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# CHINA DAILY

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Premier Li Qiang and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese arrive for the 7th China-Australia CEO Roundtable in Perth, Australia, on Tuesday. Around 30 business representatives from the two countries attended the meeting. RICHARD WAINWRIGHT VIA REUTERS

## Li: Sino-Australian ties gaining positive momentum

By CAO DESHENG in Perth, Australia  
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Premier Li Qiang underlined on Tuesday the need for China and Australia to uphold openness and cooperation for mutual success to achieve more win-win results.

Li made the remark while attending the 7th China-Australia CEO Roundtable Meeting, together with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, in Perth, Western Australia state. Around 30 business executives also attended the meeting.

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After listening to remarks from representatives of the business communities of the two countries, Li said the China-Australia relationship is gaining positive momentum for steady improvement.

"As long as both sides respect each other's national conditions, systems and core interests, they can continuously solidify the foundation of mutual trust; as long as they adhere to candid dialogue, inclusiveness and mutual under-

standing, they can effectively manage their disparities; and as long as they maintain openness and cooperation, they can achieve more mutually beneficial and win-win results," he said.

Li called for both countries to establish a correct perception of each other and set the direction of friendship and cooperation firmly to promote the steady development of the China-Australia comprehensive strategic partnership.

China and Australia benefit from each other's development, forging a close community of shared interests, and they enjoy strong complementarity in economy, which makes them natural partners for cooperation, he said.

Noting that the prospects are broad for cooperation, the premier said that China and Australia serve as important forces in stabilizing industrial and supply chains and promoting economic growth.

Li expressed the hope that business communities from both sides will continue to deepen cooperation in traditional fields, such as agriculture, mining and infra-

structure, and actively explore new areas of cooperation, particularly in emerging industries such as artificial intelligence, quantum technology and life sciences, to make the pie of China-Australia cooperation bigger.

He said that China is planning to further deepen comprehensive reforms, steadily expand institutional opening-up and improve the business environment. It is hoped that the business communities of both countries will seize the opportunities to work together to achieve more fruitful results, he said.

China has been Australia's largest trading partner for 15 consecutive years, with bilateral trade reaching around \$230 billion last year.

Albanese said that since the free trade agreement between the two countries took effect in 2015, Australia's goods and services exports to China have more than doubled, and Chinese exports to Australia have increased 76 percent.

Albanese said that bilateral ties are improving, with increasing enthusiasm for cooperation between the business communities

of the two countries. "We can already see the positive difference that clearing away the recent trade impediments has made, for both our nations. Australian farmers, growers, producers, miners and exporters are benefiting from being able to sell their cotton, copper, coal, timber, oat and hay, barley and wine to China again. Chinese consumers and businesses are benefiting from being able to buy these high-quality, high-value Australian exports"

Albanese said there is so much for Australia and China to gain from working together, including in the global shift to clean energy, advances in manufacturing supply chains and the research and innovation that will drive this progress.

Before concluding his four-day official visit to Australia on Tuesday, Li made an inspection tour at Tianqi Lithium Energy Australia, a Sino-Australian joint venture comprising a mine for hard rock lithium ore and a lithium refinery in Perth. He also visited Portescue Metal Group, an iron ore producer in Western Australia.

## Xi's reply letter a great honor for academic

Tsinghua professor stresses keeping students' curiosity, stimulating desire for knowledge

By ZHAO YIMENG  
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Andrew Chi-Chih Yao, a Turing Award winner and a professor at Tsinghua University, said he felt "extremely excited" and "greatly inspired" upon receiving a letter of reply from President Xi Jinping last week and will further engage in nurturing top talent and promoting interdisciplinary innovation.

In his recent reply to Yao, Xi acknowledged the professor's unwavering dedication and remarkable achievements in teaching and scientific innovation over the years.

In a written reply to China Daily's interview questions, Yao, a renowned computer scientist, said: "Being able to contribute my modest efforts to China's great rejuvenation is something I take immense pride in and consider to be the greatest honor of my life. President Xi's encouragement has made me aware of the responsibility even more."

In the letter, Xi expressed his hope that Yao could adhere to his original aspiration and leverage his strengths to take the lead in the cultivation of innovative talent and fostering of interdisciplinary integration.

Xi also urged Yao to further help China achieve high-quality self-reliance and build the country into an educational, scientific and technological powerhouse.

Yao said, "I have increasingly felt that China has consistently regarded education, science and technology, and top talent as of the greatest importance for the nation." China has made significant achievements in various educational and scientific endeavors in the past decade, accomplishing crucial long-term objectives, he added.

Born in 1946 in Shanghai, Yao earned his bachelor's degree in

physics at Taiwan University and went on to study and work in the United States.

He made fundamental contributions to the theory of algorithms and data structure in the 1970s, and in 2000 he received the Turing Award in recognition of his contributions to the theory of computation.

Since Yao returned from the US and started teaching at Tsinghua 20 years ago, he said he never forgot his original intention to contribute to his home country. The 77-year-old professor still teaches students courses at Tsinghua, including Theoretical Computer Science and Mathematics for Artificial Intelligence.

"Our students are very intelligent. The most important thing we need to do is to keep these smart and creative young people being curious and stimulate their desire for knowledge," Yao said.

Dai Yan, an undergraduate student of Yao's, said that the learning environment at Tsinghua is open and challenging, while students' interests are fully respected. More important, Yao's guidance and breakthroughs have greatly stimulated his interest in academia, Dai said.

"We are given valuable opportunities to engage with cutting-edge science at an early stage. The unique teaching approach has strengthened my determination to pursue a career in scientific research, just like Professor Yao," he said.

In April, Tsinghua established the College of AI and appointed Yao as its head.

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Andrew Chi-Chih Yao

## CHINA, EU SET TO STRENGTHEN ROLE AS 'BALLAST' ON CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION

Experts expect ministerial-level meeting in Brussels to further boost multilateralism

By HOU LIQIANG  
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Last year, extensive regions of southern Europe endured prolonged periods of extreme heat, with temperatures soaring to 48 C. In China, a relentless heat wave persisted for 22 days, sweeping across vast swaths of northern China and the Yellow River-Huaihe River area,



and setting regional records for the longest hot spell since 1961.

This year, an extraordinary flood besieged the Beijing River in South China on April 22, two months before deluges of similar intensity usually occur. Meanwhile,

meteorologists have issued warnings that Europe, recognized as the world's fastest-warming continent, is bracing for another scorching summer.

In the aftermath of these catastrophic events and in preparation for future challenges, a shared realization has emerged that climate change has no borders.

The 5th China-European Union High-Level Environment and Climate Dialogue, a vice-prime minis-

terial-level meeting, is being held this week at the EU's headquarters in Brussels. In exclusive interviews with China Daily, officials and experts expressed great anticipation that the dialogue will further enhance climate cooperation between China and the EU, with both being major global economies and carbon emitters.

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## Public disorder is unacceptable to any authority

The Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington-based think tank, recently published a report on the state of autonomy in Hong Kong. The report ended with a mildly positive hope that Hong Kong's "spots of resilience", meaning its relative openness and inclusivity, might be preserved through the United States' adoption of "strategic engagement" with Hong Kong. The premises for coming to this conclusion have



freedom" in various spheres of activity, the report turned a complete blind eye to the sufferings of the people of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region during the prolonged violence in 2019 and 2020, and the attacks on government institutions, which would not be tolerated by any competent authority. Events that unfolded in the US after that — the severity with which the US authorities went after "election deniers" who stormed the Capitol Hill on Jan 6, 2021, and the speed

with which police forcibly cleared US campuses of pro-Palestinian protesters — drive home the reality that public disorder that challenges the rule of law, let alone attempts at subversion and secession, is unacceptable to any authority. It would have been irresponsible of Beijing to sit idle and allow Hong Kong to be engulfed by seemingly unending circles of hatred and intimidation. The second reality, which the report overlooked, in discussing the degree of autonomy enjoyed by

## Soccer fever



Soccer fans paint the flags of Austria and France on their faces ahead of the Euro 2024 match between the two countries on Monday in Dusseldorf, Germany. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY See more, page 3

Hong Kong, is the fact that Beijing has always intended Hong Kong to be, according to Article 12 of the Basic Law, "a local administration of the People's Republic of China, which shall enjoy a high degree of autonomy and come directly under the Central People's Government". People who have a smattering of knowledge of China's history and political tradition would know that the nation has always been an administrative state. It has been highly centralized since the rule of Qin Shi Huang, or the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC).

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## PAGE TWO

## Climate: Collaborating for green future

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On the substantial strides achieved in Sino-EU climate and environment cooperation, they highlighted the immense potential of both sides to spearhead the global transition toward a low-carbon future.

**'Ballast' for multilateralism**

"Environment and climate have always been a key focus and highlight of China-EU cooperation, being one of the earliest areas included in government collaboration between the two sides and a topic of significant consensus in high-level exchanges between China and the EU," said Zhou Guomei, director-general of the Department of International Cooperation of the Ministry of Ecology and Environment.

In addition to the vice-prime ministerial-level mechanism, which was established in 2020, China and the EU also have separate ministerial dialogues on environmental policy and climate change, she said.

Xia Yingxian, director of the ministry's climate change department, said the China and EU are "ballast" that help stabilize the world's multilateral climate process, especially after the United States announced in 2017 its withdrawal from the landmark Paris Agreement.

That year, China, the EU, and Canada collectively launched the Ministerial Meetings on Climate Action, as part of joint efforts to promote exchanges of views on key issues in the multilateral climate process, build momentum and find solutions to advance global climate governance, Xia said.

Held for seven consecutive years, the event sends positive signals in upholding multilateralism, implementing the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, and promoting climate action and international cooperation. "Currently, the geopolitical situation is intricate, and international relations face numerous uncertainties, inevitably impacting the climate multilateral process," he said.

Both China and the EU are significant participants in international climate negotiations. Regardless of how the external environment changes, tackling climate change remains one of the areas of cooperation with the most consensus between the two sides, Xia said.

Dirk Messner, president of the German Environment Agency, also stressed the importance of China and the EU, including Germany, in safeguarding global climate multilateralism.

"We all know that we are living in a world where multilateralism is eroding," he said.

"We talk about climate change. It is about the fragility of the planetary system itself. This is a global problem ... and we need to restabilize multilateralism to manage this kind of problems, because we cannot solve them individually as nations."

From a German perspective, Messner said, cooperating with China in the field of climate is absolutely key as the two countries are in the G20, whose members contribute 80 percent of global carbon emissions.

"We, as the G20 countries, are producing the problem, which we now have to solve," Messner said.

Marco Lambertini, convener of the Nature Positive Initiative, said cooperation between China and the EU is essential, especially against the backdrop of an interconnected world, where impacts on climate and nature transcend borders.

"Natural ecosystems store immense amounts of carbon and every year, about half of human carbon dioxide emissions are neutralized by forests, wetlands and marine habitats," he said. "Similar to the carbon-neutral transition, it is urgent that we also embrace the nature-positive goal so as to build a sustainable future for all."

The EU and China have been aligned in tackling the challenge of building a net-zero emissions and nature-positive world, Lambertini noted.

They have both developed and enacted comprehensive and innovative domestic legislation with similar objectives and connotations, he said. The EU's Natura 2000 protected areas network and China's ecological red lines, for example, both prioritize nature conservation and sustainable development.

**Remarkable progress**

Hu Jun, director of the Policy Research Center for Environment and Economy affiliated with the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, said China and the EU have carried out pragmatic cooperation in quite a few sectors, including pollution control, biodiversity conservation, carbon trading markets and renewable energy.

To date, over 200 cooperation projects in the environmental and climate sectors have been implemented between China and the EU, as well as its member states such as



ART BY SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

“We talk about climate change. It is about the fragility of the planetary system itself. This is a global problem ... and we need to restabilize multilateralism to manage this kind of problems, because we cannot solve them individually as nations.”

Dirk Messner, president of the German Environment Agency

Germany, France and Italy. Hu cited China-EU cooperation on the environment and green economy project as an example.

Two phases of cooperation have been completed under the project, with the first one spanning 2018 to 2021, and the second 2021 to 2024.

The two sides, for example, have organized seminars on a range of topics, including green transformation, climate transition strategies, biodiversity policy and legislation, Hu said. Research on innovative green finance policies, which

“have provided crucial decision-making support for policymakers”, has also been undertaken.

Joint research has been conducted on synergizing pollution control and carbon-emissions reduction in the transportation sector as well as the role of green finance in supporting emission reductions, offering robust support for China's environmental protection efforts, Hu said.

Messner said Germany and China have had active interaction on climate and energy, much of which has happened via the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development. Established in 1992, the council is a high-level, international think tank that reports to the Chinese government. It is currently chaired by Chinese Vice-Premier Ding Xuexiang.

“As a member of the council, I'm also chair of a task force which is working on digitalization and artificial intelligence for sustainability goals,” Messner said. “We published the first study on this issue last year, and we are preparing a second one on smart and sustainable cities in Europe and China at the end of the year.”

Messner underscored the importance of the two communication channels, which feature experts interacting with political decision-makers, and help the two sides understand and learn from each other.

**Working together**

Tian Chengchuan, director of the Ministry of Ecology and Environment's Foreign Environmental Cooperation Center, high-

lighted a range of collaborative projects between Chinese and European companies aimed at advancing green and low-carbon development.

An intelligent water supply management system developed by the Shanghai Pudong Veolia Water Corporation Ltd, a subsidiary of French environmental solutions provider Veolia Group, for example, is projected to significantly reduce carbon emissions associated with water supplies for 3.8 million users in Pudong, Shanghai, over a 10-year period from its launch in 2019, he said.

The system is expected to help reduce carbon emissions by almost 4,758 million metric tons annually, Tian said.

With an independently developed cooling technology, China's Lenovo Group Ltd now helps remove approximately 90 percent of the heat generated by the computing systems at the Leibniz Supercomputing Center in Germany, he said, adding the technology has increased cooling efficiency 4,000 fold.

Hot water generated in the cooling process is used to provide heating for buildings in the center complex, resulting in annual savings of \$1.25 million, he said.

In a move to further ramp up cooperation between Chinese and European companies, Tian said his center is making efforts to establish a China-Europe environmental and climate cooperation network involving various stakeholders such as think tanks, businesses and regional authorities.

The network aims to facilitate the shar-

ing of best practices and technological solutions in promoting green and low-carbon transformations, enhance the understanding of green transformation policies in China and Europe within the business community, and support Chinese and European enterprises in engaging in collaborative exchanges related to green transformations, he said.

Hu, from the Policy Research Center for Environment and Economy, said China and the EU will also strive to deepen regional-level cooperation.

Initial focus will be on promoting the establishment of a China-Europe regional green and low-carbon cooperation platform, he said.

He outlined a long list of sectors with potential for China and the EU to further enhance cooperation through joint programs and policy dialogue, as well as seminars and training on issues such as clean energy, green transportation, green buildings, and the circular economy.

He said there was significant potential for the two sides to promote climate cooperation programs in third-party regions, including Southeast Asia and Africa.

The two sides can provide training, organize seminars and carry out demonstration projects in these regions under the frameworks of South-South climate cooperation and the green Belt and Road Initiative, he said.

“Overall, there are bright prospects and immense opportunities for pragmatic cooperation between China and the EU,” he said.

## TOP NEWS

# Travel bookings to peak early this summer

China's optimized visa policies, international events expected to promote tourism growth

By CHENG SI  
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Amid China's optimized visa policies and people's growing desire to explore new places and cultures, summer travel bookings are expected to peak earlier than usual this year, according to tourism agencies.

The summer holiday period in the country typically starts in early July and continues until late August, but several online platforms such as the travel portal Tuniu are anticipating a surge in bookings by late June.

According to a report released recently by global travel service provider Trip.com Group, as of June 6, bookings to overseas destinations had nearly doubled compared with the same period last year, while bookings to domestic destinations also saw a remarkable increase.

In addition to optimized visa policies between China and other countries, prestigious international sports events such as the Olympic Games in Paris, France, and the UEFA European Championship, or Euro 2024, across 10 cities in Germany are expected to drive the growth of outbound tourism this summer.

Online travel agency Qunar said the monthlong soccer tournament, which started on Friday and concludes on July 14, has made Germany and other European countries with celebrated soccer teams, such as Italy, France and Spain, hot favorites among Chinese travelers.

Hotel bookings to Berlin and Munich, two of the Euro 2024 host cities, have surged 400 percent and 300 percent year-on-year on the platform, Qunar said, adding that bookings to Italy, France, Spain and the United Kingdom have witnessed either twofold or threefold growth year-on-year.

Travel portal Tuniu said that while bookings for countries in Europe, Africa and Central Asia are steadily increasing, nearby overseas destinations such as Japan, Thailand and Singapore continue to remain top summer choices among users on the platform.

Trip.com reported a significant

increase in visa applications for long-distance destinations such as the United States, the UK, Australia, Canada and France. Half of its customers have applied for visas to such destinations so far this year, compared with less than a third last year.

Industry insiders also expect considerable growth in inbound tourism over the summer holiday period thanks to China's friendly entry policies for foreigners.

In its latest goodwill gesture, China announced on Monday that it is extending its 15-day visa-free entry and stay policy to Australia. Within half an hour, searches for trips to the Chinese mainland made by Australian travelers increased 80 percent on Trip.com, according to the group.

The travel company added that Australia is the fifth-largest source of travelers to China as of this year, with trip bookings to the mainland surging 155 percent year-on-year.

While long-distance travel remains a popular choice this summer, domestic destinations such as scenic areas in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region are also drawing tourists, according to travel agencies.

According to the Trip.com report, the hit Chinese drama titled *To the Wonder*, which features breathtaking grassland views in Xinjiang's Altay, has made the region a popular summer choice among domestic travelers. Xinjiang's cooler climate and ethnic diversity are acting as tourist magnets as well.

"The region's Ili Kazak autonomous prefecture has seen its summer travel bookings increase 85 percent. ... Tours lasting eight to 10 days are the most popular ones," the report said.

Yang Nan, 34, who works at a human resources company in Beijing, said she has planned a seven-day family vacation to Xinjiang in late July.

"We will first stay in Urumqi, the region's capital city, for two days and then go to Altay," Yang said, adding that she was eager to travel to the extreme northwestern region to escape the scorching heat in Beijing.



A visitor makes inquiries at the Disneyland Paris booth on May 27 during the 2024 ITB China travel and trade show in Shanghai. Over 600 exhibitors from over 80 countries and regions participated in the three-day event. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Tech: AI seen as catalyst for many fields

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In Yao's eyes, China is at the forefront globally in AI applications and has held leading positions in theoretical breakthroughs and original innovations. However, these advancements have not yet coalesced into a continuous stream and led to major breakthroughs, he said.

Yao said he believes that China can achieve remarkable progress and become a leader in original breakthroughs by leveraging its solid foundation in AI theory and technology, as well as continuously innovating talent development models.

AI has become a driving force and catalyst for the development of many disciplines. It offers significant

opportunities for advancement in education," Yao said.

"Young students can take advantage of the AI era, broaden their knowledge, and develop a strong interest in participating across multiple technological fields," he added.

Xu Yi, a graduate student at Renmin University of China's Gaoling School of Artificial Intelligence, said that Xi's letter is not only a recognition of Professor Yao's personal achievements, but also offers encouragement to all educators and researchers nationwide.

Zhu Bowei, a doctoral candidate at the school, said he was deeply moved and proud when he read Xi's letter to Yao.

Several teachers at the school were once students in the "Yao Class" at Tsinghua, which was established by Yao in 2005 to nurture promising undergraduate students in computer science.

"This connection makes me feel the continuity and inheritance of academic research, and ignites my passion in the field of AI," Zhu said.

## A glimpse of Egypt



A sandstone bust of Pharaoh Akhenaten from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, Egypt, which arrived in China on Sunday, is readied for display at the Shanghai Museum on Monday. It will be among 788 ancient Egyptian cultural relics to be displayed at an exhibition, which will open on July 18 and run through Aug 17 next year. XINHUA

## Chinese companies sponsoring Euro 2024 expand outreach

By FAN FEIFEI  
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Despite the struggling performance of the Chinese national soccer team on the international stage in the past decades, Chinese companies, as sponsors, have rarely missed the finals of major international sporting events in recent years.

At the ongoing UEFA European Championship, or Euro 2024, Chinese companies sponsoring the event account for more than one-third of the 13 top-tier sponsors, making China the single-biggest source of sponsorship for the major soccer event.

Experts said this demonstrates the rising technological prowess and competitiveness of Chinese brands on the global stage.

Furthermore, the strong presence of Chinese companies as sponsors of top-notch global sporting events has grabbed the attention of spectators around the world, and will help the enterprises expand their presence in overseas markets and boost brand awareness and international influence, the experts said.

Five Chinese companies — financial technology company Ant Group,

Continued investment in world-class sporting events represents Hisense's determination to become a global brand."

Jia Shaoqian,  
chairman of Hisense

home appliance giant Hisense, cross-border e-commerce platform AliExpress, smartphone manufacturer Vivo and electric vehicle maker BYD — are among the official sponsors for this year's soccer championship, which kicked off on Friday and runs through July 14 in Germany, according to UEFA's website.

As the official payment sponsor of Euro 2024, Alipay+, the cross-border mobile payment platform owned by Ant, has announced plans to expand cross-border digital payment acceptance and provide convenient payment service and special

benefits for global soccer fans and travelers through its merchant network during the tournament.

The company is accelerating steps to expand its footprint in European countries, such as the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Switzerland, Spain and Germany. As of this month, over 400,000 merchants in Europe accept mobile payments through Alipay+ from 14 international e-wallets and banking apps.

It is the third consecutive UEFA European Championship for which Chinese home appliance manufacturer Hisense has been a sponsor. The company is also the official screen provider for the video assistant referees during this year's tournament.

"Continued investment in world-class sporting events represents Hisense's determination to become a global brand, and it helps us build stronger relationships with global consumers and accelerates the company's globalization process," said Jia Shaoqian, chairman of Hisense.

Hong Yong, an associate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation's e-commerce research institute, said, "Chinese companies

sponsoring the Euro 2024 soccer tournament highlights these enterprises' determination in going global and leveraging the major sports event to showcase their latest products and achievements in innovation."

Emphasizing that sponsorship of iconic international sporting events is conducive to connecting with consumers across the globe, speeding up Chinese enterprises' globalization layout, and enhancing brand recognition and influence globally, Hong said that sports marketing serves as an important method for Chinese brands to increase their global competitiveness.

BYD, which is an official partner for the first time for the championship, is providing a diverse range of new energy vehicles during the tournament.

Ouyang Rihui, assistant dean of the Central University of Finance and Economics' China Center for Internet Economy Research, said, "An increasing number of Chinese enterprises, especially those gaining a competitive edge in frontier sectors including digital payment, cross-border e-commerce, smartphones and NEVs, are seeking development opportunities in overseas markets."

Sponsoring the event also indicates that Chinese enterprises hope to expand their sales channels and increase their voice in international cooperation, Ouyang said, adding that the move will help more overseas consumers learn about China's technological advantages.

## HK: Upholding national unity is prime objective

From page 1

China's administrative structure today — comprising 23 provinces, five autonomous regions, four "direct-administered municipalities" and two special administrative regions — reflects the historical developments over time, but is in essence not dissimilar to the administrative structure of China upon unification by Qin Shi Huang, also the first emperor in the Chinese history.

At the time of Sino-British negotiations on the future of Hong Kong in the early 1980s, electoral democracy was unknown in China and alien to its political tradition. It is unimaginable that Beijing would have agreed to grant population democracy to Hong Kong after 1997. No agreement on political reform in Hong Kong after 1997 was reached, as evidenced by the lack of any reference to the introduction of "democracy" in the Sino-British Joint Declaration on the future of Hong Kong.

The Sino-British Joint Declaration has become the favorite weapon of US and British authorities to clobber China for alleged breach of its "treaty obligations" to Hong Kong. In fact, the joint declaration, comprising no more than 1,183 words, three annexes and an exchange of memorandums on nationality, is literally a pair of

linked statements by which China declared it would recover Hong Kong and "resume the exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong with effect from 1 July 1997", followed by a terse statement by Britain that "it will restore Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China with effect from 1 July 1997".

In the third statement, China declared its basic policies toward Hong Kong. In subparagraph 4 of this statement, China made clear that "the chief executive will be appointed by the Central People's Government on the basis of the results of elections or consultations to be held locally". This statement papered over a rift over constitutional development in Hong Kong after 1997, which was never resolved by the end of the Sino-British negotiations.

Those who blame China for not honoring its alleged promise of democracy to Hong Kong should bear in mind that it was Britain which put democratic development on hold on two occasions. The first occasion was after World War II, which is well documented in the book *Democracy Shelved* by British scholar Steve Tsang Yui-sang. The second instance was in the late 1960s, after riots in Kowloon prompted a review of the need for greater popular participation in governance. The British leaders decided that Hong Kong,

would be better served by rational, nonpartisan technocrats than irresponsible demagogues.

It was Beijing which agreed to vastly expand the electoral element in the legislature after 1997. Unfortunately, the democratic experiment proved to be a disastrous impediment to effective governance and eventually a hotbed for anti-China movement.

Many rely on the reference to Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy except in "foreign and defense affairs" to substantiate their allegation that Hong Kong's autonomy has been whittled down by Beijing. They ignore the fact that China has declared from the outset, in the Sino-British Joint Declaration and in the Basic Law, that upholding national unity and territorial integrity is the prime objective of China's resumption of exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong.

Under the Basic Law, Beijing wields decisive powers over a wide range of constitutional arrangements, such as the appointment of principal officials, the power to apply national laws in Hong Kong, a power which has been exercised sparingly, and the power of interpretation of provisions of the Basic Law.

Lest there be any undue pessimism about the "high degree of autonomy" enjoyed by Hong Kong,

it should also be noted that Article 4 of the Basic Law provides clearly that the rights and freedoms of the residents of the Hong Kong SAR and of other people in the region shall be safeguarded in accordance with the law. This commitment is reiterated in Article 4 of the National Security Law for Hong Kong, and in section 2(b) of the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance enacted by Hong Kong on March 19. The commitment to maintaining the capitalist systems practiced in Hong Kong is equally ironclad.

As the scholars in the US think tank observed, Hong Kong remains "the freest part of China" where the flow of information and ideas is relatively uninhibited, and international business is well protected by law. It is a city where Westerners can live happily, do business and raise their families, and many have done so and chosen to stay. The US should accept Hong Kong as it is, a special administrative region under the direct authority of the central government, with adequate rights and freedoms preserved, and not an imagined community with more rights than granted by its sovereign power.

The author is convener of the Executive Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and a legislator. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## CHINA

# 7,600 fake goods seized in Guangzhou

Joint operation closed all stores and stalls involved in sale of counterfeits

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Law enforcement personnel seized more than 7,600 counterfeit products during a special operation targeting counterfeiting in shopping malls and stores near Guangzhou Railway Station in the Yuexiu district of Guangdong's provincial capital on Sunday.

The fake products were seized during investigations of 17 cases and included leather goods, clothing, shoes, cosmetics and watches suspected of having infringed on the exclusive rights of trademarked brands such as Hermes, Dior, LV, Gucci and Versace, according to a statement released by the Guangzhou market supervision administration on Tuesday.

The special operation, which was jointly launched by the administration and the public security bureau of Guangzhou, the city's Yuexiu and Baiyun districts and local neighborhood committees, dealt a heavy blow to counterfeiting activities surrounding Guangzhou Railway Station, where many bazaars and shopping malls are located, the administration said.

All suspected counterfeit products have been documented and seized in accordance with the law, and all the stores and stalls involved in the sale of the goods have been asked to close for further investigation and rectification, it said.

The operation was launched on Sunday following a special report from China Central Television about active counterfeiting in the area near the train station.

Guangzhou will intensify law enforcement efforts to combat infringement and counterfeiting

around the station to keep pressure on vendors in the area selling fake goods, the administration said.

It hinted that more campaigns targeting counterfeiting will be launched in the months to come.

The large price gap between genuine and phony products has encouraged rampant counterfeiting in recent years, according to a store manager who asked not to be named.

A genuine branded leather belt is priced at 800 yuan (\$111.11) in regular shopping malls and specialty stores. However, a fake one usually changes hands for less than 180 yuan, he said.

Since the beginning of the year, law enforcement departments in Guangzhou have investigated 181 cases involving the production and sale of counterfeits worth a total of approximately 169 million yuan, the administration said.

Huang Chuxin, an office worker in Guangzhou's Tianhe district, said operations targeting counterfeits should be launched frequently.

"Counterfeit brands satisfy the vanity of a small group of people, but they disrupt the normal order of the market and harm the interests of genuine manufacturers," she said.

Wu Chengbin, a local government employee, said the large number of counterfeit products being made and sold is due to the big profits they bring in.

"The cost for producing counterfeits is very low," he said, adding that more concrete and effective measures should be introduced to further crack down on the practice.

Last week, more than 3,300 metric tons of counterfeit and inferior goods valued at 330 million yuan were destroyed in 21 provincial-level regions.

## Dalian hosting its eighth Summer Davos

By ZHANG XIAOMIN  
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Around 1,600 global leaders from enterprises, governments, academia, and civil and international organizations will gather at the 15th Annual Meeting of the New Champions, also known as the Summer Davos Forum, in Dalian, Liaoning province, from June 25 to 27.

"Dalian will increase the influence of the forum with its openness and inclusiveness," Dalian Mayor Chen Shaowang said at a news conference in Beijing on Monday.

Both the province and the city are making every effort to ensure this year's event, with the theme "Next Frontiers for Growth", goes off without a hitch, he said.

"We will utilize 5G-Advanced innovative technology, present Liaoning and Dalian booths showcasing future digital products and application scenarios, and share the achievements of 'Digital China' with the participants," said Chen, who is also deputy Party secretary of Dalian.

The meeting will emphasize and promote green transformation through energy conservation and carbon reduction.

"To fulfill our commitment of hosting an economical meeting, we have prioritized green venue construction, green energy supply and green environment optimization," Chen said, adding that sufficient green electricity will be provided to core venues and supporting facilities, and a total of 647 new energy vehicles will be

used to transport participants.

It will be the eighth Summer Davos Forum to be held in Dalian since the city first hosted it in 2007.

The meeting will focus on six topics: the global economy; China's international relationships; entrepreneurship in the age of artificial intelligence; new frontiers for industries; investing in people; and connecting climates, nature and energy.

Pan Jiang, director of the international cooperation department of the National Development and Reform Commission, said the meeting will show the international community the opportunities arising from China's modernization journey.

"During the annual meeting, we look forward to in-depth exchanges and cooperation between representatives from all sectors of the world, especially the business community, to encourage more foreign-funded enterprises to strenuously cultivate the Chinese market," Pan said.

"We also encourage qualified Chinese enterprises to go global and accelerate China's high-level opening-up efforts."

Hosting the meeting in China highlights that Asia is an engine of global growth and that China, as the world's second-largest economy, is still the largest contributor to that growth and plays a very important role in international affairs, said Chen Liming, the Greater China chairman of the World Economic Forum.

## Rolling ahead



Chinese and foreign visitors view train models at the exhibition area of train manufacturer China Railway Rolling Stock Corp during the 22nd China Straits Innovation and Projects Fair, which opened in Fuzhou, Fujian province, on Tuesday. The three-day fair, bringing together resources such as projects, technology, capital and talent, is a significant platform to showcase the province's commitment to making innovation a driver of economic growth. ZHANG BIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## Heihe in Heilongjiang offering free admission to sites for *gaokao* takers

By ZHOU HUIYING  
and TIAN XUEFEI in Harbin

Heihe, in Heilongjiang province, has invited students who took part in this year's national college entrance exam, or *gaokao*, to visit sites in the city.

Its culture, radio, film and tourism bureau said all of its 28 scenic areas at the national A-level and above are providing free tickets for those who sat the exam until Aug 31.

Among the popular sites listed on the bureau's WeChat account, are the national 5A-level Wudalianchi Scenic Area, and the Aihui Historical Exhibition Hall and the Heihe Sino-Russian Ethnic Customs Garden, both of which are at the national 4A-level.

As a border port city adjoining Russia, Heihe is popular among Chinese tourists for its exotic appeal.

"Bring your ID cards and admission cards, Heihe welcomes you," said Li Liyan, director of the bureau's industry promotion department. "Walking through the streets across the city, you can appreciate Byzantine-style architecture, taste authentic Russian cuisine and buy various Russian goods.

"You can also take a photo with friendly and generous Russian people, experiencing European charm

without leaving the country." Li also touted the other rich natural resources in the city that tourists can enjoy.

"For instance, the 5A-level Wudalianchi Scenic Area is a precious legacy left by volcanic activities that occurred during the Quaternary Period, characterized by typical new and old volcanic landforms," Li said. "In the scenic area, tourists can visit attractions such as the China Volcanic Geological Museum, where they can learn knowledge about the volcanoes and enjoy a cooler climate in the summer."

Zhang Rongkang, an 18-year-old student from the province's capital, Harbin, plans to visit Heihe next month.

"I am satisfied with my performance in the *gaokao*, and I would like to take a trip after receiving my score," he said. "Once I learned about the free ticket news, I made the decision to visit Heihe."

Zhang added that he's looking forward to learning about the local culture.

"I have never been to the border city, but I'm really excited about experiencing its unique urban characteristics and customs," he said. "I also plan to visit Blagoveshchensk in Russia via the Heihe port."

In September, Sino-Russian visa-

free group travel services resumed in Heihe, and business from across the border began flourishing again.

It takes just seven minutes on a ferry to cross the Heilong River, known as the Amur in Russia, which separates the two nations.

"I believe it will be a wonderful experience to enjoy the journey with my parents," Zhang said.

Tourism departments across the country have made similar offers to students who took the *gaokao* this month, with many scenic areas offering free admission.

Beijing Youth Daily has reported that more than 50 sites in Beijing and the provinces of Sichuan, Shaanxi, Henan, Fujian, Hunan, Shandong and Jiangxi are offering such tickets. And some sites are also offering free admission to junior high school students who took this year's senior high school entrance examination.

Some of the more popular attractions that are not offering free tickets have chosen to give discounts.

For example, Beijing Universal Studios has launched a graduation season ticket package for people age 16 to 25 that costs 460 yuan (\$63.39), compared with 558 yuan for a standard season ticket.

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## Wheat inspectors

Researchers at the Shaanxi Grain Quality and Safety Center inspect grains of wheat for insect damage, breakage, germination, mold and other problems in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Tuesday to identify any inferior grains in newly harvested wheat samples.

MA ZHAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Briefly

### Two wild pandas seen in Gansu area of park

Technicians at the Gansu National Park Monitoring Center recently spotted a wild giant panda and a panda cub at the Baima River Conservation Station in the Gansu section of the Giant Panda National Park via a monitor. Video clips show the adult panda had just finished foraging and was leisurely making its way through the forest. In recent years, the Gansu Provincial Administration of the Qilian Mountain National Park has been vigorously promoting the construction of the Gansu section of the Giant Panda National Park.

### Nine universities cite progress in Xiong'an

Nine universities have announced significant progress in the construction of their Xiong'an New Area campuses, adding to the initial four universities that have started relocating and the Beijing Institute of Technology, which announced plans to establish a campus there earlier this year. The nine new universities include Beihang University, Beijing Language and Culture University, North China Electric Power University and the Communication University of China. North China Electric Power University recently announced it will soon solicit overall plans for its

Xiong'an campus, confirming its commitment to the project.

### Telecom fraud suspects handed over to China

The Ministry of Public Security said on Tuesday that 150 Chinese nationals suspected of cross-border telecom fraud have been transferred from Myanmar to China. Since last year, the ministry has deepened law enforcement cooperation with Myanmar police to crack down on telecom and online fraud crimes, with a total of 49,000 Chinese suspects handed over to Chinese authorities, the ministry said.

XINHUA—CHINA DAILY

## Woman who blocked cameras loses case

By YANGZEKUN  
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A court recently sided with a company in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, that dismissed a female employee who used umbrellas to block a surveillance camera installed by the company in the office area for 18 days.

The court also refused the woman's claim for compensation from the company, according to a recently disclosed court case.

The case has sparked widespread discussion on social media platforms. Some netizens said the company's actions may infringe on employees' privacy, while others argued that the installation of cameras in an office space is a normal practice and employees should not obstruct them.

In June 2019, the company installed several high-definition cameras in the workplace. One of them was positioned above the workstation of the female employee, who was concerned it would violate her privacy.

Consequently, she used two umbrellas to block the camera. Despite repeated talks with the employee and two warning letters from the company's human resources manager, she continued to use the umbrellas at her workstation.

A month later, the company terminated her employment contract, citing serious disciplinary violations for using the umbrellas at her workstation.

After being dismissed, the employee demanded the company pay her about 335,000 yuan (\$46,000) in compensation for unlawful termination. After two trials and a retrial, the Guangdong Provincial High People's Court concluded that the company's decision to terminate the contract was legal and reasonable, and rejected the employee's compensation claim.

The ruling said the company installed the cameras to ensure the safety of personnel, property and materials in the workplace, which is a common and legitimate practice. The cameras were installed in areas where multiple people work and were typically positioned in upper corners.

The employee claimed that the camera above her workstation could easily violate her privacy, but she provided no evidence to support her claim. The high court also said that she did not comply with the company's request to remove the umbrellas and refused to correct her actions after receiving the two warning letters from the HR manager, which disrupted normal work order and had a negative impact on other employees. Therefore, the company had the right to terminate the labor contract with the employee.

Lou Yu, a law professor at the China University of Political Science and Law, noted that from a labor law perspective, if an employer needs to monitor employees' work, it should be included in the company's regulations or employment contracts.

Companies are required to publicize regulations on monitoring and solicit employee opinions, he said.

Employers must obtain employees' consent and ensure that monitoring is necessary for productivity. The need for monitoring can be stipulated in contracts, regulations or collective agreements, he said.

"Companies must ensure personal surveillance information is used solely for production and operational purposes and not provided to others or used for other purposes to prevent the leakage of personal information," he said.

Huang Leping, head of the Beijing Yilian Legal Aid and Research Center of Labor, said that installing surveillance cameras in the workplace falls within the scope of a company's management rights. He emphasized that while companies can install surveillance equipment to strengthen management, they must not infringe on employees' privacy rights.

Employees who believe their privacy rights are infringed upon due to such cameras can lodge complaints with their local trade unions or labor inspection departments, he said, adding that it is more appropriate for a third party to settle the matter.

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

# Program helps locals live with elephants

By CHEN LIANG  
in Jinghong, Yunnan  
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Most of the country's wild Asian elephants, more than 280 individuals, are distributed in Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture in the southernmost part of Yunnan province.

Attracted by the abundance of food such as corn and bananas, and growing accustomed to a human presence, these majestic animals often venture into areas inhabited by people.

The increasing proximity between humans and elephants has led to a rise in conflicts, presenting challenges for many communities that previously had little to no experience with elephant activities.

To address the conflicts, local governments and conservation organizations have implemented various strategies.

In Xishuangbanna, both the governments of Jinghong city and Mengla county have established the Asian Elephant Safety Warning Monitoring Team.

Teams of professional "elephant watchers" use drones to continuously monitor the movements of wild elephants, providing crucial information to local communities and residents.

By offering timely updates on the whereabouts of elephants, the aim is to minimize the risks associated with human-elephant encounters.

Since the launch of its Asian Elephant Protection Program in 2000, the International Fund for Animal Welfare China has focused its efforts toward helping local communities and residents, said Ma Chenyue, program manager of IFAW China.

"Local communities and people are at the forefront of human-elephant conflicts. They are experiencing direct pressures from the expansion of wild elephants into their living spaces," Ma said.

"Their crops are destroyed; their safety is jeopardized while tending to rubber plantations or foraging for mushrooms in the forests; and they actually have made sacrifices in their economic development for the conservation of wild elephants. "So we feel obliged to aid them in finding sustainable ways to live harmoniously alongside wild elephants."

## Beekeeping

In June 2020, IFAW China, in collaboration with the Mengyang Protection Station of Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve and the Rainforest Foundation of Xishuangbanna, a local nonprofit, the "Community Livelihood Development to Promote Asian Elephant Protection" project was launched in Daotangqing village, Mengyang township, Jinghong.

This community, comprising 34 households and 150 residents of the Yi ethnic group, had relocated from the core area of the national nature reserve in the late 1990s to aid in the conservation of Asian elephants, a species under national first-class protection, said Cao



Rural communities in Yunnan province shown alternative ways to live off the land

**Above:** Villagers harvest tea leaves in the Konggeliudui community in Jinghong, Yunnan province. PHOTOS BY CHEN LIANG / CHINA DAILY



Cao Dafan visits Daotangqing village in Jinghong.



A villager harvests honey at Daotangqing.



Scan the code to watch the video

Dafan, program officer of the AEP program.

Following their relocation, however, wild elephants also ventured into the area surrounding the village. Once in 2022, Cao said, the villagers witnessed a visit of a herd of 22 wild elephants.

On May 10, Zhang Jiangmei, a villager, said that an elephant visited a stream near the hamlet in the evening to have a drink and a bath.

Cao said that the primary source of income for villagers is derived from cultivating rubber trees. However, due to a decline in rubber prices over the past few years, their incomes have also experienced a notable decrease.

"So we worked to help the community explore some alternative sources of income to reduce their dependency on rubber trees," he said.

At first, Cao and his colleagues decided to promote beekeeping in the village. "Beekeeping is eco-friendly, good for crop cultivation and easy for villagers to learn and master," he said.

In 2020, the project invested 75,000 yuan (\$10,600) to acquire 100 hives of the Chinese bee and an additional 100 empty beehives and distributed them to 10 families in the Daotangqing village.

In addition to providing training on beekeeping techniques, Cao and his team also helped the beekeepers establish management rules.

One of these rules includes prohibiting the introduction of wild swarms of bees into the hives, Cao said. It helps maintain the health and productivity of the bee colonies, he explained.

Between 2020 and last year, he said, beekeeping generated an income of about 200,000 yuan for the participants in the project.

However, there was an unexpected setback.

Between September and October last year, the bee population in Daotangqing experienced a significant drop, with half of the bees perishing, Cao said. The villagers soon found the cause — a species of hornet that was being cultivated in a nearby village attacked the Chinese bees at Daotangqing, feeding on their pupa.

"In Xishuangbanna, hornet pupa is considered a delicacy," Cao said. "So some people have cultivated the aggressive species to meet the market demand."

After negotiations between the two communities, the hornet cultivators agreed to cease their practice. Because of the incident, Cao said, the population of the bees at Daotangqing needs some time to restore.

## Cash crops and solar

Besides beekeeping, the international NGO also introduced the cultivation of cash crops such as mangos and macadamia nuts to the villagers.

In 2021, Cao said villagers cleared more than 15 hectares of rubber trees surrounding the village because of the plummeting price of rubber.

"So we took the chance to recommend planting mango and macadamia nut trees to them," Cao said.

Cao and his team members invited agricultural experts from the Yunnan Institute of Tropical Crops in Jinghong to Daotangqing and trained villagers on how to manage their orchards.

Nineteen families participated in the project, he said, employing sustainable management practices to reduce pesticide and fertilizer usage, lower management costs

and increase ground cover vegetation. "The experts told us that the undergrowth in their orchards can be good for the growth of fruit trees, and they also showed us how to accurately use pesticide and fertilizer," Zhang said.

Through eco-friendly management and planting practices, the project is estimated to be able to achieve a reduction of 971 to 1,256 metric tons of carbon dioxide over 15 years, with an annual reduction of 65 to 84 tons, according to Cao.

"Mango cultivation started to yield profits for the villagers last year, and the nuts will start generating profits this year," he said.

"In the long term, we hope that rubber plantations can be replaced with ecologically friendly, carbon-efficient crops, and the overall quality of the local ecosystem can be enhanced."

Moreover, IFAW China provided assistance to a family of six by installing a 16-kilowatt photovoltaic panel system in their courtyard. "In 2021, we aimed to initiate a pilot project to enhance the utilization of clean energy in the local residents' daily lives," Cao said.

Following a field survey, they identified that the 130-square-meter courtyard of villager Wang Baozhong and his family was sufficient for installing a system comprising 30 photovoltaic panels.

Wang, who has been a patrolman for the nature reserve for many years, was happy to try something new.

So Cao's project allocated 80,000 yuan for the construction of the system in July 2021, which started generating electricity in April 2022. Once the system fulfilled the family's daily electricity needs, any surplus electricity can be transferred back into the local grid.

From April 2022 to November last year, the photovoltaic system produced a revenue of more than 8,000 yuan, Cao said.

"The family kept half of the revenue, and the other half was given to the village for community development," he said.

## Community care

In December, IFAW China, the protection station and the rainforest foundation expanded their project to the Konggeliudui community in Dadugang township, Jinghong.

The community is predominantly inhabited by the Hani ethnic group, with 39 households. More than 60 wild Asian elephants roam in the vicinity.

The community's primary livelihood revolves around rubber tapping and tea cultivation. "During the harvest season, villagers' chances of encountering elephants in the forest increases," Cao said.

"So our project is set to combine beekeeping with empowering residents, enhancing their skills and income while reducing their forest activities to minimize human-elephant conflicts."

During the project's inauguration in December, the first 100 beehives were distributed to 10 households in the community.

After some field research, the conservationists also found that traditional embroidery practiced by a few senior residents, including an inheritor of the intangible culture heritage, has the potential to become a new source of income for villagers and cater to visitors as Konggeliudui is close to the Wild Elephant Valley scenic area, a major tourist attraction in Xishuangbanna.

The local government has already helped build an embroidery workshop in the community, said Yang Yan, head of the village. "In our spare time, we can learn with our inheritor to make traditional costumes featuring the embroidery," she said.

It takes her more than a month to make a traditional costume, she said, adding that villagers can sell their costumes to visitors.

Cao and his colleagues are helping the community plan for rural tourism development by training community tour guides.

In April last year, IFAW China collaborated with Freshippo, also known as Hema, a direct warehouse shopping and grocery chain, to market honey from Daotangqing and another community in Xishuangbanna under a brand named Zero-Carbon Elephant-Friendly Honey.

The first carbon-zero honey in the country, with a limited run of 3,000 jars, was sold in Freshippo stores in Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou in Zhejiang province.

The profits from the sales were subsidized to support the sustainable development of the beekeeping project, said Ma from IFAW China.

"The focus of all of our community projects has been to broaden local people's vision and empower them with new skills," she said.

## Open-minded villagers key to success of cooperative project

By CHEN LIANG  
in Jinghong, Yunnan  
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Before conservationists from the International Fund for Animal Welfare China, the Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve and the Rainforest Foundation of Xishuangbanna launched their cooperative community project in Daotangqing, in June 2020, Zhang Jiangmei rarely wore the traditional dress of her Yi ethnic group. "Hardly anyone, aside from the elderly, would don our traditional garments," said the 40-year-old. "We used to consider it unattractive and uncomfortable."

This perspective gradually shifted after Cao Dafan, program officer at IFAW China's Asian Elephant Protection Program, and his colleagues began visiting Daotangqing in Jinghong city, Yunnan province. There they have promoted beekeeping, the cultivation of mangos and macadamia nuts and photovoltaic power generation, and tried to foster a con-

cept of low-carbon development among the villagers.

Zhang and her family of five actively engaged in the beekeeping initiative. While learning beekeeping and new agricultural practices with the experts from Jinghong, and especially after a study trip to Hainan province in July last year, Zhang started wearing her cultural attire regularly.

"I've come to realize that our attire is part of our identity," she said. "And people from other places appreciate our traditional dress and consider it pretty."

To Cao, residents like Zhang have been key to the success of the community project. "They are open-minded and embrace change," he said. "These genuine influencers are valuable helping hands in our project."

Zhang, a mother to a 14-year-old son, said that her family owns 0.13 of a hectare of flatland and less than 2 hectares of hilly terrain. They mainly cultivate rubber trees on the hilly land and grow corn on the flat-

land. Because of the corn cultivation, wild elephants sometimes visit the family's plot.

The family's income, about 50,000 (\$6,900) yuan a year, is mainly from tapping rubber. As the government will compensate about 70 percent of the family's corn loss caused by the elephants, Zhang said, she doesn't mind the animals' occasional visits to her plot. In the past two years, the family has replaced some rubber trees with mango and macadamia nut trees on part of their land.

Since 2000, with an additional income of about 5,000-6,000 yuan from 10 beehives they maintain, she said she and her husband no longer need to gather mushrooms and fresh bamboo shoots in the forest during the rainy season. "With fewer trips to the forest, our chances of an encounter with wild elephants have decreased a lot," Zhang said.

Since the launch of the beekeeping project, Zhang said the villagers have learned the importance of maintaining a clean living environment to

ensure the production of high-quality honey. "We were told that proper waste management, including the treatment of domestic sewage and livestock excrement, is crucial to prevent any contamination that could affect the quality of the honey," she said.

As a result, the living environment in the community has been greatly improved in the past few years, she added.

In Daotangqing, villager Wang Baozhong and his family have provided the space for the community's only photovoltaic panel system.

At 50, Wang is a forest ranger employed by the Xishuangbanna nature reserve's Mengyang protection station. Working for the protection of wild Asian elephants for many years, he supports any action to reduce human-elephant conflicts and to find a sustainable way forward.

He said the photovoltaic panel system installed in his courtyard started operating in April 2022 and generated more than 10,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity last year. In April last



Zhang Jiangmei (from left) sits with Ma Chenyue and Cao Dafan in Daotangqing village in Jinghong, Yunnan province.

CHEN LIANG / CHINA DAILY

year, it generated 2,030 kWh of electricity, a record high for a month.

"Before, we used dried rubber tree branches as our firewood," said Wang Shaokuan, Wang Baozhong's son.

"It often filled the whole kitchen with smoke, blackened our walls and made our eyes water. Now we use electric stove tops to cook and

boil water. It's cheap, clean and convenient."

The photovoltaic system generated an income of 4,000 yuan for the family of six last year. "I will retire as a forest ranger at 55," said Wang Baozhong. "I hope that I don't need to tap rubber anymore after my retirement."

## WORLDUS

## Boeing CEO faces heat from Senate panel

By HENG WEILI in New York  
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The CEO of troubled aircraft maker Boeing faced blunt questioning in Washington on Tuesday over a string of fatal crashes, manufacturing problems and whistleblower warnings.

CEO David Calhoun appeared before a Senate investigations subcommittee, chaired by Senator Richard Blumenthal, a Connecticut Democrat and Boeing critic.

He opened the hearing by recognizing the relatives of prior Boeing jet-crash victims and the family of a whistleblower, John Barnett, who died in March.

"This hearing is a moment of reckoning," the senator said. "It's about a company, a once iconic company, that somehow lost its way."

"Boeing needs to stop thinking about the next earnings call and start thinking about the next generation," Blumenthal said.

Calhoun's appearance was the first before Congress by a high-ranking Boeing official since a door plug blew out of a 737 MAX plane during an Alaska Airlines flight in January.

Before giving his prepared opening statement, Calhoun stood and faced the people in the audience who held poster-sized photos of some of the 346 people who died in crashes of Boeing MAX jets in 2018 and 2019. He heard shouts of "Shame" as he entered the hearing room.

"I apologize for the grief that we have caused," he said.

Senators asked Calhoun — who faced more than two hours of questioning — if Boeing retaliated against employees who reported concerns and if he had ever spoken with any whistleblowers. He replied that he hadn't but said he would.

Senator Josh Hawley, a Missouri Republican, repeatedly asked the chief executive about what he did to deserve his salary.

Calhoun, 67, who took over as CEO in 2020, has said he plans to retire at the end of the year. He had compensation of \$32.8 million last year, a 45 percent increase over the \$22.6 million he received the previous year.

"You are eliminating safety procedures. You are sticking it to your employees," Hawley said. "You are cutting back jobs because you're trying to squeeze every piece of profit you can out of this company?"

Asked by Hawley why he had not resigned, among the CEO's replies were: "I'm proud of our safety record. And I am very proud of our Boeing people."

"You're proud of the safety record?" Hawley asked.

Calhoun said he was "proud of every action we've taken."

Hawley replied: "Frankly sir, I think it's a travesty that you're still in your job."

Before Calhoun arrived on Capitol Hill, the Senate panel released a 204-page report with new allegations from another whistleblower who said he worries that "nonconforming" parts — ones that could be defective or aren't properly documented — are going into 737 MAX jets.

Sam Mohawk, a quality assurance investigator at the 737-assembly plant near Seattle, claims Boeing hid evidence of the situation after the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) informed the company a year ago that it would inspect the plant.

"Once Boeing received such a notice, it ordered the majority of the

[nonconforming] parts that were being stored outside to be moved to another location," Mohawk said. "Approximately 80 percent of the parts were moved to avoid the watchful eyes of the FAA inspectors."

The parts, which included rudders, wing flaps and tail fins — all crucial in controlling a plane — were later moved back or lost, Mohawk said.

After the MAX jet crashes in 2018 in Indonesia and 2019 in Ethiopia, the FAA grounded the aircraft for more than a year and a half.

Mohawk told the Senate subcommittee that the number of unacceptable parts has jumped since production of the MAX resumed. He said the increase led supervisors to tell him and other workers to "cancel" records that indicated the parts were not suitable to be installed.

Boeing says it has slowed production, encouraged employees to report safety concerns, stopped assembly lines for a day to let workers talk about safety, and appointed a retired Navy admiral to lead a quality review. Late last month, it delivered an improvement plan ordered by the FAA.

In the past week, the FAA said it was investigating how falsely documented titanium parts got into Boeing's supply chain, and federal officials examined "substantial" damage to a Southwest Airlines 737 MAX after an unusual midflight control issue.

FAA Administrator Mike Whitaker said last week in testimony on Capitol Hill that the federal agency was partly responsible for the safety issues at Boeing, saying it had been "too hands off" in its oversight.

"Let me also acknowledge the FAA should have had much better visibility into what was happening at Boeing before January 5," he said in reference to the Alaska Airlines incident, in his opening remarks to the Senate commerce committee on Thursday.

Boeing disclosed that it hasn't received a single order for a new MAX — previously its best-selling plane — in two months.

The Justice Department decided last month that Boeing violated a 2021 settlement that shielded the company from prosecution for fraud for allegedly misleading regulators who approved the 737 MAX.

Prosecutors have until July 7 to decide what to do next.

Blumenthal said at the start of the hearing that he believes the Justice Department should prosecute the company.

Survivors of those who died in the crash in Ethiopia have urged the Justice Department to prosecute.

"We will not rest until we see justice," said Zipporah Kuria, whose father died in the crash. She said the US government should "hold Boeing and its corporate executives criminally responsible for the deaths of 346 people."

"Where is accountability when the CEOs of Boeing, management of Boeing, are walking free with millions?" asked Clariss Moore, whose daughter died in one of the MAX crashes, reported The Wall Street Journal.

Shares of Boeing closed 1.9 percent lower to \$174.99 in New York Stock Exchange trading on Tuesday. The company, which is now headquartered in Crystal City, Virginia, is a component of the Dow Jones Industrial Average, the S&P 100 and the S&P 500.

Agencies contributed to this story.



Family members of victims of Boeing plane crashes show emotion after a Senate Homeland Security Subcommittee on Investigations hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington DC on Tuesday. MARIAM ZUHAIB / AP

## Cool kids



Children cool off at Crown Fountain in Millennium Park in Chicago as temperatures reached a record high of 36.1 C (97 F) on Monday. Extreme heat alerts stretched from Iowa to Ohio on Tuesday.

SCOTT OLSON VIA AAFP

## Trade expert: US looking to 'keep Chinese goods out'

By YIFAN XU in Washington  
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US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's recent statement on trade with China was overly broad and protectionist, according to trade experts.

"The US is doing what it can and using arguments that it can marshal ... (to) keep Chinese goods out of its market," Sourabh Gupta, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Institute for China-American Studies, told China Daily.

"And that is protectionist, purely," he said.

In her remarks at the Economic Club of New York last Thursday, Yellen blamed China's "over-concentrated supply chain" for posing a threat to US jobs and recent investments aimed at building America's green energy sector.

She also said China's pursuit of its trade policies "may interfere significantly with our efforts to build a healthy economic relationship."

Gupta said that Yellen may be asserting that China's high production capacity, high savings rate and low consumption ratio are putting pressure on international markets.

"But what economists would also say reciprocally is that the US runs a huge budget deficit and ... that it is overconsuming at its end," Gupta said. "And therefore, the United States kind of sucks in imports from overseas because it doesn't employ or have a balanced budget. And therefore, there's excess consumption on its end."

Yellen has more than once said that China's electric vehicles and other green industries have "overcapacity" that threatens the global supply chain. China has countered that the US is essentially using the "overcapacity" narrative to "kneecap" other countries' strong industries, practice protectionism and "trample" on market principles and international trade rules in the

name of "fair competition."

Gupta said most subsidies provided by the Chinese government on EVs are consumer subsidies, and "that is WTO legal."

And it is "perfectly fine to subsidize" infrastructure such as charging stations because "the market would not do it on its own."

Gupta said government subsidies are not uncommon for companies.

"They didn't just spring up one day. Governments gave them subsidies — even things like the United States chip industry in the 1960s," he said.

"But now the Chinese government is letting that (EV) industry run mostly on market force lines. And so, China has nothing to hide in this regard."

Gupta described the US as "a completely protectionist and noncompliant client on trade issues", which, he said, was "the real opposition" to Yellen's assertion of macroeconomic imbalances hurting the US-China trade.

He said that the US would prefer China to remain downstream of the value chain, but it is not for Washington to make that call.

"That is for China to make its own decisions, and for the market to make its own decisions," he said. "China is moving far up the value-added ladder very quickly in sophisticated export goods. And the important thing that the US needs to do is try to come back into WTO-compliant ways in which it deals with China."

The day after Yellen's speech, the World Bank released its Global Economic Outlook, in which it raised China's GDP growth forecast from 4.5 percent to 4.8 percent in 2024.

Gary Hufbauer, a nonresident senior fellow at the Washington-based Peterson Institute of International Economics, said that Yellen's statement targeting China is "too broad" to "lead to a constructive outcome."

Hufbauer said that the US has the

right to criticize specific trade policies, but it "cannot dictate the shape of China's industrial development."

"Good Chinese growth should attract more investment from Europe, Japan and Korea, but not from the US under current geopolitical circumstances. Moreover, if the US puts barriers on capital flows, that will discourage investment into China from all sources," said Hufbauer.

Jake Sullivan, US national security adviser, is one of the main designers of the US science and technology defense strategy against China, known as the "small yard and high fence".

In an April speech, Sullivan said that US policy is to "de-risk" rather than "decouple" from China, which was called out by the Chinese side as rhetoric without substance.

"Unfortunately, there are no boundaries on Sullivan's 'small yard, high fence' policy. 'De-risking' may become more like 'decoupling,'" Hufbauer said. "Much will depend on the outcome of the November presidential election."

Gupta said, "I think the simplest way to understand this is by understanding that the US wants to decouple from China in certain sectors and doesn't want to decouple in the other sectors."

He said that substantial capital would flood into other industrial sectors, except in areas such as semiconductors, AI or quantum computing, where the US and perhaps even Western countries want to exclude foreign capital from entering China.

"The Chinese economy is huge, trillions upon trillions. And there's a lot of space for foreign investment to come in and earn rewards in the Chinese market," said Gupta. "Therefore, a lot of money will also come in now and continue to come in for the long term."

## Deal with Washington heightens nuclear fears in Sweden

STOCKHOLM — Swedish lawmakers voted on Tuesday on a controversial defense deal with the United States, which critics fear could lead to the deployment of nuclear weapons and permanent US bases on Swedish soil.

The Defense Cooperation Agreement, or DCA, is a major step for a country that ended two centuries of neutrality to join NATO in March.

Signed by Stockholm and Washington in December, the deal would give the US access to 17 military bases and training areas in Sweden, and allow the storage of weapons, military equipment and ammunition in the country.

Opponents say the agreement should state outright that Sweden will not allow nuclear weapons on its territory.

"The agreement has no limits," said Daniel Hellden, co-leader of the opposition Green Party, which together with the Left Party opposes the DCA.

"It opens up nuclear weapons on Swedish soil ... And it is so vaguely written that the government could even allow them in peacetime," he told SR public radio on Monday. "We're going to be a target for nuclear weapons. We're going to have 17 bases where the Americans can store material."

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson's center-right minority government, propped up by the far-right Sweden Democrats, has insisted the deal respects Swedish sovereignty.

"Sweden is a sovereign nation and it will always be Sweden that decides what type of weapons we allow," Defense Minister Pal Jonson told SR. "Parliament has already agreed that we will never need permanent bases or nuclear weapons on Swedish territory and that was specified in our NATO accession."

For the bill to pass on Tuesday, it has to win a 75 percent majority that includes the votes of more than half of the Riksdag legislature's 349 MPs.

The Left and Green parties, which both voted against Sweden's NATO membership, together hold just 42 seats — not enough to block the agreement's adoption on their own.

In an op-ed in the Aftonbladet daily on Sunday, two Left Party MPs called the government's handling of the agreement "not just naive, but downright foolish."

They said the DCA makes Sweden less safe because "US defense and security policy is based on nuclear weapons."

"Nuclear weapons are a threat to mankind. That the government hasn't demanded any guarantees against such a brutal weapon of mass destruction is terrifying," they wrote.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## More US states making 'Big Oil' pay on climate

By MINLU ZHANG in New York  
minluzhang@chinadailyusa.com

More US states are holding major fossil fuel companies financially responsible for climate change damages.

New York legislators recently approved the Climate Change Superfund Act, mandating that the companies cover the costs of climate change-mitigation projects, if the measure is signed by Governor Kathy Hochul.

If the legislation is enacted, New York will become the second US state requiring such companies to bear some of the financial burden of climate change.

Last month, Vermont became the first state to approve such a law, and at least four other states — California, Maryland, Massachusetts and Minnesota — are considering

similar measures.

The New York bill would obligate the companies to pay \$3 billion annually for 25 consecutive years. The bill's supporters say that will total \$75 billion for the state to address climate damages and construct more resilient infrastructure.

"Recent science has determined that the largest one hundred fossil fuel producing companies are responsible for more than 70 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions since 1988, and therefore bear a much higher share of responsibility for climate damage to New York State than is represented by the \$75 billion being assessed them," the bill says.

The bill awaits Hochul's signature, and she hasn't commented publicly about it. The governor recently reversed her support for a first-in-the-nation congestion-pricing plan

and halted its implementation in New York City, jeopardizing expected emissions cuts and much-needed funding for the city's subway system.

The plan was aimed at reducing traffic below 60th Street in Manhattan and increasing mass transit use.

If enacted, the climate law will affect around three dozen companies, according to a memo written by New York state Senator Liz Krueger, The Wall Street Journal reported.

"We're probably spending a lot more than [\$3 billion] a year already, and the numbers keep growing when you look at flooding damage, storm damage, rising water tables, fires, pollution, health — all these things being caused by climate change," she told the Journal.

Saudi Aramco, the leading company on the list, could be liable for \$644 million annually to New York, according to the memo by Krueger.

That is about 2 percent of the company's first-quarter 2024 profits, which totaled \$27.27 billion.

Critics argue that states lack the authority to regulate emissions, that companies shouldn't be retroactively charged for emissions that were legal when produced, and that it is unfair to target only oil companies without including power plants and car drivers who used the energy provided by the companies.

Scott Lauer, a spokesman for the American Petroleum Institute (API), the top lobbying group for the oil and gas industry, told the Journal that he hopes Hochul will veto the legislation.

"This punitive new fee represents yet another step in a coordinated campaign to undermine America's energy advantage and the economic and national security benefits it provides," he said.

## WORLD

## BRICS ties eyed as multipolar trend emerges

Diversification of partnerships sought as Nicaragua, Bolivia look to join group

By JIMENA ESTEBAN in Buenos Aires For China Daily

The significant interest of Bolivia and Nicaragua joining the BRICS group highlights the growing economic ties with the group's members, in particular with China, while reducing their dependency on Western economies, say experts.

Key officials from the Latin American countries announced their intentions during a two-day BRICS gathering in Russia earlier this month.

It is seen as a strategic move to enhance their economic prospects through collaboration with BRICS that includes original members — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — plus new entries that include Egypt, Iran and Ethiopia.

"The involvement of countries like Bolivia and Nicaragua in BRICS has the potential to rebalance economic influences and create a more multipolar global economy," said Gabriel Merino, a researcher at the National Scientific and Technical Research Council of Argentina and professor at the National University of La Plata.

Laureano Ortega Murillo, Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's representative in Russia, said the country is negotiating to become a member, a move aligned with a broader strategy to diversify its economic relationships and reduce dependency on Western powers.

"Nicaragua sees immense potential in aligning with BRICS. The partnership could open doors to new economic opportunities and foster a more balanced global economic landscape," Murillo said.

Bolivian President Luis Arce, during a speech at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in May, reiterated his country's commitment to joining BRICS, which he called "pivotal for Bolivia's economic future."

"It will bolster our industrialization efforts and promote sustainable development through strategic partnerships," said Arce.

"The economic collaboration within BRICS has the potential to accelerate our national development agenda, creating more robust and mutually beneficial economic ties."

Countries like Bolivia and Nicaragua

want to join BRICS for three main reasons, said Merino. First, the economic growth led by countries like China and India. Second, the opportunity to diversify their economic partnerships. And third, to reduce dependency on traditional Western economies.

"For nations in Latin America, aligning with BRICS could signify a pivotal shift in economic strategy, facilitating greater resilience and autonomy in the global market," Merino said.

## Closer links

The bids by Bolivia and Nicaragua reflect a broader trend in Latin America to diversify economic alliances and strengthen ties with major global developing economies like China.

Bolivia and China have grown increasingly close, with Beijing providing growing financial support as well as currency and infrastructure development.

"The Bolivian economy has shown concerning signs and symptoms of a potential economic crisis in the medium term," said Daniel Flores Escobar, associate investigator in economic and international relations at the Centre for Political Science Studies at Bolivia's Gabriel Rene Moreno Autonomous University. "The first quarter of 2024 began with a significant reduction in revenues from the export of hydrocarbons, metals, and food."

But he added that Bolivia has great advantages due to its natural resources and can use this association to generate an industrial and diversified economy that guarantees the supply of critical resources to countries like China.

"Joining BRICS could be beneficial, but it would also require preparation and consideration of the internal economic challenges the country faces," Escobar said.

Nicaragua's engagement reflects a complementary yet distinct aspiration. "Our economic future depends on establishing new international relationships that reflect our national interests and goals," Murillo said.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

## Parade ready



A rescue boat cruises on the Seine River near the Eiffel Tower during a rehearsal for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games opening ceremony on Monday. There will be boats for each national delegation during the Games' opening ceremony on July 26. THOMAS PADILLA / ASSOCIATED PRESS

## EU leaders haggle over bloc's top jobs

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels chenweihua@chinadaily.com.cn

European Union leaders failed to reach an agreement on the bloc's top jobs on Monday night in their informal summit despite some favorite names being supported by many member states.

It was widely expected before the meeting that European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, of the European People's Party, would secure a second five-year term.

Monday's gathering was the first for the 27 member heads of state since European elections earlier this month, which saw far-right parties gain ground and prompt French President Emmanuel Macron to call snap elections.

Former Portuguese prime minister Antonio Costa, 62, is a hot candidate to be the next European Council president, now held by former Belgian prime minister Charles Michel.

Estonia's Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, 46, is regarded as a favorite candidate for the EU foreign policy chief, now held by Spain's Josep Borrell, while Malta's Roberta Metsola might remain as European Parliament president for 2.5 years.

"There is no agreement tonight," Michel told reporters after the long dinner meeting, adding that he was not surprised at all because the purpose of the meeting was not to

make a decision. He said the gathering was a "good occasion to exchange views" and the goal was to have "an in-depth exchange of views and share concerns, priorities, hopes and expectations."

EU leaders are expected to reach an agreement when they meet for a formal summit on June 27-28. The EPP, the largest political group in the European Parliament, is said to eye three of the four top jobs. The party is a big winner in the June 6-9 European Parliament election.

EPP was reportedly proposing to Socialists & Democrats, or S&D, the second largest group in the parliament that the European Council presidency be split into two 2.5 years for them. Both von der Leyen and Metsola belong to the EPP.

## Vote on the nominees

But the S&D, which wants their own candidate Portugal's Costa to be the European Council president, disagreed with such a proposal.

The new European Parliament will vote on the nominees after the European Council reaches an agreement in next week's summit.

While von der Leyen is supported by many national leaders, including Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, she is still under investigation for the so-called Pfizergate — a scandal over her failure to disclose

exchanges with Pfizer's chairman and CEO Albert Bourla.

Von der Leyen also drew fire this week after media reported that she has sought to slow down an official EU report criticizing Italy for its eroding press freedom to seek support for her second term from Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, from the far-right Brothers of Italy party. Meloni's party won 28 percent of the votes in Italy in last week's election.

"The will of the European people was ignored today in Brussels," Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said on X, accusing the EPP of not listening to the voters but instead trying to team up with socialists and liberals to divide the top jobs among themselves.

Ding Chun, director of the Center for European Studies at Fudan University, said he does not expect any immediate impact of the European election on EU-China relations.

"Since the three-pronged approach of 'cooperation partner, economic competitor and systemic rival' was approved by the European Council and has become a consensus among member states, it is unlikely to have fundamental change without a major political shift in the European Parliament election," he said.

Agencies and Jonathan Powell in London contributed to this story.

## Briefly

## CHINA

## Nigeria's FM to pay eight-day official visit

Nigeria's Foreign Minister Yusuf Maitama Tuggar will pay an eight-day official visit to China starting from Wednesday, China's Foreign Ministry has announced. During his visit, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Nigerian counterpart will co-chair the first Plenary Session of the China-Nigeria Intergovernmental Committee, ministry spokesman Lin Jian said on Tuesday. The committee between the two countries was established in 2021. Nigeria is the largest project contract market, second-largest export market and third-largest trading partner of China in Africa. Last year, bilateral trade volume reached \$22.56 billion.

## INDIA

## Trade, defense focus of talks with Washington

India and the United States pledged on Monday to boost defense and technology cooperation and remove long-standing barriers to bilateral strategic trade, following a meeting between the national security advisers of both countries. US National Security adviser Jake Sullivan is on a two-day visit to the Indian capital New Delhi, the first from a high-ranking US official since Prime Minister Narendra Modi secured a third straight term in India's general election earlier this month. Sullivan held talks with Modi and met with his counterpart Ajit Doval.

## CENTRAL AMERICA

## 13 killed as heavy rains pound region

Thirteen people have died in flooding and landslides in El Salvador and Guatemala as heavy rains pound Central America, authorities from the two countries said. In El Salvador, the hardest-hit country so far, 11 people died from Friday to Monday, civil defense chief Luis Amaya said. President Nayib Bukele said on X that he had asked Congress to make Tuesday a federal holiday to avoid commutes and "reduce the risk of tragedies." In Guatemala, a woman and a man died on Sunday in the village of Chacayá when they were buried by a collapsed wall, authorities said.

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## Putin pledges to enhance relations with DPRK

By REN QI in Moscow renqi@chinadaily.com.cn

Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his intent to enhance bilateral relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in an article ahead of his planned visit to the neighbor, the official Korean Central News Agency reported on Tuesday.

In the report published by the Rodong Sinmun, the official newspaper of the DPRK, Putin said Russia and the DPRK "will put the bilateral cooperation onto a higher level with our joint efforts and this will contribute to developing reciprocal and equal cooperation between the two countries," according to the KCNA, which released the full text of the article.

Putin said Russia will invariably support the DPRK's fight to defend its freedom, sovereignty and the right to choose its road of independence.

The Russian president also denounced the United States-imposed "order based on rules", calling it "nothing but a worldwide neocolonialist dictatorship based on double standards."

According to the Kremlin, Putin would arrive on Tuesday evening in Pyongyang, where he will attend a concert in his honor, before signing "important" documents with Kim Jong-un on Wednesday.

The DPRK's top leader Kim paid an official visit to Russia at the invitation of Putin in September 2023 and then invited Putin to pay

a return visit.

The visit will include one-on-one discussions between the two leaders, as well as a gala concert, state reception, honor guards, document signings, and a statement to the media, Assistant to the Head of State Yuri Ushakov told reporters, according to Russia's Interfax news agency.

Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, the ministers for natural resources, health and transport, and Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, will be part of the delegation.

According to Sputnik News, Putin has accepted the proposal of the Russian Foreign Ministry to sign a strategic partnership agreement with the DPRK,

according to the relevant decree published on the official legal information portal on Tuesday.

Western countries have accused the DPRK of sending weapons to Russia for use in the conflict with Ukraine, which Moscow and Pyongyang both denied.

"We're not concerned about the trip" by Putin, US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters on Monday. "What we are concerned about is the deepening relationship between these two countries."

The Kremlin said Putin will also visit Vietnam on Wednesday and Thursday for talks that are expected to be focused on trade.

Xinhua and agencies contributed to this story.

## Probe called over Greek coast guard's role in deaths of migrants

By JULIAN SHEA in London

The main opposition party in Greece has called for an inquiry after allegations made by the BBC that the actions of the country's coast guard service has led to the deaths of dozens of migrants over the past three years, with nine of them allegedly deliberately thrown into the sea.

The BBC showed footage, previously published by The New York Times, of 12 people being put into a Greek coast guard boat and then abandoned on a dinghy, to a former senior official from the coast guard.

After viewing the footage, with his microphone still on, he was heard saying that the actions were

"obviously illegal" and "an international crime".

Greek government spokesman Pavlos Marinakis has insisted there was no evidence to support the allegations.

"Our understanding is that what is reported is not proved," he told reporters at a scheduled government media briefing, adding that it was unfair to target coast guards who "save dozens of human lives every day".

But Giorgos Psychogios of the center-left Syriza party said: "We demand an in-depth investigation, we demand answers, we demand accountability, and the reason we do it is this.

"We care about all human life, and

we cannot get used to the loss of human life."

Greece and its many islands have long been a magnet for people crossing the Mediterranean Sea in small boats from North Africa and the Middle East, trying to gain entry to the European Union.

Another popular destination for migrants is Italy, whose coast guard officials said on Monday that 11 people died and more than 60 were missing following two migrant shipwrecks off the country's southern shores.

German aid group Resqship, which operates the *Nadir* rescue boat, said it picked up 51 people from a sinking wooden boat and found 10 bodies trapped in the

lower deck of the vessel.

## Rescuing survivors

Survivors were handed over to the Italian coast guard and taken ashore on Monday morning, while the *Nadir* was making its way to the Italian island of Lampedusa, towing the wooden boat with the deceased, the charity said.

The second shipwreck took place about 200 kilometers east of the Italian region of Calabria, as a boat that had set off from Turkey caught fire and overturned, according to a few United Nations agencies.

They said 64 people were missing at sea, while 11 were rescued and taken ashore by the Italian coast guard, along with the body of a woman.

The incidents confirmed the central Mediterranean's reputation as one of the world's most dangerous migration routes. According to UN data, more than 23,500 migrants have died or gone missing in its waters since 2014.

Greece has often been accused of pushing boats back into the waters of neighboring Turkey, which is illegal. And based on data from sources including local media, nonprofits and the Turkish coast guard, it has been calculated that 15 incidents between May 2020 and May 2023 have led to 43 deaths.

Last year, officials in Greece reported that an estimated 500 people had drowned off Messenia on the coast of Italy, when a boat called the

*Adriana*, with as many as 750 people on board, was lost at sea.

But the Financial Times reported that the recent BBC documentary film *Dead Cabin: Killing in the Med?* has dug further into the story and has come up with disturbing claims.

It alleged that while Greek coast guards had said the boat overturned because of "commotion" on the deck, firsthand accounts suggested that before it sank, a Greek special forces team had tried to force the boat out of the country's waters, and search and rescue efforts were described as "delayed and inadequate".

It also included claims that people who had crossed to the Greek islands were forced out to sea again in unsafe vessels by masked individuals, and that others were beaten or thrown into the waves.

Reuters contributed to this story.

## BUSINESS

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European pork promoted during an expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Probe heralds duties on EU pork imports

Row over Chinese vehicles may deepen, affecting ties, analysts say

By WANG KEJU  
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China's decision to investigate pork imports from the European Union is the latest step in an escalating trade standoff between the bloc and its largest trading partner, and any antidumping duties would deal a hard blow to the EU's pork sector, analysts said.

China's position as the largest consumer of pork globally has fueled substantial imports from the EU. Data from the General Administration of Customs showed China imported some 1.34 million metric tons of pork and pork by-products from the EU last year.

The EU has emerged as a major source of imports of pork and related by-products from China, and more than half of China's imports in this category were sourced from the EU between 2020 and 2023.

Beijing's move comes in the wake of the bloc's decision last week to slap additional import tariffs of up to 38 percent on Chinese-made electric cars from next month after a so-called anti-subsidy probe.

Brussels pointed to "unfair subsidization" in China, which it said "is causing a threat of economic injury" to EU electric vehicle makers, proposing additional tariffs on different Chinese manufacturers — 17.4 percent on market major BYD, 20 percent on Geely and 38.1 percent on SAIC, on top of the standard 10 percent car duty.

The consequences of the protectionist measures that unfairly target China will only result in the shift of production from a low-cost country with greater efficiency to a higher-cost country with less efficacy, said Zhao Zhongxiu, president



Zhao Zhongxiu

of the University of International Business and Economics. Moreover, it is foreseeable that if trade disputes over clean-tech products continue to escalate, the foundation of trust for climate change cooperation between China and Europe will be undermined, Zhao said.

The Chinese probe is in response to an application submitted by the China Animal Agriculture Association, a Chinese trade group, on behalf of domestic producers, the Commerce Ministry said in a statement on Monday.

In its petition, the association raised concerns over the EU's pig farming sector, alleging that substantial support and subsidies have enabled it to maintain a competitive edge with low production costs.

Citing the EU's midterm budget for the period 2023-27 showing that 194 billion euros (\$208 billion) in agricultural subsidies was allocated through direct payments to member states, the association said about 82 percent of these subsidies could end up in the hands of high-emission livestock farming operations.

Olof Gill, a spokesperson for the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, said on Monday that the EU would follow China's investigation into pork products very closely and intervene as appropriate, to ensure the probe complies with rules set by the World Trade Organization.

Spain's Agriculture Minister Luis Planas told reporters in Madrid: "I hope and expect that

there will be room for understanding, for negotiation, and to avoid the imposition of tariffs on agricultural and food products."

Spain exported 560,488 metric tons of pork products worth 1.2 billion euros to China in 2023, representing 20.3 percent of its total pork exports by volume and 13.7 percent by value, according to Interporc, Spain's pork producers' association.

Impact on EU exports will take time to emerge as China's Commerce Ministry said the investigation could last more than a year, focusing on pork for human consumption, like fresh, cold and frozen whole cuts, as well as pig intestines, bladders and stomachs.

The potential inability to export pork offal, which has limited demand in Europe due to dietary preferences, could lead to increased pressure on sales and potentially impact pork prices within the EU, further affecting the bloc's livestock sector, said Shi Teng, an agriculture analyst with China Merchants Securities.

Meanwhile, China's self-sufficiency in pork production and its limited reliance on imports will ensure a secure pork supply chain and stable prices, mitigating the potential consequences of import reductions, Shi said.

China achieved a cumulative pork production of 57.94 million tons in 2023. Meanwhile, the country's imports of pork remained minimal, down nearly 12 percent from the 2022 levels, official data showed.

Prior to the pork product investigation, Beijing launched an anti-dumping investigation in May into imports of a key engineering chemical from the EU, as well as an antidumping investigation in January into brandy imported from the EU.

## Fresh signs of steady rebound seen

By OUYANG SHIJIA  
and LIU ZHIHUA

China is ramping up stimulus measures to expand domestic demand and boost market confidence in a bid to further consolidate the recovery trend of the world's second-largest economy, said officials and experts.

Li Chao, a spokeswoman for the National Development and Reform Commission, said China's economy is showing fresh signs of a steady rebound with improvement in key indicators despite lingering pressures.

"China's economic recovery still faces many difficulties and challenges, including a more complicated and grimmer external environment and mounting uncertainties," Li said at a news conference in Beijing on Tuesday.

Li said the country will accelerate the implementation of key policies to prop up the economy, including issuing ultra-long-term special treasury bonds for major national strategies and building up security capacity in key areas and driving large-scale equipment renewal and trade-in deals for consumer goods.

During the January-May period, investment in equipment and tool purchases increased 17.5 percent year-on-year, contributing over half of overall investment growth. Sales of home appliances sold on major e-commerce platforms under the trade-in deals for consumer goods program increased by more than 80 percent in the first five months, the NDRC said.



Considering the lower base and the gradual effectiveness of consumer stimulus policies, we expect the growth rate of total retail sales of consumer goods in June to accelerate."

Chang Haizhong,  
executive director of corporates  
at Fitch Bohua

National Bureau of Statistics data showed China's retail sales increased 3.7 percent year-on-year in May, an increase of 1.4 percentage points from April, which experts said was driven by the May Day holiday economy and early sales during the extended June 18 online shopping carnival (known as "618").

Chang Haizhong, executive director of corporates at Fitch Bohua, said May's retail sales growth is still significantly lower than prepandemic levels, suggesting that the problem of insufficient effective social demand has not been remedied.

However, Chang said the growth rate in May has ended the continuous slowdown since the beginning of the year.

"Considering the lower base and the gradual effectiveness of consumer stimulus policies, we expect the growth rate of total retail sales of consumer goods in June to accelerate," Chang said.

On the investment front, Chang said he expects that with the equipment renewal policies taking effect, investment in the manufacturing sector will continue to grow rapidly going forward and infrastructure investment will maintain a moderate growth rate in the second half.

Citing a series of significant stimulus policies introduced in mid-May, he said housing sales indicators have slightly improved.

Chang said the year-on-year decline in sales area and sales of newly built commercial housing units in May narrowed by 2.1 and 4.1 percentage points, respectively, to 20.7 percent and 26.4 percent in May.

"If sales continue to improve, it will be transmitted to property investment, then the decline of the latter will be significantly narrowed, and the drag on fixed-asset investment and economic growth will be reduced."

Xiong Yuan, chief economist at Guosheng Securities, said the broader economy is still facing pressure from lackluster domestic demand, and called for stronger policy stimulus measures to boost demand and stabilize the property sector.

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## German trade bodies decry EV tariffs

By LIU YUKUN  
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The European Union's move to temporarily impose high additional tariffs of up to 38.1 percent on Chinese battery electric vehicles or BEVs from July weakens global cooperation and increases the risk of a global trade conflict, said German trade bodies recently.

Hildegard Muller, president of the German Association of the Automotive Industry, said: "The potential damage that could be caused by the measures now announced may be greater than the potential benefits for the European — and, in particular, the German — automotive industry ... It would be expedient if we manage to overcome the existing challenges through dialogue and primarily strive for partnership-based formats and solutions."

The German Federal Association for Economic Development and Foreign Trade said that the EU's additional tariffs on Chinese BEVs send a wrong signal at the wrong time. Hence, the association "firmly rejects" the decision, it said.

Michael Schumann, chairman of the federal association, said: "Inexpensive suppliers from China could stimulate the market and help e-mobility gain more acceptance in Germany. However, protectionism is hindering the mobility transition ... Possible countermeasures from the Chinese side could affect a core industry in our country and further damage Germany as a business loca-

tion in difficult times."

China provides a large market for the EU, according to the latest data from the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association. China is the third-largest market by value for EU vehicle exports, after the United States and the United Kingdom.

Some 359,271 cars were exported from the EU to China in 2023, valued at 19.4 billion euros (\$20.8 billion), the auto association said. Among those, 11,499 BEVs were exported from the EU to China in 2023, valued at 852.3 million euros.

Last year, BEVs produced by German automakers saw a nearly 50 percent increase in sales in the Chinese market compared to 2022, said a report by global accounting firm PwC.



BYD new energy vehicles on display during an expo in Munich, Germany. REN PENGFEI / XINHUA

## Experts: Stocks to bottom out in Q3

By SHI JING in Shanghai  
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As China heads toward an economic turnaround, investors in A shares can look forward to the stock market bottoming out in the third quarter of the year, experts said.

The benchmark Shanghai Composite Index gained 0.48 percent to close at 3,030.25 points on Tuesday, while the Shenzhen Component Index ended 0.4 percent higher. The technology-focused ChiNext in Shenzhen also climbed 0.29 percent.

The uptick followed the release of macroeconomic data by the National Bureau of Statistics on Monday.

China's total retail sales rose 3.7 percent year-on-year in May, while fixed-asset investment grew by 4

percent on a yearly basis. The added value generated by industrial companies with annual sales revenue of at least 20 million yuan (\$2.8 million), each jumped 5.6 percent year-on-year in the past month.

Yang Fan, chief macroeconomic and policy analyst at CITIC Securities, said production has remained strong in China, which is reflected in the May data.

Industrial production, while undergoing a marginal slowdown, is still recovering. High-end equipment manufacturers, midstream chemical companies and nonferrous metal suppliers have shown higher growth in May. The recovery in the services sector has accelerated, she said.

While domestic demand is still weak, improvements in the consumption of home appliances and beauty products can be seen

thanks to the June 18 online shopping carnival, she said.

Qin Peijing, chief strategist at CITIC Securities, said the A-share market can anticipate a turning point in the third quarter as domestic demand picks up, external effects such as foreign exchange and geopolitical tensions weaken and more fiscal and economic stimulus policies are expected in the following months.

At this point, investors can focus on A-share industry leaders showing lower volatility but providing more dividends. If more positive signals emerge as expected in the coming months, they can attach more importance to growth enterprises with better business performance, he added.

Experts from China International Capital Corp Ltd said that investor sentiment is gradually improving.

### 3.7 percent

year-on-year growth rate of total retail sales in China in May

Although the recovery in the A-share market since February has been bumpy, the indexes are likely to rise further once more long-term reform policies are introduced.

The A-share market's investment value is quite noticeable now after recent adjustments. Investors should not be pessimistic, they added.

Hong Hao, chief economist at GROW Investment Group, wrote in a report released on Monday that the recent rebound in April shows that "Chinese stocks can rebound without a rebound in property".

Falling property prices have been a boon to discretionary spending, he said.

Hong said China's economy is

bottoming out with some upticks. Manufacturing investment has made up for a fall in property investment.

On the other hand, excess savings are coming out of bank accounts, seeking yields. When confidence improves, they will likely be allocated back to stocks, according to Hong.

Chen Guo, chief strategist of China Securities, said the latest financial and core consumer price index data are still lower than expected. The market is awaiting more powerful fiscal policies and relaxed monetary measures.

While incremental capital flow into the A-share market remains moderate at present, the electronics and semiconductor sectors may show more bullish performance amid stronger market expectations. In the short term, however, investors should be more rational while investing in these emerging sectors, by carefully choosing targets and the timing.

### Briefly

#### PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 86 billion yuan (\$12.11 billion) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.8 percent on Tuesday. The move aims to keep liquidity reasonable and ample in the banking system, the People's Bank of China said.

#### Express delivery sector sees robust growth

China's express delivery sector registered rapid expansion in both business volume and revenue in May, amid a steady recovery of the economy and faster consumption growth in particular, said the State Post Bureau. The sector handled 14.78 billion parcels last month, reaching a historical high for monthly business volume.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## BUSINESS



Passengers bound for Sydney line up for check-in at Haikou Meilan International Airport in Hainan province. LUO YUNFEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## More Australian tourists eye China after visa-free policy

Visitor traffic on the rise this year on increased flights, frequencies

By ZHU WENQIAN  
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Australian tourists have shown increased enthusiasm to travel to China after they were included in the unilateral visa-free policy list on Monday.

Half an hour following China's announcement of the move on Monday, Trip.com, the country's largest online travel agency, witnessed search volumes by Australian tourists of keywords related to China jumping more than 80 percent over the previous day.

With new flights and increased frequencies connecting China and Australia since the beginning of this year, travel between the two countries has been growing in popularity.

Australia has ranked as the fifth-largest source country for the number of inbound tourists to China this year, and orders for inbound tourism service products have grown by 155 percent year-on-year.

Meanwhile, the number of flights from Australia to China has surged

As important countries in the Asia-Pacific region, China and Australia show high economic complementarity and boast enormous potential for further cooperation."

Qin Jing, vice-president of Trip.com Group

by over 220 percent year-on-year, data from Shanghai-based Trip.com Group showed.

This summer, the average price of flight tickets from Australia to China declined by nearly 30 percent compared to the same period last year, Trip.com found.

Some popular destinations for

Australian tourists include Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province, Chengdu, Sichuan province, and Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.

"The implementation of the unilateral visa-free policy is expected to accelerate tourism exchanges, and economic and trade cooperation between China and Australia. The visa-free policy will also benefit over a million Chinese living in Australia, making it more convenient and smooth for family visits and travel to China," said Qin Jing, vice-president of Trip.com Group.

"As important countries in the Asia-Pacific region, China and Australia show high economic complementarity and boast enormous potential for further cooperation. Next, we hope to achieve stronger cooperation momentum in the tourism sector," Qin said.

Meanwhile, the visa exemption policy for Australian tourists has also spurred domestic tourists to explore travel options to Australia.

After the announcement, the search volume for flight tickets from China to Australia jumped more than 40 percent compared with the

level seen in May, according to Qunar, a Beijing-based online travel agency.

Currently, direct flights connect Sydney and Melbourne with major Chinese cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Guangdong province, Nanjing, Jiangsu province, and Xiamen, Fujian province. Besides, direct flights also connect Brisbane with Shanghai and Guangzhou.

Chinese tourists eyeing destinations in Australia are considering some renowned sightseeing spots in Australia, such as the Great Barrier Reef and Sydney Opera House, as well as watching dolphins at sea, Qunar found.

"Many Chinese tourists have booked group tours for eight to 12 days in Australia. Travelers can go out to sea to watch whales, and penguins returning home, to experience some unique local features in Australia," said Xiao Peng, a researcher with the big data research institute of Qunar.

Last week, China said it would also include New Zealand in the list of unilateral visa-free countries, boosting inbound tourism orders to China.

## New research institute on rules-based business unveiled in Shanghai

By WANG YING in Shanghai  
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A research institute for a law-based business environment as well as its 30-member expert committee were unveiled in Shanghai on Monday.

This is expected to better connect the eastern metropolis with international regulations and represent China in global competition, official sources said.

The China Institute for Rule-oriented Business Environment was formally unveiled by the Shanghai Municipal Development and Reform Commission and East China University of Political Science and Law at a ceremony in Shanghai.

With more than 150 members, the institute consists of 14 specialized research areas, with working languages including English, German, French and Japanese.

"It is hoped that the institute will play a contributory role in fulfilling the Chinese government's goal of building a world-class, market-oriented, legalized and internationalized business environment," said Li Shuguang, dean of the School of Law and Economics at China University of Political Science and Law.

"Considering the city's significance in China's economy, Shanghai's business environment not only matters in the city's economic and social development, but also influences the nation's business environment," Li said.

"The experience of the world's major economies has shown that one of the most important characteristics of a prime business environment is the rule of law," Li said.

In May 2023, the World Bank introduced new criteria for assessing the business environment of more than 190 global economies, covering firms' life-cycle of business entry, business location, utility services, labor, financial services, international trade, taxation, dispute resolution, market competition and business insolvency.

"Shanghai will represent Chinese cities to be assessed by the World Bank, and its performance will set a benchmark for other domestic cities," said Li.

According to Li, the institute will strengthen the city's efforts in improving business environment based on the rule of law, which is in line with all the 10 criteria.

Over the years, Shanghai has been pioneering a series of regulations and laws. The municipal government publishes action



It is hoped that the institute will play a contributory role in fulfilling the Chinese government's goal of building a world-class, market-oriented, legalized and internationalized business environment."

Li Shuguang, dean of the School of Law and Economics at China University of Political Science and Law

plans to create a world-class business environment on an annual basis, and in February issued the seventh edition action plan to further upgrade the city's business environment.

A total of 18 laws and regulations have been tailor-made for Pudong New Area to support its high-standard reform and opening-up since 2021.

"The majority of the expert committee members come from universities across China. Their innovative ideas and complementary knowledge structures will inspire each other and nurture breakthroughs," said Luo Peixin, vice-president of East China University of Political Science and Law.

Luo said the institute will strive to promote the formulation and revision of business environment laws and regulations, provide forward-looking and practical suggestions and proposals on problems confronting enterprises, and help Shanghai better align with international rules and represent the country in global competition.

A total of 30 experts were appointed as members of the expert committee during Monday's ceremony.

The members are either experts from comprehensive universities including Tsinghua University, Peking University, Renmin University of China, Fudan University, Wuhan University, or scholars from political and legal professional universities such as China University of Political Science and Law and East China University of Political Science and Law.

## IKEA supply chain fine-tuning seen enhancing affordability, green drive

By WANG ZHUOQIONG  
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Amid global economic challenges affecting consumer spending, Swedish housewares giant IKEA has managed to gain market share with a more competitive pricing strategy.

The secret to its growth also lies in the continuous optimization of its supply chain.

"Often during economic downturns, IKEA discovers new customers," said Susanne Waidzun, global supply manager at Inter IKEA Group, addressing the big picture of the global home furnishings market.

"There will continue to be a big demand for well-designed, low-priced furniture."

IKEA has implemented a global pricing strategy, including Ingka Group, an IKEA franchisee. It announced that it would invest 6.3 billion yuan (\$870 million) in China over the next three years to lower its prices in the country.

Inter IKEA's supply chain, which covers everything from raw materials up to the final mile — production, procurement, raw materials sourcing, in-house manufacturing, transport and logistics — makes products affordable without compromising on quality, sustainability, form or function, said the company.

"Our primary objective is to



Susanne Waidzun

reduce costs across our supply chain," said Waidzun.

The goal is expected to be pursued through enhancing efficiencies, more smartly utilizing materials and accelerating automation initiatives, she added.

IKEA is creating a more responsive and resilient supply chain, not only to maintain robustness but also to put itself in a position to act on opportunities, she said.

Automation is crucial to improve efficiency and cut costs. Many of its more than 400 suppliers in China are pioneers in the field of automation, particularly on the production front, said Waidzun.

Amid fluctuating global commodity prices and various inflationary pressures, IKEA has found opportunities in procurements and logistics to ensure costs remain lower than in previous years. Balancing cost dynamics amid inflation requires more efficiency in automation, said Waidzun.

Meanwhile, circular design optimized for manufacturing is a pillar strategy to lower supply chain costs. For example, she said, the right packaging and pallet density play a cru-

cial role in streamlining costs across production and sales channels.

The second objective is to enhance accessibility through its omnichannel platforms, said the manager. IKEA has raised its online presence globally from five percent pre-COVID-19 levels to more than 25 percent at present.

More investments in AI-driven tools like Demand Sensing — a method and technology that predicts near-future demand based on short-term data — have bolstered precision and accuracy in sales forecasts and inventory planning, said Waidzun.

"That is important for us to be able to execute and to have an efficient inventory management," she said.

AI tools also serve IKEA supply chain in terms of risk assessment.

In navigating the volatile landscape of global disruptions, "the company has to get used to more volatility when it comes to the demand, sales and supply sides," Waidzun said.

Visibility and trackability are also areas where AI can help. For instance, the Suez Canal tensions have added much more lead time on goods from China to Europe.

"To mitigate the risks and to be a little bit ahead of the risks — these are areas where we are investing right now," she said.



An employee works at an IKEA production facility in Nantong, Jiangsu province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Third, the company has invested in building a green supply chain.

"In China, more than 80 percent of IKEA's suppliers had transitioned to renewable electricity by April 2023. Electrification of our flows is very important for us," she said.

The company is also adding more electric trucks in China. Meanwhile, hydrogen-powered trucks in China are next on the agenda. By 2030, IKEA's target for supply chain operation is to reduce its carbon footprint from every transport by an

average of 70 percent compared to fiscal year 2017.

IKEA has integrated rail and other modes to reduce environmental impact and optimize efficiency. About half of IKEA's global land transport now utilizes intermodal systems, which means mixed routes of rail, electric trucks and sea, for long haul transportation, which is higher than industry standards, said Waidzun.

The company has worked on innovations in materials transformation — using materials that are renewable or recycled.

For instance, IKEA has developed carpets from recycled polypropylene, which are currently in production. Postindustrial waste and postconsumer materials such as glass, plastic and textiles are also part of key efforts for IKEA to reduce its carbon footprint.

Waidzun is optimistic about the prospects of IKEA's integrated value chain.

"We are working throughout with optimizing. It's part of our DNA to always see what we can do better," she said.

# BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

## Exporters race to find space on ships

Containers in tight supply as vessels reroute to stave off delays in Red Sea



By ZHONG NAN  
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Lu Chao, head of the marketing department at Zhejiang Xinqiaoyuan International Logistics Co, has been facing a tough time over the past five weeks.

Though her freight forwarding company, which is based in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, has successfully booked cargo space on ships, securing shipping containers for loading goods has proved difficult.

To locate empty containers, Lu and her team members have been diligently making online reservations, adhering to a strict daily schedule.

"If we don't get them today, there won't be any more available. We will start again tomorrow afternoon," said Lu.

She said booking containers online has become a key daily task, sometimes even requiring assistance from all the staff members of the company.

Sharing a similar experience, Guo Xinxin, head of customer service at Zhejiang Xiecheng International Freight Forwarding Co in Yiwu, Zhejiang, said a significant portion of her daily workload involves scrambling for containers.

"Container truck drivers also have to be quick. Once they receive the pickup bar code, they must relentlessly search for empty containers. If they are too slow, the containers could be reassigned to other companies," said Guo.

The tight supply of containers is primarily due to ships rerouting and delays caused by the ongoing tensions in the Red Sea region, along with a surge in demand driven by a

large number of new container vessels being built and launched, said Li Muyuan, executive vice-president of the China Container Industry Association in Beijing.

To meet the shipping needs of foreign trade companies and improve the efficiency of container use, some shipping companies have reduced the time to pick up empty containers from 48 to 72 hours previously, to just 24 hours now, said Li.

Jin Xiaomin, chairman of Zhejiang Kingston Supply Chain Group Co Ltd, another Yiwu, Zhejiang-based exporter, said due to a shortage of containers, several exporters and shipping companies have begun buying their own.

Prices of secondhand containers have also soared. The cost of a used container was around 15,000 yuan (\$2,068) at the beginning of the year, but has surged to 23,000 yuan early this month.

At Ningbo Xinhuaichang International Containers Co, a container manufacturer based in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, trucks loaded with bamboo wood flooring and steel coils continue to arrive at its workshops. The company said that the raw materials in its warehouse can only meet production needs for two to three weeks.

Ningbo Xinhuaichang is now operating on a two-shift schedule to meet order volume. Two months ago, it was operating a single shift.

"Our production capacity is currently at an unprecedented high since the founding of our company. There is a possibility that in June and July, we may even surpass the levels achieved in May," said Zhang Zhuohui, the company's assistant president.



Top: An aerial view of Qingdao Port in Shandong province on June 6. ZHANG JINGANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Above: Workers operate a production line at a container factory in Qidong, Jiangsu province, in September 2023. XU CONGJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

This is because of high demand from clients at home and abroad, and the order volume is substantial and urgent, said Zhang.

The sudden surge in orders has also led to a supply shortage of upstream raw materials. Additionally, the rainy season in certain parts of China is affecting the situation, making the supply of bamboo wood flooring particularly tight, he added.

In addition to shipping traditional goods like household appliances, machinery and clothing through containers, many automakers have also relied heavily on these freight boxes to ship their vehicles abroad, forced by a situation of insufficient car carriers. This has also added to high demand for containers, said Liu Shuang, an official at Beilun Customs, a branch of Ningbo Customs.

For instance, Ningbo Port export-

ed a total of 64,000 vehicles in the first four months. Of these, around 50,000 were shipped using containers. This has also driven an increase in container usage.

Affected by the extended international shipping cycle on certain routes, manufacturers in Fujian province exported 526 million yuan worth of new containers from January to April, up 686 percent year-on-year, data from Xiamen Customs showed.

China's container throughput at its ports rose 9 percent year-on-year to 104.03 million twenty-foot equivalent units between January and April, according to data released by the Ministry of Transport in May.

Major players like France's CMA CGM Group, Germany's Hapag-Lloyd AG and Denmark's Maersk Line have all reported substantial rate increases in recent months,

with some hikes reaching up to \$2,000 and several routes experiencing over 50 percent increases. These adjustments span numerous routes connecting Asia with Europe, North America and South America.

For example, CMA CGM said that starting May 15, the rate for a TEU on the Asia to North Europe route would be adjusted to \$2,700, and the rate for a 40-foot container (FEU) will increase to \$5,000, which represent increases of \$500 and \$1,000, respectively, compared with rates implemented on May 1.

Maersk started to impose a peak season surcharge on routes from Asia to the west coast of South America, Central America and the Caribbean from June 1. The surcharge is \$1,000 for a TEU and \$2,000 for an FEU.

As various shipping companies announced price increases, including surcharges, the freight rates from Ningbo Port to some ports in Latin America have jumped from about \$2,000 per FEU in the off-season to \$9,000-\$10,000 this month, said Pan Jiangbo, a business manager at Ningbo Qianheng International Logistics Co, another Ningbo-based freight forwarder.

Similarly, the basic freight rates to Europe in early June have risen by nearly \$1,000 compared to May, reaching close to \$6,000 per FEU, and may even rise, said Pang.

The continued hike in freight rates is being mainly driven by operational safety concerns in the Red Sea region, the Paris 2024 Olympic Games (from July 26 to Aug 11) and a surge in demand for goods in many regions across the world. Freight rates are likely to rise in the short term, he added.

Yang Changyong, a researcher with the Academy of Macroeconomic Research under the National Development and Reform Commission, said the current scenario is expected to persist for another two or three months.

July and August mark the conventional peak shipping season, while August and September represent the busy season for global e-commerce businesses.

Anticipating uncertainties in trade policies due to the US general elections later this year, several US retailers and businesses have rushed to order products from Chinese exporters to replenish stocks, Yang said.

Generally, long-term contracts offer prices that are lower than spot market rates, but when the former are much lower than the latter, shipping companies prefer to fulfill spot contracts.

Consequently, the management and allocation of low-priced space are stringently controlled, said Lin Meng, director of the Modern Supply Chain Research Institute at the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

Overall, the freight forwarding sector is witnessing higher earnings compared to the off-season, though far from reaching the peak of 2021 when global supply chains were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and obstructions in the Suez Canal, Lin said.

Whether the rates will rise by Christmas season depends on global developments. Judging from the current circumstances, the situation of high freight costs will not last particularly long, she added.

## MNCs intensifying investment push for growth

By ZHONG NAN

China's fast-growing tech-intensive green industries, lucrative market potential and high-level openness to international engagement will boost confidence among multinational corporations, said foreign business leaders.

Highlighting China's strong attraction for global companies due to emerging opportunities in sectors such as electric vehicles, advanced manufacturing and trade in services, they said that technological decoupling presents a significant risk to global economic recovery.

Driven by these prospects, foreign companies are intensifying their investments, broadening their business scope, and devising medium- to long-term strategies for consistent growth, optimistic about China's prospects for high-quality economic advancement in the coming years.

Riding a boom in China's automotive sector, Japanese tire manufacturer Bridgestone Corp said earlier

this month that it will invest 562 million yuan (\$77.47 million) in the country over the next three years. The investment will focus on constructing production bases and enhancing output of high-performance passenger car tires.

"To achieve the goals of enhancing profitability, our strategic resources will be primarily directed toward the high-end passenger car tire market in China. This area has greater potential for growth," said Agustin Pedroni, president and CEO of Bridgestone (China) Investment Co Ltd.

The Japanese company plans to invest \$26 million in its tire factory in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, this year, to expand high-end passenger car tire production capacity.

To adapt to the changing demands of the Chinese tire market and accelerate product localization, Bridgestone's Wuxi plant has increased production of high-rim diameter tires to 21 inches to replace imports.

Bridgestone's investments appear

justified. A total of 8.07 million passenger cars were sold via retail channels in China in the first five months of 2024, an increase of 5.7 percent year-on-year, data from the China Passenger Car Association showed.

Meanwhile, US logistics provider FedEx will continue to invest in network development, digital-related services and key regions in China this year, said Robert Chu, vice-president for operations at FedEx China.

As one of the most dynamic and promising bay areas in China, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area has attracted businesses of all sizes, said Chu, adding that the company recently upgraded its gateway facility in Shenzhen, Guangdong province.

"With the newly renovated and expanded import warehouse, our import operations and Customs clearance have become more efficient," he added.

In a survey of more than 600 foreign-funded companies, over 70 percent said they are optimistic

about the development prospects of the Chinese market over the next five years, and more than 50 percent believe the Chinese market has become more attractive.

The Beijing-based China Council for the Promotion of International Trade released the study results earlier this year.

The trade value of foreign-invested companies amounted to 5.09 trillion yuan between January and May, declining 0.1 percent year-on-year, accounting for 29.1 percent of China's total foreign trade value, statistics from the General Administration of Customs showed.

Eager to attract more foreign investment, China has taken a series of measures to facilitate foreign investment this year, including rolling out national and pilot free trade zone versions of negative lists for cross-border trade in services, and simplifying visa application procedures for foreigners.

Upbeat about the Chinese market, Rui Coelho, CEO of the China unit at Air Liquide SA, a French



A view of FedEx's booth during the sixth China International Import Expo in Shanghai in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

industrial and medical gases provider, said the nation's comprehensive and reliable industrial chains play an indispensable role in stabilizing the global supply chain.

"The country's economic development model and market environment are continually evolving, offering opportunities and valuable experiences for our business expansion and enhancement," said Coelho.

Apart from operating more than 120 plants across China, the French company will set up a large-scale hydrogen filling center in Shanghai in the second half. It will also accelerate the deployment of hydrogen energy in Shanghai and the Yangtze River Delta region.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Visit's reaffirmation of friendly relations is positive marker for regional stability

Relations between China and Australia are "back on track after a period of twists and turns", visiting Chinese Premier Li Qiang declared upon his arrival in Canberra for a formal visit. Shared recognition that "mutual respect, seeking common ground while shelving differences, and mutually beneficial cooperation" are the cornerstones of healthy bilateral relations has been the enabler for the two countries to reboot what was becoming a problematic relationship, according to the Chinese premier.

If Beijing and Canberra could maneuver such an upturn, there is no reason the Chinese premier's visit to Malaysia, the third leg of his ongoing overseas trip that began in New Zealand, shouldn't be even more rewarding and fruitful. Because while Beijing has to overcome such geopolitical and ideological hurdles as convoluted security issues and concerns to improve relations with Wellington and Canberra, Beijing and Kuala Lumpur have a more conducive foundation for strengthening their cooperation thanks to the many years in which they have got along together. With his visit coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the establishment of China-Malaysia diplomatic relations, Li's itinerary will certainly be all about raising bilateral ties to a higher level.

Praising the two countries as "neighbors across the sea of traditional friendship", a spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry described their relations as that of "good friends, true friends who have always been candid with each other, trusted each other, watched out for each other, and helped each other" for all the vicissitudes in the international situation over the past five decades. What more can you ask of a friendship?

Echoing Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's latest expression of his government's interest in deepening and broadening cooperation with China, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman reiterated Beijing's keen interest in building a "community of shared future" with Malaysia, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, of which Malaysia will be the chair next year.

Malaysia lays great stress on a community spirit within ASEAN for the grouping to realize its aspirations, and it has said that as chair it will seek to tap the potential of ASEAN's underutilized mechanisms, namely the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Plus meetings and the East Asia Summit, in order to reinforce ASEAN's position as the key platform for managing regional affairs.

Beijing has consistently and resolutely supported ASEAN's centrality in the region and strategic autonomy. That explains why, for all the efforts of the United States and other Western countries to press Kuala Lumpur to shun Beijing, the latter is in favor of closer ties with it.

Although Washington and its Western and "Indo-Pacific" allies have resorted to both carrots and sticks to make countries in the region pick sides, the leaders of Malaysia are well aware of what is in the best interests of their country and the region. Joining extra-regional and regional powers in their geopolitical game against China may serve those countries' purpose. But for ASEAN countries such as Malaysia, that is more about ruining the prospects of regional peace and prosperity than about delivering those two fundamental aspirations.

This is not to say there are no issues between China and Malaysia. For example, the two countries have overlapping territorial claims in the South China Sea. And that is viewed by extra-regional powers as the leverage they need to get Kuala Lumpur to turn its back on China. But Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar made it clear in a recent interview that his government has no intention of picking sides in another's game. "It is no longer neocolonialism or colonial rule. We are an independent nation," he said. In contrast to the Western portrayal of China as a regional bully, the Chinese "have been most receptive and they collaborate well, and they are frank and [make] no display of arrogance," said the Malaysian leader.

Instead of the threat others have portrayed, Beijing, in his eyes, is a friendly partner whose investment capacity and technical expertise can significantly boost Kuala Lumpur's efforts for economic takeoff.

Premier Li's visit is set to provide further proof of that.

## Daylight pauses part of veil of deceit

The Israeli military said on Monday that it had paused operations during daylight hours in parts of southern Gaza to allow more aid to reach the residents of the beleaguered territory.

But the policy applies only to an 11-kilometer stretch of road in southern Gaza, and not to areas in central Gaza where hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians have fled since Israel's offensive against Rafah began.

That explains why aid agencies said there remain several obstacles to delivering humanitarian assistance to areas in central and southern Gaza from Kerem Shalom, an important border crossing between Israel and Gaza.

Although aid groups had stockpiled food and other supplies before the Israeli push into Rafah, six weeks of fighting there have raised concerns about the Benjamin Netanyahu government using hunger as a tactic in its war against Hamas, which it says will not end until all of its goals are realized.

By weaponizing its control of all aid routes into Gaza, Tel Aviv sought to incite anti-Hamas sentiment among the Palestinians. But that scheme has backfired, as the Palestinians attribute their sufferings to Israel, not the militant group.

Israel claims that there are no limits on the amount of aid it allows to enter Gaza and blames the disorganization of aid groups — as well as theft by Hamas — for the failure to deliver food to the besieged Palestinians in Gaza.

Yet while domestic and international pressure is mounting on Tel Aviv, urging it to implement the US-proposed UN Security Council cease-fire resolution passed last week, the daytime pauses in the offensive in some parts of Gaza are only a fake show of cooperativeness by Tel Aviv that it is using as a stalling tactic.

With anti-war protests sweeping across major cities in Israel calling for an immediate election, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dissolved his War Cabinet on Monday, shortly after two moderate members of the five-member Cabinet, Benny Gantz and Gadi Eisenkot, resigned last week.

But as some observers say this might largely be a symbolic move as Netanyahu does not lack warmongering aides. If he sets up a new War Cabinet, the body might be more belligerent than before.

Even if no new War Cabinet is set up, that only serves to help "centralize Netanyahu's power and solidifies it and makes it much more difficult for any mutiny", as one analyst said.

With Netanyahu removing any naysayers from his decision-making circle, there are signs that he is preparing to further escalate tensions by intensifying attacks against Hezbollah. That represents a new noteworthy change of focus, which prompted White House advisor Amos Hochstein, who has overseen previous talks between Israel and Lebanon, to meet with Netanyahu in Jerusalem on Monday.

Washington is wary that Netanyahu's refusal to accept that enough is enough will lead to a wider confrontation with the Lebanese militant group. Hochstein warned Netanyahu that the confrontation with the Iran-backed Hezbollah could grow into an all-out regional war.

The US side claimed in the UN Security Council that Israel supports its cease-fire proposal that has now become a binding UN Security Council resolution, an important reason why the deal could pass the vote.

Now, not only is Israel obliged to implement the resolution, but the US also has the unshakable duty to ensure that Israel does.

Cao Yi



## Opinion Line

## If Biden is going after TikTok, expect Trump to back the app

In response to a question in a 30-second video on June 7, former US president Donald Trump said he would never ban TikTok, a major reversal from his earlier ambiguous stand toward the app owned by Chinese firm ByteDance.

In an interview with CNBC on March 11, Trump had repeated his argument that TikTok endangers national security in the United States, while justifying the need for it to continue to exist in the US. In a post on his Truth Social platform on April 21, Trump accused Joe Biden of being the one who pushed to shut down TikTok in order to help his friends on Facebook become richer and more influential, and urged young American voters to remember this on voting day.

Since its launch in 2017 by ByteDance, TikTok, the international version of the Chinese video app Douyin, had been growing in strength in North America, but it began to encounter fierce biparti-

san suppression in 2019, on grounds of its alleged links to the Chinese government. Trump became a leader of the anti-TikTok campaign. In July 2020, his campaign team ran political ads on Facebook and Instagram, accusing TikTok of "spying" on users. On Aug 6 that year, without waiting for Congress, Trump signed an executive order saying the US must take active action to protect national security and address the threat posed by TikTok. Trump demanded that ByteDance sell TikTok to a US company within 45 days or face a complete ban in the US.

In July 2020, during the campaign, Biden asked his team members to remove TikTok from their work and personal devices. From 2022 to 2023, the Biden administration intensified the crackdown against TikTok, pushing the House and Senate to pass a bill requiring ByteDance to sell TikTok to a US company within 270 days.

However, the strategy of opposing all proposals of the opponent in a presidential election year makes it inevitable that Trump strongly disagrees with all the policies of the Biden administration, especially when he finds its stance on TikTok unpopular with the US public at large. A 2023 Pew poll found that one-third of US citizens are using TikTok, and the app is used by 62 percent of young people between the ages of 18 and 29. Trump's team believes TikTok could be of great help to his election.

In fact, Trump's election as US president was to a large extent because of his use of social networking sites; he was once even nicknamed the "Twitter president". However, many observers also believe Trump makes rash promises and then willfully breaks them, which they think damages his political integrity, and make his promises on TikTok seem unreliable.

— BEIJING NEWS

## Country will bring more opportunities to world

The official release about China's economic performance in May shows that the value-added industrial output of enterprises above designated size grew by 5.6 percent year-on-year, while the Business Activity Expectation Index for enterprises stood at 54.3 percent, both maintaining a high level. Profit growth for industrial enterprises above designated size in the first four months was up by 4.3 percent, indicating continued improvement in corporate performance.

The primary advantage of the Chinese market lies in its vast size. In May, total

retail sales of consumer goods grew by 3.7 percent year-on-year, accelerating by 1.4 percentage points compared to the previous month. Notably, consumption services such as culture and tourism have maintained rapid growth.

Moreover, the large domestic consumption market is undergoing qualitative improvement and upgrading.

In May, the value-added output of high-tech manufacturing enterprises above designated size grew by 10 percent year-on-year, outpacing the growth of all industries above designated size by 4.4 percentage points. The rapid growth in

the production of high-tech products such as integrated circuits, 3D printing equipment, and fully containerized ships indicates a clear trend of high-end transformation in the domestic manufacturing sector, and the new momentum generated by new quality productive forces is accelerating.

Given China's robust economic performance this year, several international institutions have revised upwards their forecasts for its economic growth. China will bring more opportunities to the world to share prosperity.

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

## What They Say

## Employment market's two-headed challenge

Although the unemployment situation has been partly relieved thanks to the slow but sure recovery of the economy, the mismatch between supply and demand still exists. On the one hand, it is difficult for job hunters to find jobs. On the other hand, it is not easy for employers to find candidates that meet the requirements of their vacant posts.

Data show that the population in China aged 16 to 59 is close to 900 million, and the proportion of urban employment is increasing year by year. Since 2022, the number of college graduates has exceeded 10 million each year. The talent dividend formed by such a large-scale supply of high-quality talents not only shows the huge advantages of sustained and healthy economic development, but

also means that employment pressure will exist for a long time.

In recent years, traditional labor-intensive industries have automated their operations, which has created new skill requirements for employees. The rise of emerging industries such as high-end manufacturing, artificial intelligence, and big data has increased the demand for talents in these areas, and the professional abilities of some workers have not kept up with job changes.

The flexible employment spawned by the digital economy has also changed young people's views on and expectations of work, widening the gap between the job requirements of some employers and the personal expectations of some job candidates. So how to make the job requirements more customized and make job hunters' expectations more realistic is the key to bridging the gap.

Higher education institutions and vocational schools should adapt their

courses and training programs in a timely manner to the fast changing landscape of the job market. Besides, they should strengthen cooperation with enterprises and other potential employers to create opportunities and platforms for both students and teachers to know the practical requirements of and the trend of the job market.

The human resources service industry should be encouraged to provide efficient employment services to enterprises and job hunters. That some local governments regularly publish lists of vacancies and catalogs of in-demand occupations is a useful exploration to complement public employment services with market-oriented human resources services.

The implementation of pro-employment policies must be closely combined with the development of new productivity, the expansion of domestic demand, and the release of market potential.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

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## COMMENT

Ding Duo

## Manila's provocative moves will not succeed

The Philippines made a submission to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf on June 14 for determining the outer limits of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles in parts of the South China Sea. Although the details of the application have not been released, it can be inferred from the term "Western Palawan region" mentioned by the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs that it covers China's Nansha Islands and the waters in China's jurisdiction, which is a violation of China's sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction.

Manila had been planning the move for a long time to substantiate the award of the 2016 South China Sea arbitration, consolidate its illegal gains and unilateral claims, and continue to make provocative moves in the South China Sea in a bid to gain global support for its illegal acts.

Established under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the commission takes into consideration information and other facts on the outer limits of coastal states' continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles and accordingly makes recommendations. Since the launch of its formal operations in 1997, the commission has received 94 applications from coastal states for determining the outer limits of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles.

According to the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea from 1973 to 1982, more than 30 countries had an outer continental shelf. However, the total number of applications has now more than doubled, with South China Sea littoral states such as Vietnam,

**By making the submission to the commission before any substantive progress could be made in the COC negotiations, Manila intends to add a veneer of legitimacy to its illegal claims.**

Malaysia and the Philippines, too, making joint or separate submissions to determine the outer limits of their continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles in parts of the South China Sea.

This shows that during the negotiation of the UNCLOS, countries had a relatively limited understanding of the outer continental shelf. The issue of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles in the South China Sea is what led to the intensification of the South China Sea disputes, with the negative impact of the arbitral award highlighting the issue of the outer continental shelf in the South China Sea.

In fact, individual parties to the disputes in the South China Sea have violated China's sovereignty and maritime rights, with some non-regional powers portraying the South China Sea as a "global common good." These powers, with the help of some of China's neighbors, have been using the South China Sea disputes as a political and legal tool to negate China's claims in the South China Sea and strengthen the "effect" of arbitral award.

Although, in accordance with the

rules of procedure, the commission will not consider applications relating to disputes. As a result, some committee members as well as certain UNCLOS member states have, from time to time, called for an amendment to the rules. In other words, although the rules may not be repealed or amended in the short term, an amendment cannot be ruled out, which could compel the commission to consider submissions for the determination of the outer limits of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles in the disputed waters of the South China Sea.

After Ferdinand Marcos Jr. was sworn in as Philippine president in 2022, Manila began gradually changing its China policy and its stance on the South China Sea issue, while repeatedly making provocative moves in the South China Sea. However, China's strong countermeasures have put paid to the Philippines' evil design. As a matter of fact, the Philippines is trying to open a new battlefield in multilateral forums by filing a submission to determine its outer continental shelf.

Some US research institutes and the team of US lawyers, which provided legal services for the Philippines in the South China Sea arbitration case, have given legal and technical advice to the Philippines on issues related to the outer continental shelf.

With the gradual strengthening of China's soft and hard power, which helps it to safeguard its legitimate rights and maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea, the Philippines' anxiety over consolidating its illegal gains has increased. And given the limited time window China and ASEAN

member states have to advance negotiations on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, Manila has less room to make provocative moves on the South China Sea issue.

By making the submission to the commission before any substantive progress could be made in the COC negotiations, Manila intends to add a veneer of legitimacy to its illegal claims.

Considering the commission's rules of procedure, whether its submission is considered, let alone accepted, is not of paramount importance to Manila, because its aim is to set off another round of diplomatic debate against China, and provide a chance for some countries within and outside the region to attack China's South China Sea policy. The danger is that the Philippines is creating the ground for not only the countries directly involved in the disputes but also those from outside the region to intervene in the name of safeguarding "freedom of navigation and overflight" in the South China Sea.

Perhaps the content of Manila's submission goes far beyond the scope of expressing positions, which would make it impossible for the commission to deal with. Such an approach reflects the current geopolitical reality of the South China Sea issue, which could destabilize the region. Still, Manila's attempt to legitimize its illegal claims in the South China Sea is not destined to succeed.

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Kang Bing

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## Boys shouldn't embrace girlish traits in pop culture

Very few, if any, can deny that we used to be (or still are) crazy about "heroes". Thanks to the stories from China's revolutionary history in the school syllabus, people of my generation idolized patriots who sacrificed their lives in the fight against invaders and colonial powers.

We were so impressed by the sacrifices of the war heroes that on reaching the age of 18, we — all the 20 boys in my class — applied to join the People's Liberation Army. To our great disappointment, all except one were disqualified after failing the "eye test". The only lucky one later became a jet fighter pilot and a letter he wrote to our teacher was read in front of all teachers and students of the school.

After the resumption of the college entrance examination in the late 1970s after a gap of 10 years, a few of us who passed the exam suddenly became the target of envy — only 4.8 percent of the examinees got admission in college. As the new social stars, many new college entrants pinned their school emblems on their chest in public places, which prompted many youngsters to seek success tips from them.

The reform and opening-up launched in the late 1970s introduced to China not only European soccer leagues and NBA but also pop stars such as Michael Jackson and Teresa Teng. After that the "Japanese wave" swept across China, which later was followed by the "Korean wave", making sushi and kimchi popular in China along with the Japanese and Korean languages, dresses and plastic surgery.

**To my great relief, the public opinion this time is largely against such metrosexual performers.**

For decades, there have been discussions on the effects of the Japanese and Korean "waves" on Chinese youths. Those who support the introduction of foreign cultural elements say they have enriched our lives and their negative aspects can be eliminated through government measures. And those against view it as a conspiracy and cultural invasion, saying imported culture will ruin our young generation.

I used to have an open attitude toward such "waves", thinking why shouldn't Chinese youths take a liking to sushi and kimchi if they don't hurt others? The foreign sports and performing artists are among the best in the world and their fans in China should not be blamed for enjoying their performances. And if someone wants to improve their appearance by undergoing plastic surgery, well, it's his or her own problem.

But I changed my mind when I saw some groups of boys swinging their hips seductively on a public TV channel show. Wearing heavy makeup and jewelry and dressed up like "metrosexuals", their performance, to my puzzlement, drew wild cheers from the young audience. The performance of the boys aged between 15 and 18 years, despite the adulation of the audience, left me distraught.

After doing some research, I realized the effeminate culture was probably imported from neighboring countries, that the boys were mostly contracted actors associated with certain performing arts companies that probably picked up the boys when they were very young and trained them to act womanly and appear attractive to female college and middle school students. The boys, thanks to their appearance and performance, have become stars in their own right each with millions of fans.

To my great relief, the public opinion this time is largely against such metrosexual performers. Such effeminate behavior may be contrary to traditional Chinese values, but have our youths chosen this path because we failed to provide them with proper education? Or have the youths fallen victim to cultural commercialization?

Responding to public concerns, the government has banned such youths from appearing on public platforms. But that is not the end of the story.

Some of those boys have shifted from TV programs to internet platforms, with some public media outlets highlighting the need to prevent such youngsters from crossing the redline.

We need to promote a healthy culture, complete with the virtues of serving the country and promoting the rich traditional Chinese culture, so that youths work for greater common good, and thus prevent the younger generation from going astray.

Helen Han

## High-quality growth boosts investors' confidence

China's major targets for this year include a GDP of about 5 percent, the creation of 12 million jobs and keeping the increase in inflation below 3 percent.

Since 2015, China has been the world's largest economy by GDP (purchasing power parity), with substantial improvements in people's purchasing power and standard of living. First, people's standard of living has improved due to factors such as the increase in per capita GDP. As a result, China now has the largest middle-income group in the world — more than 400 million people.

Second, people's living cost is relatively low because the prices of goods and services in China are lower than in other countries.

And third, the availability of goods is wider and speed of delivery faster in China compared with those in the US, thanks to the booming e-commerce sector and online retail platforms.

Also, for the Chinese people, bank savings and real estate, particularly commercial residential housing, are the most important channels to increase their wealth. By the end of May this year, China had savings of 299 trillion yuan (\$41.2 trillion). These savings have helped make the Chinese economy so resilient.

The real estate reform in 1998 kick-started the commercial residential property boom. China is in the midst of the world's largest urbanization drive. While the urbanization rate had reached 66.16 percent by the end of 2023, China's urbanization rate is still lower than 80 percent or more in developed countries.

Urbanization will ensure high-quality growth and make cities more attractive, while better city planning and management will ensure the real estate's qualitative growth.

**'Silver economy' new opportunity**

Amid all these developments, the fact that Chinese consumers are becoming more sophisticated is evident from their changing tastes and interests, and their focus on value for money. The added advantage is that the middle-adult (45-65) age group is the most affluent among all age groups and, at the same time, willing to spend more.

As for China's "silver economy", it is estimated to be worth 30 trillion yuan by 2035. And elderly people's rising demands for entertainment, travel, luxury goods, healthcare, medicines, further education and wealth management will help further boost overall growth.

China's manufacturing capacity and digital economy can easily meet the urbanization and consumer demands, according to the International Institute for Management Development, because it is by far the world's biggest manufacturing hub. The logistical advantages of China having a complete domestic supply chain become even more prominent when global supply chains are disrupted by pandemics, conflicts, geopolitics and protectionism.

Thanks to the largest e-commerce market, the application of advanced digital technologies and availability of the largest educated workforce, Chinese manufacturers are able to produce at scale, substantially reducing their cost of production. Such a high level of production and innovation capability helps them expand their global footprint. For instance, new e-commerce platforms have showed how China's manufacturing advantages combined with the digital economy to create a perfect loop.

**Innovations ensure leadership in AI**

Furthermore, the Belt and Road Initiative has injected new vitality into China's supply chain by opening up new markets. China became the world's biggest car exporter in 2023 and is the global leader in making and selling electric vehicles (EVs). Therefore, despite the auto industry having one of the most complex supply chains, China will lead the development of the global EV sector.

Moreover, China has the highest number of university graduates in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) in the world which, coupled with the national policy of promoting fundamental research and innovation in high-tech, has given rise to a new round of R&D and innovation at scale. As for China's AI+ strategy, it is helping build AI+ infrastructure and supercomputer-manufacturing centers, and applying AI in all aspects of the economy. As a matter of fact, China is particularly strong in developing AI solutions and commercializing AI.

China has applied AI in fields such as



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

**The economy will overcome these challenges, though, thanks to its large consumer market, a burgeoning middle-income group, high agricultural and industrial production capacity, and innovation-driven development.**

new materials, new energy cars, life sciences, and environmental and ecological protection. In smart manufacturing and industrial internet of things, AI is more concentrated in the design and quality control fields, which means virtual reality, augmented reality, mixed reality, industrial robotics and/or edge computing can be applied to improve productivity in any manufacturing area.

Besides, the country has invested more than 3 trillion yuan in research and

development in 2023, which may help it to lead in all AI-enabled emerging areas.

However, the financial stability of the Chinese economy is being tested as the country undergoes deeper financial and structural economic reforms. The economy will overcome these challenges, though, thanks to its large consumer market, a burgeoning middle-income group, high agricultural and industrial production capacity, and innovation-driven development.

China has vowed to further open up its economy and already signed visa-free entry agreements with a number of countries. This, along with its high-quality growth, will attract more investors focused on long-term value-based returns.

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## GLOBAL VIEWS

CHENG KIMLONG

## Diamond-clad friendship

Growing economic relations between Cambodia and China mark a significant step forward in fostering cooperation and collaboration in the new era of a shared future

China and Cambodia marked the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations in February 2023. The two countries have elevated relations to "diamond hexagon cooperation", marking an upgrade in their ironclad friendship amid increasing geopolitical tensions.



The two countries signified the depth of their relations by marking 2024 as the year of commencing the Cambodia-China people-to-people exchanges with the aim of deepening cultural ties. In the Mekong sub-region, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in particular, Cambodia and China have established the only iron-clad friendship as manifested by the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership signed in 2010.

In terms of trade and economy, China is Cambodia's main driver of foreign direct investments, which have accumulated to more than \$10 billion in 2022. The fundamental State-to-State and Party-to-Party connections have served as a major gateway for the two countries to continue deepening their relations. As of 2023, Cambodia registered an estimated economic growth of 5.6 percent and most of its manufacturing activities are closely linked to China. However, China has also benefited from Cambodia's growing economic ties with ASEAN and the world. These relations should be further nurtured.

Since 2010, Cambodia-China economic ties have been heightened with the foundation of mutual trust, drawing the attention of many larger economies. The increased interdependence has been a major driving force for various bilateral cooperation programs, including the new Action Plan on Building a Cambodia-China Community with a Shared Future in the New Era (2024-28). The Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone alone stands as a flagship example of increasing Chinese support to the country. In 2023, the value of imports and exports passing through the economic zone reached \$3.36 billion, accounting for about 7.18 percent of Cambodia's total import and export trade. Moreover, Prime Minister Hun Manet attended the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing last October, which reflects China's warm embrace of Cambodia. The two sides have agreed to jointly build the Industrial Development Corridor and the Fish and Rice Corridor, which can bring further development flow into local communities in Cambodia.

While some may view China as focusing on its interests, its recent engagement displays otherwise. China is committed to strengthening its

relationship with Cambodia by prioritizing more people-centric and mega-investment projects, such as the Siem Reap Angkor International Airport, the Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway, special economic zones, and hydropower plants. Interestingly, under the new diamond hexagon framework, getting involved in Cambodia's energy sector could be feasible for China, potentially given its prioritization in the Chinese Government Work Report 2024. This demonstrates China's efforts to deepen comprehensive strategic cooperation with Cambodia for the mutual benefit of both nations. China's support to Cambodia comes with numerous investments and trade activities. A recent \$600 million investment into Sihanoukville embarks a significant milestone for Cambodia's development. This investment is expected to generate potential revenue in its services and tourism sectors as well as enhancing its production capacity. Over the past 27 years, the exports of Cambodia to China have increased at an annualized rate of 23.6 percent, from \$5.37 million in 1995 to \$1.63 billion in 2022.

Additionally, the visit of Prime Minister Hun Manet to the 20th China-ASEAN Expo in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, in September 2023 aimed to boost the trade ties between the two countries, attracting more investors and businesses across global and regional landscape. This collaboration resulted in Chinese enterprises investing in various sectors, including agro-industries, manufacturing and transportation infrastructure. Specifically, the railroad development project will substantially benefit Cambodia in logistics efficiency, supply chains connection and tourism promotion.

The ambitious goal for a constant year-on-year 5 percent economic growth as outlined in the Chinese Government Work Report 2024 demonstrated a positive outlook for Cambodia-China future investments.

Cambodia-China relations will continue to bring advantages to both countries' development objectives. Chinese economic funding advances Cambodian public and private good, particularly to support the national development targets of the government. Chinese investors can benefit from Cambodia's Pentagonal Strategy Phase I and Cambodia's new investment law adopted in 2021 as the country is steadfast about opening up its economy, introducing legal and institutional refinements, and business and investment climate improvement. Much of the gains will go to the peoples of both countries, and the Cambodian government will need to advance its economic diplomacy by doubling down on efforts to attract investments from China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, ASEAN and other sources.

As a way forward, both countries should prioritize turning low-hanging fruits into long-term cooperation strategies:

Enhancing people-to-people relations to a higher level, namely holding more open, interactive, dynamic, and closer cooperation in private enterprises, innovation, digital transformation, skill development, and productive trade relations vis-a-vis Cambodia-China Free Trade Agreement and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. The horizons of the crucial people-to-people relations can expand in multiple directions by aligning with the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, the Global Civilization Initiative and other national development plans and strategies of both countries.

Creating more favorable conditions to boost two-way trade to support domestic industries for exports and to raise productivity levels of the Cambodian workforce.

Linking the coastal provinces of Cambodia, namely Kampong Som, Kampong Speu, Kep and Koh Kong, known literally as the K4, with the Hainan Free Trade Port of China will open more opportunities for bilateral and regional economic, trade, cultural, environmental, and energy cooperation.

Exploring further advancements in such areas as the interconnected digital economy, e-commerce, and data security will be both novel and promising for charting the course of inclusive, sustainable and resilient regional development, contributing to peace and mutual development.

In conclusion, the growing economic relations between Cambodia and China mark a significant step forward in strengthening bilateral ties and fostering cooperation and collaboration in the new era of shared destiny. The joint efforts of the two countries have underscored mutual commitment to deepening economic, political, and cultural relations at large. As long-standing partners with strong bonds, Cambodia and China are examples of the enduring power of diplomatic ties and strategic economic alliances while navigating the complexities of global trade. Through maximizing the potential for cooperation, both nations can further enhance economic and trade relations, promote tourism, and create a more prosperous future between the two countries. The prospects for building a Cambodia-China community with a shared future in the new era lie with the strategic trust, win-win cooperation and development partnership.

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MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

WANG RUI AND DENG MINNE

## Vitality supplement

Sustainable development offers the instruments and opportunities for nontraditional stakeholders to augment China-Arab nations cooperation

The launch of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum 20 years ago has strengthened the ties between the two sides with dozens of formal mechanisms established for political, economic and cultural exchanges. Sustainable development, despite the

nuanced interpretation and approaches of various countries, has been manifested through enormous bilateral or multilateral programs for renewable energy, green development, digitalization, artificial intelligence, and so on.

The practices of leading players, existing mechanisms and instruments, as well as the aspirations of the next generation, make sustainable development a good entry point to initiate dialogues and cooperation to complement the existing mechanisms. This can further South-South cooperation and accelerate the sustainable transformation across regions.

Both China and Arab nations, especially the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, are undergoing an economic transformation toward a more sustainable future, underscoring the exchange of industries such as renewable energy, new energy vehicles and digitalization. Chinese businesses, particularly State-owned enterprises, are mobilizing existing technical assets to build sustainable value chains in Arab nations, while Arab investors are embedding social and environmental impact management into their global investing to facilitate change.

During past decades, industries such as clean energy, healthcare and artificial intelligence have already been established in China, based on which, Chinese businesses are capable of integrating both the "soft" side such as talents cultivation and technology sharing, and the "hard" side such as infrastructure construction in Arab nations. For example, China Railway 18th Bureau Group Saudi Company has initiated a processing workshop project at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals in Saudi Arabia that involves building a site and providing training for local college students to learn and practice advanced processing techniques. Additionally, encouraging local

employees to obtain internationally recognized certificates and conducting capacity building for local suppliers is becoming prevalent among Chinese companies in Arab nations. Therefore, a localized value-chain approach reinforces the business sustainability of China as well as enhances the capability of Arab nations' sustainable transformation.

Arab investors, dominated by sovereign wealth funds such as the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, Kuwait Investment Authority and Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, are active in China and Asian markets with their investments. By embedding long-term impact goals into investment strategies, Arab investors pursue not only financial returns but also environmental and social impact from their global presence. Meanwhile, Arab countries are seeking to align with international standards. For example, the United Arab Emirates has mandated companies to publish corporate social responsibility or sustainability reports adhering to the Global Reporting Initiative standards since 2021, further mainstreaming sustainability at the local level.

While the value-chain-based approach of Chinese companies and sustainable investing by sovereign funds of Arab states have made big steps to strengthen the partnership between China and Arab nations, the full potential of cooperation to promote sustainable transformation is yet to be unleashed.

First, sustainable development encompasses comprehensive thematic areas beyond any single industry. For example, humanitarian aid requires the coordination of multiple industries under policy endorsement. China State Construction Engineering Corporation has built a vaccine factory in the UAE which contributes a production capacity of 200 million doses. After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, another Chinese company BGI established nucleic acid testing laboratories in Saudi Arabia and conducted over 18 million tests. These two together effectively assisted the local emergency response to the pandemic. Timely responses to other emergencies also require prior planning, material goods and technical preparation. Synergies across industries such as manufacturing, transportation and warehousing create responsible business opportunities, and a joint China-Arab nations force for humanitarian aid that covers three continents, and which can offer an intraregional solution that adds global preparedness to the humanitarian crisis.

Second, sustainable development opens the window for more flexible and diverse engagement modalities, together with the participation of nontraditional stakeholders. So far business actors, particularly state-owned enterprises, sovereign funds and governments have played a leading role under the current cooperation mechanisms. But some initiatives that engage nontraditional players have started to emerge. For example, Abu Dhabi hosted the Asia Venture Philanthropy Network 2024 Global Conference, a gathering which attracted various stakeholders such as family offices, foundations, private investors, and startups. It is the first time this kind of event has been held in an Arab nation, although trade fairs and industry exhibitions have been convened in the region in recent years. Other philanthropic players from China and Arab nations, such as leading foundations and high-net-worth individuals may also be engaged at different levels. Undoubtedly, sustainable development as an umbrella that breaks the boundaries between sectors, as well as that between businesses and nonprofits, offers opportunities for China and the Arab world to engage various stakeholders and deepen their collaboration.

Last, sustainable development looks into the instruments and opportunities that originate from the strengths and potentials of China and Arab nations. Current bilateral mechanisms have not fully leveraged domestic sustainability resources from both sides. China and Arab nations are pursuing international alignment on either ESG or CSR reporting, yet possible action plans for sustainability between the two are underdeveloped. Looking to the future, emerging Generation Z investors and entrepreneurs from both sides possess a sustainable ambition unprecedentedly, who take not only business-bound benefits but also people- and planet-centered agendas into account. Therefore, sustainable development can be a language to connect actors, either technology-powered Chinese players or financing-powered Arab players who are performing their sustainable duties in silo currently, and to boost social innovation to translate ambitions into reality.

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MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

LIFE



# Cultivating China-US youth bonds

By LI XINRAN  
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From June 12 to 14, a group of young representatives from both China and the United States gathered in Beijing for the China-US Youth Exchange Program with the theme "Bridge of the Future".

During the three-day event, these young people immersed themselves in a comprehensive experience of China from the past to the present.

On the first day, they were divided into two groups: one group visited the Great Wall, while the other explored the Palace Museum, guided by an English-speaking tour guide. The young representatives even tried out the iconic "Palace Museum" ice cream.

Aurora Moore, 15, a high school student from California who went on this route, expressed her delight, saying, "I'm very happy to be here. It's super beautiful and it's amazing to see what Chinese people could make hundreds of years ago."

In addition to the architecture, Moore also highlighted the warm hospitality of the locals she encountered. Throughout her visit to China, she wore a hat with a fan that she had bought in a US shopping mall, which is also a popular item in China. "All the people I've met are very sweet and they really liked my hat," she said.

Jake Munzaa, 16, another member of the Palace Museum group, also experienced the hospitable nature of the Chinese people. Eager and curious, Munzaa greeted every Chinese passerby who smiled at him. He and his friends even engaged in a conversation with a group of elementary school students from Hong Kong while waiting in line. As soon as Munzaa discovered they could speak English, he began recommending cities they should visit if they travel to the US.

"I love the community as a whole and I love how everybody here is so connected. They're all respectful and kind," said Munzaa.

He expressed his desire to learn the Chinese phrase "Nice to meet you; I'm Jake" as a way to show his gratitude.

On the second day of their Beijing trip, some representatives had the chance to visit the National Stadium and the National Aquatics Center. Many were amazed by how these facilities are seamlessly integrated into the lives of the people in Beijing.

"You hear about all these huge cities hosting the Olympics. There's a lot of concern about them being wasted after huge infrastructure investments. But based on everything we've seen so far, Beijing is making great use of these facilities. Considering they have been in operation since 2008, it's impressive," said Maxwell Bergen, a 20-year-old student at Duke Kunshan University in Suzhou, East China's Jiangsu province.

This is Bergen's second year in China and his second visit to Beijing. "It's very refreshing to be in Beijing again with a diverse group," he said. "The country continues to impress me. I think the overall hospitality of China and the welcoming nature of the whole program have been the most outstanding features."



Young representatives from China and the US attends a concert at Beijing's Century Theater on June 12. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Top left: Zhang Shan (left) and Zhang Yawen enjoy nature during their leisure time. Top right: Zhang Shan (left) offers assistance to a passenger with a child in the waiting room. Above: Zhang Yawen stands on the platform, waiting for a train to arrive. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# Railway oasis in nature

A dedicated team of young railway station staff in Shennongjia Forestry District overcame extreme weather and isolation to establish a crucial railway link.

By LIU KUN in Wuhan  
and LI XINRAN

Shennongjia Forestry District, where Emperor Yandi, a legendary ancestor of the Chinese people, is believed to have once resided, was historically a remote and secluded area. This changed with the establishment of a railway station, thanks to a group of dedicated youth.

In January 2022, staff from across the country arrived in Shennongjia Forestry District, located in Central China's Hubei province.

At that time, the station was still under construction. With the dormitory and cafeteria unfinished, they had to live in temporary housing for the first few months.

"It took me over six hours on the bus to get here, but we were all determined to get the station up and running soon because we knew it was the dream of generations of local people to have a railway station," said Zhang Yawen, a 27-year-old station staff member.

Despite their determination and passion, the team initially underestimated the challenges ahead.

Shennongjia, with an average altitude of 1,700 meters, is known as the "Roof of Central China." Winters are long and bitterly cold, with temperatures dropping as low as -20 C. "There is no heating here, so it feels even colder than my hometown of Mudanjiang city in Northeast China's Heilongjiang province," said He Ruihan, 27.

Zhang further explained that due to the extreme cold, the water supply

pipeline would sometimes freeze and crack. During the Spring Festival of 2023, the station experienced blizzards and freezing rain, and all staff members had to give up their holidays to clear snow and ice from the railroads to ensure smooth transit for passengers.

The station staff also encountered unexpected "passengers". According to He, they have come across protected animals such as the tawny owl and complex-toothed flying squirrel. However, they've also had some unwelcome guests: mosquitoes and various other insects.

"I've never seen mosquitoes like the ones they have here; they are so big and come in swarms. One bite and it swells up for a long time," said Zhang. "Insects would crawl on our laundry that was left out to dry. I once had an allergic reaction because of that."

In addition to the challenges posed by nature, 24-year-old Xie Yuxin pointed out the lack of recreational facilities, as the nearest supermarket was 8 kilometers away. Although the scenery in the area is indeed beautiful, it is the sole amenity; life with little entertainment can feel a bit lonely.

Over the past two years, some staff members have come and gone, while most have remained in their posts. Zhang was one of those who stayed, although she did have moments of doubt. However, one encounter dispelled her hesitation and strengthened her resolve.

During her rounds, Zhang met an elderly gentleman staring at the train

schedule display screen in the waiting room. She asked him if he needed any assistance, and he told her that he had been a forest ranger for decades in the region. In the past, it had been difficult to leave town due to limited transportation and treacherous roads. Now, thanks to the train station and staff stationed there, locals can travel to big cities like Beijing and Shanghai within just a few hours.

"When he thanked me with tears in his eyes, I thought, 'What reasons do I have not to stay?'" said Zhang.

She pointed out that since the establishment of the Shennongjia station, an increasing amount of local produce such as citrus, cured meat, and shiitake mushrooms has been shipped out, bringing in profits for local farmers.

More business opportunities have also arisen for locals. Wei Yabo, 48, head of the station, shared the story of Ms Mei, a local woman who used to work in distant cities due to limited local business opportunities.

"With more tourists visiting now, Mei has transformed her house into a homestay. Her business thrives in both winter and summer, so she no longer has to work far from home," said Wei.

Wei highlighted that Shennongjia offers different attractions throughout the year: "In spring, visitors can enjoy the blossoms; in summer, they can escape the heat; in fall, there's the allure of autumn leaves; and in winter, they can experience the thrill of winter sports."

Life has also improved for the staff

members. The station has built a sun-room for drying clothes, acquired various fitness equipment, and set up a reading room. Younger staff members have even taken over a small plot of land to grow vegetables such as tomatoes and green peppers.

"I had never farmed before joining the station. Now, I'm enjoying organic vegetables that I've grown myself," said Zhang Shan, 26, a staff member. "I can draft railway schematics, sell tickets on the computer, and work in the fields with my own hands. I think that's pretty cool."

According to Zhang Yawen, eight out of the 26 staff members were born in the 1990s and 2000s. "Most of us used to work at regular-speed stations. We came here because we believe there are more challenges and opportunities for personal growth at a new high-speed railway station," she said. "We have learned a lot, including emergency procedures for extreme weather."

Wei believes that Shennongjia Forestry District and the younger staff members share a common trait: both are full of potential.

"Shennongjia is still a mysterious place with vast unexplored and undeveloped land. Traveling through the district by train, seeing the primitive forests alongside modern cities, feels like a journey through time. It's definitely a place worth visiting at least once in a lifetime," he said.

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## LIFE

# Redefine societal beauty norms

Young women in China are reshaping beauty ideals, moving beyond traditional norms toward embracing strength and self-empowerment through sports and fitness, **Gui Qian** reports.

Narrow faces, waists as slender as an A4 sheet of paper, and legs as slim as an iPhone 6 — these were once celebrated beauty standards on Chinese social media, highlighting people's — especially young women's — strong desire for a skinny figure.

Yet, these internet-driven trends seem to be fading away as girls engaged in sports and bodybuilding are gaining increased visibility and popularity.

"I've noticed that more girls are now prioritizing their own happiness and well-being over their body image. Our previous beauty ideals were heavily influenced by idol dramas, favoring pale, slender, and youthful looks. But as we mature, we strive to take control of our own lives," said Zhang Xiao, a 26-year-old from Jinan, East China's Shandong province.

Having graduated from the School of Business at Beijing Sport University, where she majored in sports industry and management, Zhang now works at an internet company. Like many young women, she too went through a phase where fitting into Brandy Melville's clothing seemed like the ultimate aspiration.

She recalled the brand's arrival in China in September 2019, known for its short, tight, and revealing designs available only in the smallest sizes — creating the phenomenon of "BM girls" on social media, making the "BM style" a coveted trend among young Chinese women.

Identifying herself as a "BM girl" at that time, Zhang remembered, "I felt proud wearing it and looking good in it. I enjoyed being one of those attractive girls who could fit into BM clothes as portrayed on social media."

However, reflecting on those days, Zhang was startled by the harsh standards she once imposed on herself to conform to the "perfect girl image" depicted online.

To achieve her desired figure, Zhang restricted herself to one meal a day — usually a light hotpot without oil or carbohydrates. She used leg slimming massagers daily until her skin turned red and even seriously considered liposuction to achieve the slender waist and neck she wanted, which exercise alone couldn't provide.

"There was a time when I scrutinized every flaw on my body. I suppose I must have had some kind of psychological issues back then," she confessed.

Despite standing at 170 cm and weighing slightly over 50 kg, Zhang managed to trim down to 48 kg through these extreme measures.

Zhang's experience is not an isolated one.

Dai He, a 34-year-old jewelry designer from Shenyang, Northeast China's Liaoning province, and a national champion in freediving, also resorted to extreme weight loss approaches in pursuit of societal beauty ideals.

She experimented with acupuncture, sauna sessions, the Copenhagen diet, and even tried eating only apples for a week.

Such experience is also familiar to Yu Jiayue, a 28-year-old from Tonghua, Northeast China's Jilin province, who is now a model and sports influencer with over 270,000 followers on the Chinese lifestyle-sharing platform Xiaohongshu.

Owning a fit and muscular physique now, she underwent a period of both physical and psychological torment around nine years ago when she first joined her university's modeling club due to her height.

"At that time, I felt deeply inadequate compared to other models, so I went to extreme lengths to lose nearly 10 kg," Yu recalled.

"I wouldn't step outside my dorm room without makeup, not even just to take out the trash. If I had to, I'd wear a mask. It's only in the past two years that my body and appearance anxieties have begun to ease."

Reflecting on the painful struggles these women face with their bodies, Zhang said, "How did weight loss become such a dominant focus for so many women aged 18 to over 30? Unbelievable."



**Above:** Dai He is a national champion in freediving. **Left:** Zhang Xiao enjoys rock climbing in the suburbs of Beijing. **Below:** Yu Jiayue trains regularly at the gym. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Winds of change

Zhang's transformation began during the COVID-19 pandemic when she came to realize the paramount importance of health. She started eating well and exercising, eventually joining a rock climbing club where she discovered a newfound passion for sports.

Currently, she visits climbing gyms more than three times a week and engages in daily strength training. Her hands have toughened with calluses, her body has grown more muscular, and she feels stronger each day. Gradually, her focus shifted away from the pursuit of slenderness.

"Many girls simply lack the initial push to start their fitness journey. Any sport can be enjoyable if it resonates with them, motivating them to dedicate time each week," she said.

Dai has also witnessed a significant change, noting a decline in body shaming. "Several years ago,

wearing leggings in public would draw star-eyes. Nowadays, regardless of body shape, more girls confidently wear whatever they choose. In workplaces, gyms, and various other settings, you can see more self-assured women embracing their unique styles," she said.

"It's not that being slim and fair-skinned is no longer desirable, but beauty standards have diversified and become more inclusive. Chinese girls with darker complexions and more muscular physiques can now take pride in symbolizing strength, speed, and athletic prowess."

Yu's modeling journey may indicate shifts in the market. While mainly collaborating with sports brands, even these brands used to criticize her for being "too muscular" just a few years ago. However, in recent years, the criteria for models have become more flexible and diverse.

"Today, many brands prefer a wide range of models: from slender to muscular, slightly curvy, and more. Instead of merely showcasing body shapes, brands want their models to convey a vibe — a relaxed, joyful energy with contagious enthusiasm," she said.

However, Yu acknowledges that the pressure to lose weight remains a prevalent trend. Even as she shares numerous videos online about fitness and self-acceptance, she continues to receive comments from girls anxious about why they haven't lost weight despite regular exercise.

## Possible remedies

Yu describes herself as a "developmental" influencer. Since starting her fitness journey and becoming a vlogger about seven years ago, she has experienced emotional highs and lows similar to those of her followers. She firmly believes in the transformative power of exercise.

"For me, working out is life-changing. It has shaped both my inner and outer self," she said.

According to her, the positive impact of exercise on the body is immediate and noticeable, creating a sense of continuous progress. The joy and confidence gained from achieving fitness goals can also extend to other aspects of life, boosting self-esteem, patience, and inner peace. At the same time, a better physique naturally follows as a byproduct.

For Zhang, developing a deeper sense of self-awareness is crucial in easing concerns related to appearance and body image. Through rock climbing, she has learned to use her body more effectively and discovered her potential and capabilities.

"The critical gazes and self-doubt many girls direct toward themselves often stem from a lack of strong self-awareness, leaning too heavily on the approval of others," she said. "Products that promise to 'enhance beauty' exploit this insecurity. Once girls transcend this, they can appreciate their bodies without constantly seeing flaws."

While Dai no longer struggles with appearance-related anxieties, she remains "attentive" to her physique. "I don't care how others see me, but I maintain my own aesthetic standards and strive to uphold them," she said.

"When I was overweight or weak in the past, I felt disconnected from my body, less sensitive, and constantly tired. Through exercise, I began to appreciate the strength and intricacies of my body, finding joy in rediscovering and understanding myself."

Dai believes an ideal woman is someone with a unique style and confidence. For her, style reflects a person's inner stability — whether sporty, traditional Chinese, nature-inspired, or casual, she embraces her distinctiveness. Confidence, she asserts, arises from having "a little world of her own" — be it professional accomplishments or dedication to hobbies.

"Our country is so vast that people's lifestyles and states of living are very different. So why should beauty standards be the same?" said Dai. "I hope those who still hold narrow views on beauty and excessively scrutinize women can catch up and evolve."

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## LIFE

# Heroes in action

The Clouded Leopard Commando Unit in Kunming, Yunnan, demonstrates their commitment to public safety.

By LI YINGQING in Kunming and MENG WENJIE

In Kunming, the capital city of Southwest China's Yunnan province, a criminal took two hostages in a hotel. During negotiations, the criminal unexpectedly fired shots. Upon hearing the gunfire, two police officers swiftly entered the room and successfully eliminated the threat in a close-quarters gunfight, ensuring the safe rescue of the hostages.

This remarkable hostage rescue wasn't a scene from a movie but a real-life operation conducted by the Clouded Leopard Commando Unit, a counterterrorism force within the special police unit of the Kunming Municipal Public Security Bureau. The unit is named after the agile and powerful clouded leopards native to Yunnan.

"The commandos are like legends to me," said Li Ming (pseudonym), a 26-year-old member of the unit.

Inspired by the unit's reputation during his university years, Li dreamed of joining it. After graduating from the People's Public Security University of China in Beijing in 2021, he was recruited by the special police unit in Kunming.

By 2023, due to his exceptional performance, Li achieved his ambition of becoming a Clouded Leopard commando. His duties expanded to handling more dangerous situations, including encounters with armed criminals and managing urgent and complex tasks like rescues and counterterrorism operations.

The path to becoming a seasoned commando involves enduring eight hours of demanding daily training over a period of three to five years. Li must meet more than 20 strict requirements covering physical fitness, weapon skills, and tactical expertise.

Additionally, specialized training in areas like tactical driving, diving, and sniping is tailored to each recruit to maximize their individual strengths.

Once a leisure activity for Li, physical fitness has now become a daily essential obligation and a personal challenge. Despite occasional temptations to slack off, he finds motivation in his colleagues' commitment to training. "If I don't make progress each day, I feel like I'm wasting valuable time," he said.

In addition to their daily training regimen, teamwork also plays a crucial role in the curriculum of these "clouded leopards."

A key exercise in Li's training routine involves "trust target shooting", where a sniper aims at an apple held by a teammate. According to Li, the sniper's precision must be exceptional, and the teammate holding the target must have complete faith in the sniper's skill and accuracy to prevent any mishaps.

"This exercise aims to build trust among team members, ensuring that you can con-



ing zero mistakes," he said, dispelling the idea that a commando's routine is merely monotonous repetition.

It is through this rigorous training that the unit, founded 22 years ago, has achieved numerous operations without a single error.

The intense training and high standards extend equally to both men and women. Li highlights the significant contribution of female members within the team, expressing deep admiration for their dedication.

"Each one of them is incredibly powerful. They face more challenges and put in tremendous effort," he said.

According to Li, female members actively participate in missions, particularly in handling high-risk individuals like female suspects or terrorists.

Within the unit, there is an honor room that houses a bullet-riddled bullet-proof vest, serving as a reminder for Li and his comrades of the risks they face and their commitment to their duties.

"On normal days, we go about our training and friendly interactions like any group of young people, but when faced with real danger, every single one of us is ready to risk our lives without hesitation," Li said.

The training makes it difficult for these commandos to balance their rigorous routines with limited family time. Li mentioned that some senior members are parents, but due to the secluded nature of their training sessions or mission obligations, they can be separated from their families for months at a time, missing significant moments in their children's lives.

"In this job, you must deal with being alone. While others may have exciting lives, we must train hard in the hot sun and stay focused on our main goal," said Li.

He pointed out that social security has significantly improved in recent years thanks to the collaborative efforts of various sectors in Kunming, leading to a decrease in serious violent incidents.

As a result, the Clouded Leopard Commando Unit members are now deployed less frequently on missions. However, they remain dedicated to daily training, always prepared to confront any threats to national security, social stability, and public safety.

"This is how people can feel safe, knowing they can depend on us in times of danger," Li affirmed.

While Li sometimes feels his skills are not fully utilized, he recognizes that the rarity of violent incidents signifies societal progress and greater security for the public.

"In our line of work, we deal with tough criminals and distressing situations, but the Clouded Leopard commandos remain resolute because our commitment to justice is unwavering," he said.

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“On normal days, we go about our training and friendly interactions like any group of young people, but when faced with real danger, every single one of us is ready to risk our lives without hesitation.”

Li Ming (pseudonym), 26, a member of the Clouded Leopard Commando Unit

fidently depend on your teammates, especially in challenging situations," Li explained.

Moreover, during shooting practice, commandos must refine skills to counter interference. While practicing aiming and firing, intentional noises like shouting, music, and drumming are created nearby. This prepares snipers to remain composed and focused in complex environments, enabling them to effectively hit their targets despite distractions.

Because of his outstanding performance, Li became the youngest sniper on the team within a year of joining the unit, earning the opportunity to train with a sniper rifle.

"In dangerous and urgent missions, it's the muscle memory from daily training that guarantees flawless task execution, ensur-



Top: Li Ming (pseudonym) in training. Above: Members of the Clouded Leopard Commando Unit spend hours in rigorous training every day. YI JIANYUN AND NIU WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY



Lyu Yating, a young artisan from Jingdezhen in Jiangxi, is devoted to the craft of creating Linglong porcelain. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Young artisan revives Linglong porcelain craft

By XU WANYANG and MENG WENJIE

There is a unique type of porcelain that appears to be covered with small "holes" yet can still hold water without leaking. Known as "Linglong porcelain", it is one of the four esteemed traditional porcelains from Jingdezhen, often referred to as the "city of porcelain" in East China's Jiangxi province.

Unlike ordinary ceramics, Linglong porcelain is meticulously crafted by first carving tiny holes into the porcelain body, which are then filled with a unique glaze. After undergoing high-temperature firing, the outcome is a piece adorned with small, translucent "windows" embedded within it, earning it the nickname "porcelain inlaid with glass".

Due to the complexity of its production process, only a limited number of Linglong porcelain pieces have survived over time. Today, carrying forward this elaborate glazing technique is Lyu Yating, an artisan born in 1993.

Lyu comes from a family in Jingdezhen deeply rooted in the porcelain industry, a heritage dating back to her great-grandfather. In 1993, her father established the Linglong porcelain brand, Fuyu Porcelain.

"I spent my childhood in the ceramic workshop, playing with clay every day," Lyu recalled.

While studying international business in the UK, Lyu noticed that many foreign museums exhibited Chinese porcelain. "Seeing those ceramics made me really want to preserve this tradition. It's a crucial part of Chinese culture, reflecting generations of craftsmanship," she said.

Upon graduating in 2014 at the age of 21, Lyu made the unconventional choice to give up further academic pursuits and lucrative offers from multinational corporations. Instead, she returned to her roots, taking on the responsibility of mastering the art of Linglong porcelain from her father.

Rather than immediately taking on a managerial role, Lyu's father emphasized the importance of her learning the craft of porcelain making. For more than a decade, Lyu diligently apprenticed under the factory's artisans, immersing herself in the intricacies of ceramic techniques.

This hands-on experience allowed her to develop a deep understanding of both professional ceramic practices and her family's unique glaze formulas. She also started innovating her own techniques for glaze preparation.

"The essence of Linglong porcelain lies in its glaze, so I focused on innovating from that foundation," she explained.

Through continuous experimentation and adjustments to the glaze materials, Lyu's factory has achieved

a high level of light transmittance for their Linglong porcelain, giving it a shimmering quality under light. She also introduced colored glazes and developed an easy-to-clean, oil-resistant surface, enhancing both the artistic and practical appeal of the porcelain.

Today, under her leadership, Fuyu Porcelain holds two ceramic invention patents and over 100 ceramic design patents.

Lyu explained that in ancient China, the artistic trends of dynasties were largely shaped by the aesthetic preferences of emperors. Jingdezhen was tasked with producing ceramics for the imperial palace, and those approved by the emperor would be mass-produced.

"However, Linglong porcelain was too difficult to make, so it remained rare in the market; even our museums display very few examples of it," she said.

Today, thanks to modern technology, Linglong porcelain has transcended its niche status. Lyu explained that certain tasks such as carving and painting have been partially mechanized to reduce manual labor.

"I believe it's important for intangible cultural heritage to reach every household. My achievements aim to translate into everyday ceramic items, making it possible for more people to enjoy the beauty of this cultural heritage at an affordable price," she said.

Lyu also observed the changing tastes of young consumers in Linglong porcelain products over time. In 2023, for example, her innovative creation — the rotating cup — attracted significant attention from young buyers due to its practicality and entertainment value.

However, Lyu has recently noticed a rising fascination among young individuals with traditional decorative arts.

"Our sales of cups and tableware featuring traditional crafts have surged, indicating a renewed appreciation and recognition of traditional culture and art among young people," she said.

Beyond integrating intangible cultural heritage into the daily lives of young people, Lyu has even greater ambitions.

"I aim to create something completely new for international audiences, drawing global attention to Jingdezhen's Linglong porcelain and highlighting its richness and diversity. I'm confident I can accomplish this," she said.

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