil, Mexico and Indonesia. Mega protectionism should have no role in the 21st century.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



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GLOBAL VIEWS

ZHANG YUN

Incremental progress

Pessimism about trilateral cooperation among China, Japan and the ROK is unjustified

The China-Japan-the Republic of Korea trilateral summit meeting resumed last month in Seoul after a four-and-half-year hiatus. With the issuing of a joint declaration, the event heralds a promising revival of cooperation among the three neighbors.

However, some analysts said the summit failed to achieve any progress on the Korean Peninsula security issue, and in the context of the ongoing China-United States tensions, there is limited room for improvement of relations



between China and the two major allies of the US in East Asia. Some claimed that with the rise of Chinese economy, the complementarity among the three East Asian economies has been replaced by competition.

In fact, pessimism about China-Japan-ROK cooperation and Northeast Asian regionalism is nothing new, as there have long been voices saying that the soil for cooperation in this region doesn't exist.

There is a tendency to compare Northeast Asian regionalism with the integration of Europe. But it is misleading to judge the nature and level of integration of other regions against the standards of Europe, and thereby conclude that East Asia lacks the soil for cooperation. The historical legacy of disputes and the divided Korean Peninsula dictate that East Asian regionalism will progress at a different pace compared with that of Europe.

While the level of institutionalization of China-Japan-ROK cooperation needs improvement, that doesn't negate the progress the three neighbors have made in regional cooperation. The trilateral cooperation was initiated during the 1997 Asian financial crisis under the framework of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Given that China and the ROK established diplomatic ties only five years earlier, it was quite an accomplishment to form a cooperation mechanism in such a short period of time.

In 2008, the three countries held their first summit outside of the ASEAN framework; in 2014, an investment deal among the three countries took effect; in 2015, China and the ROK signed a free trade deal; and with the Regional Comprehensive Eco-



WANG XIAOYING/ CHINA DAILY

nomc Partnership coming into effect in 2022, free trade among China, the ROK and Japan was realized indirectly, with the trade volume reaching nearly \$800 billion that year. These are remarkable results of economic cooperation.

There are some who claim that China's rapid economic and technological advancements have weakened the economic complementarity among the three economies.

But in actuality, the three countries have achieved win-win development through building integrated regional industry and supply chains.

Revisiting history helps us understand the issue. After the Plaza Accord was signed in the mid-1980s, the Japanese yen appreciated rapidly against US dollar. As a consequence, Japanese enterprises started investing in other East Asian nations, initiating the restructuring of regional industry chains; from the 1980s to 1990s, the rise of economy in the ROK, one of the Four Asian Tigers, sparked a new wave of

industry chain reconfiguring; and China's economic ascent in the 21st century led to another industry chain restructuring of the region.

In the three waves of industry chain restructuring, the three nations' companies have shown strong resilience and competitiveness, and Japan and the ROK did not experience a growing wave of anti-free trade sentiment and nationalism witnessed in some developed countries. Enterprises of China, Japan and the ROK have their respective strengths, and the three countries' industry chains are deeply intertwined, creating more, instead of less, opportunities for cooperation in the new wave of restructuring.

Another misperception is that Chinese "overcapacity" in green industries has intensified economic competition in the region. In fact, China doesn't have an overcapacity problem, but rather, an undercapacity problem, because from the global perspective, China's green products are far

from enough to meet the vast demand of the international market, especially the Global South countries.

The "Trilateral+X" cooperation model proposed in the joint declaration is a major innovation. In the face of the rapid advancements of new technologies, the Middle East and Latin America have pressing needs for industrial upgrading, and therefore show strong interest in strengthening economic cooperation with East Asian countries.

Recently, the President of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan visited China to attend the 10th ministerial conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum. Before arriving in Beijing, the UAE leader paid a visit to the ROK where the two countries signed a comprehensive economic partnership agreement.

China, Japan and the ROK all champion free trade and are committed to maintaining stable supply and industry chains,

which are in the common interests of Global South countries.

That competition, instead of cooperation, is the main theme in Northeast Asia's political landscape is palpably false. Some argued that the joint declaration barely touched on security issues, and as the US, Japan and the ROK have enhanced their military alliance, there is little room for security cooperation among China, Japan and the ROK.

However, Northeast Asia has been home to an economic boom for more than 30 years. There has been two pillars for the decades-long peace and prosperity in East Asia. The first is that regional countries have been focusing on developing their economy, thus creating the need for a peaceful external environment; and the second is regional countries' commitment to the security philosophy that seeks to manage differences through cooperation.

At the core of Northeast Asia's security problem is the absence of a balanced and functional peacekeeping mechanism. Resorting to military deterrence will only feed into a vicious circle of escalating tensions. The successful experiences of the Six-Party Talks prove that a multilateral security framework can be established through diplomatic efforts should all parties respect each other's security interests. China-Japan-ROK cooperation does not target any other country, instead, it is laying the foundation for wider multilateral cooperation in the region.

As for China-Japan-ROK cooperation, experience shows that Northeast Asian regionalism tends to take one step forward, and then take one or even two steps back. The progress in regionalism should be viewed in an objective manner, and its potential should not be underestimated.

China, Japan and the ROK should foster confidence in regional collaboration, which will get a boost through closer interactions among the three nations.

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ZHANG YONGJUN

Boomerang moves

The Biden administration's imposition of tariff hikes on Chinese goods will end up disrupting US as well as global supply chains

The United States announced additional tariffs on a variety of imports from China, including electric vehicles, lithium batteries, solar cells, critical minerals, semiconductors, steel, aluminum and port cranes on May 14. As China's Foreign Ministry said, the US side has continued its wrongdoing



and such a move will have a negative impact on China-US economic and trade relations. In addition, it will adversely affect the US supply chain and disrupt the global supply chain.

When in office, the Donald Trump administration imposed tariffs on around \$300 billion worth of Chinese imports on the basis of the so-called Section 301 tariff review. According to analysis on data from the US Census Bureau by Chinese analysis company Sinoimex, from 2017 to 2023, US imports of Chinese goods included in the Section 301 decreased by \$51.58 billion, a decline of about 17.3 percent.

The effect of tariff hikes under the Trump administration is mostly felt in a small number of commodities, including communications equipment, computer equipment, televisions and household items. There's an evident drop in the import volume of these products by the US for two reasons. First, the trade volume of these products prior to the tariff hike was relatively large. Second, after the imposition of the additional tariffs, either production of these products moved to other countries (regions) or the US itself expanded the scale of production, thus producing a strong transfer or substitution effect.

Generally speaking, tariffs are imposed on imported products to protect the development of domestic industries. However, the latest tariff hike by the Joe Biden administration cannot play the role. Take the EV industry as an example.

Despite a rapid increase in Chinese auto exports, the export volume to the US market has been quite small.

China exported 4.91 million vehicles in 2023, a jump of 57.9 percent from 2022, with new energy vehicle exports surging by 77.6 percent to 1.2 million units, according to data released by the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers. The export destinations cover over 180 countries across Europe, Asia, Oceania, the Americas and Africa.

The US ranked 14th among China's auto export destinations in 2023, when China exported 74,800 cars to the US, accounting for a meager 1.5 percent of its total car exports. Besides, the vast majority of Chinese auto exports to the US are fuel vehicles. Thus, the latest tariff hike will have little impact on US EV imports and will not help expand the size of the domestic EV market in the US.

Rather, the recent tariff increase will adversely affect the supply chain of US automakers.

The volume of Chinese lithium battery exports to the US has been quite large. In 2023, China's lithium battery exports to the US surged to \$13.55 billion, accounting for 20.8 percent of China's total lithium battery exports and making the US the largest single-country export market for Chinese lithium battery makers.

The impact of the recent tariff hike on US lithium battery imports is significantly greater than that on EVs. US automakers have to import a large number of EV parts from China, as China is the world's largest producer of lithium batteries, accounting for over 70 percent of global output. Thus, the tariff increase will have a large impact on the supply chain of US carmakers.

According to the analysis of auto experts, the three top US EV new producers other than Tesla — Rivian, Lucid and Fisker — are all mired in difficulties, with excessive inventory, heavy loss and survival difficul-

ties. The tariff hike will not help expand the market for US domestic carmakers, but rather, will significantly increase their production costs.

The latest tariff hike on Chinese products will also be detrimental to the efficiency of US supply chains.

International shipping is an important part of the global supply chain, and increased tariffs on Chinese products such as port cranes will undermine the efficiency of the shipping industry. With a low level of automation, US ports have lagged behind those in many parts of the world. Congestion at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach in 2021 was mainly caused by poor evacuation capacity, which resulted in freight rate hikes, fueling US inflation. China is a major producer of port cranes, with strong international competitiveness in

this regard. The newly imposed tariffs will increase the cost of technical renovation and transformation by US ports.

In a nutshell, the Biden administration's tariff hike on Chinese imports violates the basic principles of international division of labor, and such a protectionist move will also hurt US domestic industries.

As a matter of fact, the Biden administration's tariff hike is mostly driven by domestic political concerns. The 2024 US presidential election battle is now set — Biden representing the Democratic Party against Trump representing the Republican Party. Trump imposed tariffs on Chinese exports to the US during his term of office, and has vowed massive new tariffs if he wins this year's election. To undercut the impact of Trump's campaign rhetoric, the Biden administration launched a new

round of tariff hikes on Chinese products.

Meanwhile, the recent tariff hike aims to appease US automakers and win over their support, as major US NEV manufacturers are mired in difficulties. But the above-mentioned analysis shows that the move will fail to support the US EV industry.

Besides the political pandering, the Biden administration's tariff hike on Chinese products is ultimately aimed at continuing to contain and suppress China strategically and hindering the development of Chinese industries.

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MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

LIFE

Zhang Bin, a tour guide in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, recently changed his working approach. Widely known as Bingdan ("ice egg"), an influencer in his 30s with more than 8 million followers on short-video platform Douyin, he released a tour guide video with English subtitles late last month.

"Riding a bike on the ancient city wall is certainly a nice tourist experience, but why not see the Terracotta Warriors now that you are here," Zhang comments in the video about a video posted by an international tourist who recently visited the city.

In the video, Zhang also recommends local specialties travelers shouldn't miss out on and demonstrates how to make digital payments using their mobile phones.

It's his latest endeavor to convey the city's charm to inbound travelers, as he has witnessed the country's commitment to welcoming international tourists.

Last month, about 400 representatives of governments, institutions and tourism-related enterprises of two of the world's biggest economies attended the 14th China-US Tourism Leadership Summit held in the ancient Chinese city of Xi'an. Zhang accompanied them to several well-known tourist attractions during their stay, including the Grand Tang Dynasty Ever Bright City, a 2.1-kilometer street where Tang-style architecture, featuring flying eaves and layered pavilions, abound and the glorious culture of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) is presented in modern style.

Carrying a distinctive local accent, Zhang rose to fame with his humorous delivery on the Terracotta Warriors at Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum. "I tend to use humor to pique more curiosity about the history and culture of Xi'an, maintaining tourists' enthusiasm," Zhang explains.

He often interlaces the Shaanxi dialect and anecdotes about the museum with technical explanations to liven up the trip, which usually lasts more than two hours.

Zhang has a bag of tricks to enhance his delivery of those cultural relics. He jokingly shows the resemblances between certain Terracotta Warriors figurines and entertainment celebrities.

This is always widely appreciated.

However, his delivery has never come at the cost of accuracy, regarding the culture and history behind the museum. The man has been exposed to the Terracotta Warriors since childhood, as his grandfather was among the first to construct the museum, and his uncle was on the museum's archaeological team. "I felt a personal urge to tell their stories," Zhang says.

In 2012, he passed the national tour guide qualification exam. With family members working at the museum, Zhang has kept up with archaeological studies at the site.

"Whenever I come across any problems, I will send them text messages," he says, adding that his uncle has greatly influenced him. "He insists that I speak with precision



Tour guide captivates visitors with Shaanxi charm

Explaining the nuances of history captures more attention by using a unique approach, Yang Feiyue reports.



Top: Tourists appreciate a Terracotta Warrior at the Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum in Xi'an, Shaanxi province. **ZHANG TIANZHU / FOR CHINA DAILY** **Above left:** Zhang Bin, a popular tour guide in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, boasts more than 8 million followers on short-video platform Douyin. **Above right:** Zhang with a group of young visitors to the museum in Xi'an. **PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY**

and he often picks holes in my work."

Under this influence, Zhang meticulously examines every word and verifies all data and statements, and each time, he revises his script.

The role of a tour guide has given full play to his passion for sharing his hometown treasures with the outside world. He holds himself to a high standard and strives to become a tour guide who can answer any

tourist's question, no matter how difficult. This requires daily studying, learning about the history and culture of Shaanxi, understanding the diverse psychology and needs of thousands of tourists, and enriching his cultural knowledge and guiding

techniques, according to Zhang.

No detail is too obscure. For example, some tourists even ask about the flowers and plants in the museum, so he "studied all of them".

Last month, a guest asked him how come a horse bone dug up from the mausoleum site could survive hundreds of years. He wasted no time consulting with a museum staff member, who revealed the mystery that it was thanks to the low water content of the soil.

In addition to being serious about the historical part, Zhang has also tapped into his talents of singing and performing, which have endeared him to his guests.

It's a result of observing his interactions with his guests. For example, he notes that the explanations in the Terracotta Warriors exhibition hall have been based on research by archaeologists, which can sometimes be too technical for visitors. "Since not all tourists are interested in every historical detail or related info, sometimes a bored tourist may interrupt the tour guides' introduction," he explains.

He then began to re-edit and reintegrate anecdotes about historical figures and popular sayings, transforming rigid professional knowledge into flexible and engaging stories, delivered through memora-

ble and witty remarks.

It didn't take long for Zhang to work his way up to become a head guide in the tour company.

With summer approaching, many of his guests will be children, so he needs to make the explanations more interesting, Zhang says. For example, he has interspersed four or five children's songs into his script.

"I have converted some of the technical explanations into folk songs that are easy to remember for kids. After the tour, they can still sing the folk songs to engage with history," Zhang says, adding that he has also applied discussions and Q&A sessions to spice

things up for young tourists.

For those who want technical explanations, Zhang digs into the latest archaeological reports and ensures their questions and any previous misinterpretations about the museum are addressed.

The turning point for him came in 2019 when he started making short videos to introduce the history and culture of Xi'an. More people began to appreciate his charm.

Cen Yanhua, a tourist from Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, still remembers Zhang's distinctive Shaanxi accent during his trip in 2020. "We toured the city with him as a guide and experienced the charm of the Shaanxi dialect," Cen says, adding that Zhang even taught him to recite Tang poems in the dialect. "I read about how Tang poetry should be recited in the dialect to be more rhythmic and authentic."

The popular tour guide now takes three groups a day, each group consisting of 60 tourists. He owes it to the rising popularity of Xi'an and says that the profound history and culture of the city, as well as the presentation of Tang Dynasty elements in art performances and exhibitions, have made the city a hot spot among travelers.

During the May Day holiday, the city received 14 million tourists, an increase of 5.38 percent year-on-year, up 23.74 percent compared to the same period in 2019, before the pandemic. The total tourist expenditure reached 11.5 billion yuan (\$1.59 billion), an increase of 6.72 percent year-on-year, up 38.3 percent from 2019.

Without expecting to become something of a celebrity but somehow becoming one, he wanted to do more meaningful things for his home. In his spare time, Zhang has obtained certificates as an all-media operator and a network host, promoting the sales of local specialties, such as dates, pomegranates and noodles. He has taken various opportunities to promote Xi'an, including attending entertainment shows by China Central Television. He was also named an ambassador of poverty alleviation by the Shaanxi provincial committee of the Communist Youth League in 2020.

More tourists are willing to pay higher fees for better services, which has paved the way for the rise of celebrity tour guides like Zhang, according to some experts. "These tour guides are adept at capturing the trends from internet channels and incorporating them into their services. Many of them have rich experiences and are good at delivering professional knowledge," says Yu Jun, a tourism management lecturer with Jiangsu-based Global Institute of Software Technology.

Zhang says having different tourists every day brings him a sense of freshness. "My dream is simple — to tell the stories of my hometown, spread the history and culture of Shaanxi, and make more people fall in love with the Terracotta Warriors and the province," he says.

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By WANG QIAN
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As the familiar melodies that once echoed through his childhood fill the air at Prince Kung's Palace Museum in downtown Beijing, 53-year-old Liang Rongshan is transported back in time.

These tunes, once played by his father and grandfather, now resonate through the hands of his fellow troupe members during a puppet show-themed exhibition. Liang feels a wave of nostalgia. With a deft hand, he begins to demonstrate his craft, cutting intricate puppet silhouettes from cow leather for an eager audience.

As a third-generation shadow puppet performer and sculptor in Zhushan county, Shiyan, Hubei province, Liang brings the ancient art alive in the *Exhibition of Shadow Puppets From the Collection of Prince Kung's Palace Museum* and hopes more people will appreciate its beauty.

"As an art form embodying shadow and light, the craft of shadow puppetry has been passed down



Left: A shadow puppetry troupe performs at an exhibition at Prince Kung's Palace Museum in Beijing. **Right:** Liang Rongshan, a member of the troupe, creates a puppet out of cow leather at the event. **Top left and right:** Two puppets on show. **PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY**

through many generations and should be preserved and seen by more," Liang says, adding that due to the popularity of television and smartphones, the art is under threat of extinction.

Running until Aug 15, the exhibition showcases more than 200 exquisite shadow puppets selected from the museum's collection, which boasts over 9,000 pieces. These shadow puppets represent diverse styles from across the country.

Highlighting the flourishing development of Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) shadow puppetry in Beijing, the exhibition recollects the customs of patronizing shadow puppet-

ry troupes in the Qing Dynasty's princely residences, illustrating the historical connection between Prince Kung's Palace and Jizhou shadow puppets from what is now Jizhou district of Tianjin municipality. The palace, a public museum today, was the 18th-century residence of Yixin, Prince Kung (1833-98), a statesman and member of the Qing imperial family. According to historical records, the residence, and those of many other imperial families, used to raise or hire shadow puppet troupes who lived and rehearsed in their rented places in Jizhou area, which is near Beijing.

As the introduction of the exhibi-

tion states: "Shadow puppetry spans thousands of years, witnessing the traces of history, carrying the sediment of time, and exuding a strong folk atmosphere."

During the exhibition, shadow puppet shows by five inheritors from Hubei's Zhushan county perform soothing music and operate complex sculptures, exhibiting lively performances.

Chen Zhongxiang, 83, the oldest in the troupe, says it is not easy to master the techniques, such as improvisational singing, falsetto, simultaneous manipulation of several puppets, and the ability to play various musical instruments.

As a member of one of the last troupes with an average age of over 70, Chen is worried about the future of the folk art. Liang, in his early 50s, is the youngest of the troupe. He is the puppet-making craftsman and is also a singer and a musician.

Dating back to the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24), *piyingzi*, or shadow puppetry, which means performance with shadows, is a form of theater using colorful silhouette figures made of leather accompanied by music and singing. Manipulated by puppeteers using rods, the figures create the illusion of moving images on a translucent cloth screen illuminat-



ed from behind. It was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2011.

Usually made up of five people, a troupe includes a puppeteer, three musicians who play many musical instruments, such as *suona* (a woodwind instrument), *shu* (a four-stringed bowed instrument) and percussion instruments, and a singer who assumes all the roles in the show. The plays pass on stories and ideas regarding cultural history, social beliefs, oral traditions and local customs.

In its heyday, professional shadow puppet troupes abounded, and countless smaller groups formed by families or individuals contributed to about 30 genres. Wealthy, influential families often hired big shadow puppet troupes for religious rituals, weddings, funerals and other occasions.

With their passion and enthusiasm for the art form, folk artists like Liang and Chen are exploring contemporary takes, such as adapting and writing new plays based on traditional practice.

LIFE

CULTURAL JOURNEY

People often recount legendary tales of Fengguo Temple, a structure more than 1,000 years old that is situated in Yixian county, Jinzhou, Liaoning province. It has miraculously withstood the ravages of war, earthquakes and various disasters throughout history and continues to thrive to this day.

One particularly perilous moment occurred during the War of Liberation (1946-49) in 1948, when bombs were dropped on the temple's Mahavira Hall. One bomb penetrated the roof, breaking a Buddhist statue's arm before finally landing on the lotus throne. Miraculously, none of the bombs detonated, saving the hall from being destroyed. This remarkable story has been recorded in the county annals of Yixian.

Today, although the old complex bears the marks of time and is undergoing renovation, it shines even more brightly in people's eyes and has attracted more and more visitors to pay tribute to its rich history and culture.

The temple was built in 1020 during the prosperous time of the Liao Dynasty (916-1125). "Legends say it was built by Liao Emperor Shengzong (972-1031) in commemoration of his mother, Empress Dowager Xiao (953-1009), a powerful politician who once ruled Liao for 27 years," says Li Zhenhua, a tour guide at the temple, adding that Yixian used to be a fief of the Xiao family and that is probably why the temple was built.

Established by the Khitan people, a nomadic ethnic tribe, the Liao Dynasty once ruled a vast area of today's Mongolia, Northeast and North China for more than 200 years until it was conquered by the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234). Yixian, located in the heartland of the Liao Dynasty, lay between the Liao upper capital in Baarin Left Banner, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, and its east capital in Liaoyang, Liaoning, according to Li.

The temple complex now comprises an outer gate built in 1984, a Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) inner gate and a memorial gateway in memory of a Qing princess. Additionally, there are Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) murals adorning the walls of the main hall and the main hall itself, dating back to the Liao era. The most significant structure is the Mahavira Hall, a colossal wooden building.

Spanning an area of 1,800 square meters, the hall is 55 meters long and 33 meters wide. Inside the hall, seven painted clay Buddhist statues stand side by side, each towering at an average height of 9 meters, she says.

"The attire of the statues is particularly elegant and luxurious, reflecting the Buddhist sculptural style of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), which was then inherited by the Liao Dynasty," says Li.

Wen Hui, director of Yixian's archaeology and cultural relics protection and service center, says, "The Mahavira Hall is one of the largest wooden structures



The seven painted clay Buddhist statues, a rare format, at Mahavira Hall, Fengguo Temple in Jinzhou, Liaoning province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Temple of history inspires the future

Structure sees its growing appeal attracting increasing numbers of visitors, **Wang Ru** reports in Jinzhou, Liaoning.



Left: A Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) inscribed board that says "infinite wonderland" hanging at the temple's Mahavira Hall. Right: A restorer repairs part of a statue in 2015. Below: A bird's-eye view of the Liao Dynasty (916-1125) temple complex.



among ancient China's Buddhist temple remains. The clay statues, with their exquisiteness and grand scale, are rare treasures anywhere in the world."

Moreover, the beams and ceiling of the hall are painted with Buddhist patterns like Flying Apsaras, some of which are "rare to see," according to Buddhist master Hsing Yun (1927-2023), who visited the temple three times. Altogether,

the painted area covers 2,400 sq m, says Li.

Wen says that, in front of each Buddhist statue, there are two painted clay statues of flanking-attendant Bodhisattvas, standing at a height of 2.5 meters. On two sides of the hall, two heavenly kings are also present. Currently, efforts are underway to repair and preserve the statues.

"We have seen cracks and missing parts on the surface of the

statues, and dust and bird droppings may corrode the painted patterns. Therefore, we have been cleaning them and restoring the fallen parts to extend their lifespan," says Wen.

Another project aims to protect the Yuan Dynasty murals on the hall's walls. He says that, at the beginning, there were Liao Dynasty murals as well, but a major earthquake in the Yuan Dynasty destroyed

them. Then, Yuan people made new murals, which have been kept to this day.

"There have been instances of peeling and cracking, as well as pest infestation on the original murals. Subsequently, we have carried out a research project focusing on their preliminary conservation," says Wen.

A Jin Dynasty tablet written by Zhang Shao, an official at that time, records the past grandeur of the temple. The tablet says that the temple once boasted an expansive scale, featuring lofty and magnificent buildings that housed more than 1,000 monks.

Li says that most of the buildings were destroyed by the Jin people after they conquered Liao, but nobody knows why they left the Mahavira Hall intact.

"Although the Liao Dynasty left behind few historical records due to the Jin Dynasty's destruction, these Liao buildings vividly recount the prosperous past of the Liao era," says Li.

Three important Liao Dynasty temples still exist today — the Huayan Temple in Datong, Shanxi province, Dule Temple in Tianjin and Fengguo Temple, among which only the Fengguo Temple still keeps its main hall, says Wen.

Moreover, among the existing eight wooden Liao structures in China, the Mahavira Hall of Fengguo Temple is the largest in scale, according to Li.

The local government has attached great importance to the protection and promotion of the temple. Guo Kuo, Party secretary of Yixian, says they have been especially cautious in developing and protecting the surrounding areas of the Fengguo Temple, trying to maintain their original features instead of allowing excessive commercial activities.

They plan to build a museum to show more cultural relics of the temple that have been kept in storehouses and step up efforts in fire prevention as wooden structures are vulnerable to fire.

Local people have actively participated in promoting the temple. For example, Li, also a livestreamer with more than 450,000 followers on short-video platform Kuaishou, has been actively introducing cultural heritage in Yixian, especially Fengguo Temple. More people have volunteered to contribute to these efforts.

With these endeavors, the temple welcomes more and more visitors. In the past four months this year, the temple has received 203,000 visits, generating tourist revenue of more than 2 million yuan (\$276,500), a 451 percent increase compared to the same period last year, according to county authorities.

"Protection takes precedence over development and profit. If I have the opportunity to make it better, that would be wonderful. But if that's not possible, the priority is to avoid causing any damage and not let our ancestors' cultural legacy be destroyed," says Guo.

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Previous generations would be in awe of our technology

The convenience we enjoy in today's society is something that has never failed to astound me.

The quantum leaps in technological progress over the past century are unmatched in the vast span of human civilization.

I use the century as my measure, as that is the period of time I can most easily relate to, given that my grandparents

began their lives just over 100 years ago in the early 1920s, and the experiences of their lives were related to me by them as I was growing up.

If their parents, who were born in the Victorian era, had been told what remarkable advances would occur during the lives of their children, they would have dismissed the predictions as, at best, science fiction, and at worst, the ravings of a madman.

For them, the cinema and electricity were remarkable achieve-

ments of the age. And sadly, many technological "achievements" in the field of engineering were deployed in this era in the slaughter of World War I.

Today's breakthroughs in artificial intelligence would be totally beyond their comprehension. When my grandparents were little children, the "household name" of the BBC didn't even exist, with the iconic British Broadcasting Corporation being established in 1927 in an era when radio was considered to be a "breakthrough" and televi-

sion was only in the public discourse as something that people could possibly experience in the future. In fact, the first reference to "television" by the BBC was a radio drama play broadcast from its Glasgow studios on May 8, 1925, which was set in the year 4000 AD. So the "possibility" of television was certainly seen as a prospect in the very distant future in those days and was definitely in the realms of science fiction.

My grandparents' lives spanned an era in which radio was a "new"

thing, all the way to the advent of the internet. I don't think any other generation will experience such transformations and changes on such a profound scale.

Even how I am writing this very story would have seemed like science fiction to the people of the 1920s, with no paper, no pen, no ink and no typewriter, just words appearing on a screen.

The reason I want to refer to something which we consider "everyday" and "mundane" is that it really only seems like that to us. To

previous generations, what we consider "normal" would be truly remarkable. So you should take this into account the next time you order food delivery or watch a video on a device in the palm of your hand. Even in my youth in the 1970s and '80s, this would have been unimaginable.

Consider how lucky we are to have all this convenience and please do not take it for granted.

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LIFE

By MINGMEILI in Boston
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Thousands of people enthusiastically participated in dragon boat races on the Charles River this weekend, along with the cultural fair celebrating the Chinese traditional event.

This year's Boston Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival, held Sunday near the John W. Weeks Footbridge on the river, featured 68 teams with about 2,000 paddlers from across Massachusetts, other New England states and New York. They competed in 500-meter races, which started in 1979.

"We want to promote dragon boat racing; we want to use this platform to promote Asian culture ... people come here to learn, for exchange or just for fun, too," Gail Wang, board president of the Boston Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival, told China Daily.

Wang said that over the past year, dozens of volunteers for the 45th annual festival have been working diligently to preserve the tradition while also offering a fresh perspective to attendees.

"It's very important for [connections] of people ... culture exchanges, and that's what we do," she said.

The festival, also called *Duanwu*, is a traditional Chinese festival observed on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. It commemorates the life and death of Qu Yuan (340-278 BC), an exiled poet and politician during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC). Upon hearing that his state, Chu, had fallen, he committed suicide by drowning himself in the Miluo River.

Legend is that the people of Chu rushed to the river to rescue him, but they arrived too late. So they splashed furiously and threw *zongzi* (traditional rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves) into the river as a sacrifice to his spirit and to keep the fish away from his body.

Zongzi and dragon boat racing have remained traditions for Chinese people until the present day. The historical significance — combined with fun, competitiveness and athleticism — has transformed it into a sport that attracts participants from around the world. It also serves as a gateway for people to learn about Chinese history and culture.

"I love to come to the Dragon Boat Festival. I think it's one of the best things that happens in Cambridge, and we're so delighted to welcome all of the rowers and everyone to Cambridge," said Jason Weeks, director of the Cambridge Art Council. The docks for the dragon boat are located on the Cambridge side of the Charles River.

"It's very, very strong. We have just a robust community of folks here who keep all of the creativity alive." He said it was nice "to have a festival like this where we can all come together for the day and celebrate not just the races and the sporting aspects, but also especially the cultural aspects."

Weeks said the shape, design and decorations of dragon boats are part of Chinese culture and art. "The arts and the culture always create the opportunity for us to come together successfully and in a spirit of celebration," he said.

"No matter what the politics of the day or the difficulties or challenges we might face as a country or an area, I think the arts always bring us together and create social cohesion," he said. "And the festival is one of the biggest and best ways to bring all of the different communities of Cambridge together to celebrate the Chinese culture and history."

Roger Jones also enjoys dragon boat racing and the spirit behind it. He is the author of *The Final Victory*, the first and only novel to center on the thrills and challenges of dragon boat paddling and the daunting challenges for a team of 12 men and eight women, all cancer survivors over the age of 50.

"In 2005, I was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer, and a couple of years later, I started paddling with a dragon boat club in Charleston, South Carolina," Jones said. "In 2010, we decided that we wanted to put an all-cancer team together to see if we could compete at the national championship level."

He said he really didn't think they had much of a chance to win, but they won the national championship.

Boston dragon boat-racing event excites, unites



The Living Root club team races in the 45th annual Boston Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival on Sunday. PHOTO BY WILL WANG

"It was a great honor, and we earned the right to represent our division in Hong Kong the next year," he said, but the team wasn't able to go because some people were ill, and several passed away the next year.

"The book is a novel based on this team and what we did, what we accomplished, and just the inspiration that it brought to a lot of people, and the hope that it brought to people not quitting, giving up and moving forward and achieving something they didn't think they could ever achieve," he said.

"The thing with dragon boating is the support of a group. You're on the water, and (when) you are with other people who love you and support you, you just seem to do better," he said.

Jones said that he has been involved with the Dragon Boat community and has learned more about Chinese culture.

"It's a wonderful, beautiful culture. I think the beauty of it is 20 people working in unison — that's the teamwork."

Dragon boat racing is now also a popular sport for individuals to practice wellness.

"I'm really enjoying it. It's my first festival. It's my first dragon boat race, and it's been an incredible experience,"

said John Micale, a member of the Boston 1 Team.

"It's really challenging, but it's also really exciting," he said. "It's also a lot about teamwork. So the team working together is one of the most important things. Timing is really important."

"Part of the reason I'm enjoying it is because of the diversity, cultural diversity of participating," he said. "The more we can bring people together from different backgrounds, different countries, the better place this world will be."

Hilary Nicholson, 34, of Team Tango, representing Tango Therapeutics, said: "This is the first year. We've never done it before, so it's been a really fun experience, just learning how to do it, learning all the differences between that and crew or other rowing."

"I think I was intimidated doing this as a first-timer, and everyone has just been so incredibly welcoming, incredibly supportive, even if you've never done it and you are brand new, come give it a try."

"Everybody brings something different, and even just on our team, everybody has a different perspective in a different background on it, and we race stronger as a team," she said. "We're the stronger company for it, and I think it's a really wonderful way to celebrate it," she said.

"It's been really fun to see that kind of progression," said Peter Murphy, 26, a Team Tango member. "A big challenge is trying to get everyone in sync."

"I've been sort of like an observer ... It's been really cool to learn about," he said. Murphy said that he liked the sound of the drum at the start of the race.

As an educational hub, Boston attracts students and scholars from around the world. Students and university alumni from higher education institutions in the US and China also participate in dragon boat racing.

Along the Charles River where Harvard University is located, contestants also expressed their interest in dragon boat racing at their "home river."

"Well, we're super tired. We finished our third race, but really happy to be here," said Kassandra Diaz, a 26-year-old Japanese literature graduate student, of the Harvard dragon team. The competition started at 7 am and concluded at 5 pm, with heavy rain in the morning.

"The weather cleared up!" she said. "Most of us are locals, so to be able to get on the Charles where we've been doing our practices and actually compete with a lot of our fellow teams has been really amazing."

"There are 20 paddlers in a boat, as opposed to your regular three to six people in a canoe, so you really have to communicate with each other a lot of times without words," Diaz said. "Your body and being able to feel the boat move together as a team and can make all the difference in a race. So that's a really appealing part of it for us."

Aric Lu, a 28-year-old bioengineering PhD student, said many people looked forward to the race.

"It's one of the few times where the entire dragon boat community in Boston comes together. We get to see paddlers that have been a part of our team in the past, you know, other people that are looking to just move to Boston and learning about dragon boat for the first time," he said. "It's always great to paddle, meet new people and have a lot of fun."

He said that "dragon boating in particular is one of those things that brings a lot of people together and kind of bridges some of those gaps that sometimes occur."

"And it's also just another opportunity for a lot of people from a lot of different cultures to come together and work together and, you know, participate in something like this."

Chinese students and dragon boat alumni teams proudly represent their colleges overseas while also promoting Chinese traditions and culture where they now reside.

"We are very proud to represent our school and our region," said Zhang Lida, of the Sun Yat-Sen University team. She said that dragon boat racing is especially popular and more intense in South China.

The team members designed a special T-shirt for the race, which also serves as a 100-year birthday gift to their beloved university.

"We are so proud of this event, and we invited all of our friends and tell them where the event came from. We told them the history of the tradition," said Wang Yongtao of the Sun Yat-Sen team.

"It's really exciting, really unites all the people and all the members of the alumni of our university," said Cao Yajun, 24, of the Peking University (PKU) Alumni Association. "I feel a strong, emotional feeling from the team."

"It's a great way to promote this really fascinating, traditional Chinese culture through the races and through all the amazing cultural events in the festival," he said.

The PKU alumni team, Dreamega, finished first in its division.

"Each year we have an exciting race, and we have some new team members," said Shirley Shen, of the Tsinghua Alumni Association team. Shen, who said she has participated in the event for seven years, said that people are passionate about joining the team with school pride and sporting spirit.

The Tsinghua team finished third in its division.

"I'm so very proud. I'm proud to express our culture and our tradition, especially our younger generation as well," she said. "It's a precious opportunity for us to join a team while we work together as adults but we can compete like a child."



Left: The Santander team races in a new boat donated by Hainan Airlines for the 45th annual Boston Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival on Sunday. PHOTO BY WILL WANG



Right: A dragon dance is performed at a cultural fair during the festival on Sunday. PHOTO BY LIU GANG



Center: A paddler exults after finishing a race on Sunday. PHOTO BY LIU GANG

