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# CHINA DAILY

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XI'S VISION | REFORM AND OPENING-UP

## Ecological gains reflect broad shift

Nation's transformation led by higher project thresholds, conservation efforts

By HOU LIQIANG and YUAN HUI in Hohhot

In the early days of Feng Jiang's tenure as a bird monitor at Chenhu Lake Wetland Nature Reserve in 2008, his routine was a laborious dance between nature and technology.

Armed with binoculars, the 41-year-old Feng would venture into the vast expanse of the 11,600-hectare wetland in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, his eyes sweeping across the landscape and sky.

What once involved a solitary camera capturing glimpses of the avian world in the park has now been transformed into a network of 31 cameras. Feng's work has also been made a lot easier thanks to a number of devices capturing the symphony of bird songs.

As Feng reflected on the past 16 years, he couldn't help but marvel at the profound changes that have swept through the park since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, which saw ecological civilization inscribed into the Party's Constitution.

Ecological civilization is a concept promoted by President Xi Jinping for balanced and sustainable development that features harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

Feng said, "After the congress, I have noticed a clear increase in government support for our conservation efforts in the reserve, evident through enhanced funding and policy measures."

For example, the aquaculture enclosures that once vied for space on the water bodies of the park have been removed, and measures were introduced to compensate property owners within the reserve for any losses caused by wildlife.

Thanks to such measures, the area has been rejuvenated as a paradise for birds, with the foul odor of the once visibly polluted waters now a thing of the past, he said.

For Feng, the park's transformation serves as a microcosm of a broader shift in China toward valuing ecological benefits over mere economic gains.

"It's under the guidance of this philosophy that the series of conservation measures that led to the transformation were rolled out," he noted.

Feng's conclusion is consistent with the advocacy of the country's central leadership.

While addressing the Leaders Summit on Climate in April 2021, for example, President Xi emphasized the critical importance of prioritizing environmental preservation over short-term development gains.

Saying that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets", Xi noted that to protect the environment is to protect productivity, and to improve the environment is to boost productivity.

"The truth is as simple as that," the president said, adding that "we must abandon development models that harm or undermine the environment, and must say no to short-sighted approaches of going after near-term development gains at the expense of the environment."

As the country advances the construction of ecological civilization, many local governments have raised the threshold for project introduction, rejecting ones that could be highly polluting.

Adhering to the principle that economic development must never come at the expense of the environment, the government of Xiantao, Hubei province, for example, rejected or discouraged over 50 heavily polluting industrial projects during the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-20) period, the total investment for which would have been over 2 billion yuan, according to the Xiantao government.

Furthermore, Juungar Banner in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, the country's largest county-level coal-producing area, with 58.2 billion metric tons of coal reserves, has nonetheless been making all-out efforts to promote the green transition.

Du Yanbin, deputy head of the banner, said, "Environmental protection is considered a crucial threshold for project introduction in the banner, and projects that are heavily polluting, cause permanent damage to the environment, or do not meet environmental standards are firmly rejected."

He added that during the 13th Five-Year Plan period, the banner rejected or discouraged more than 20 highly polluting industrial projects with a total planned investment of 50 billion yuan (\$6.88 billion).

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### Spot the photobombers



Torchbearers for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games Rodolphe Delord (right), general director of Beauval Zoo, and French navigator Maud Fontenay pose for photos in front of twin giant pandas Huan Lili and Yuan Dudu during the Olympic flame relay at Beauval Zoo in Saint-Aignan, central France, on Monday. ZOO PARC DE BEAUVAIL VIA XINHUA



## First photos of new pandas at San Diego Zoo

By RENALI in Los Angeles renali@chinadailyusa.com

The San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance on Tuesday shared the first photos of the highly anticipated panda pair, Yun Chuan (left) and Xin Bao, as they settled into their new home at the zoo.

According to a statement from the alliance, the pandas are the first to enter the United States in 21 years, arriving in San Diego on June 27. They are currently getting acclimated to their private habitat and will not be viewable to the public for several weeks.

Yun Chuan, an almost 5-year-old male, is "identifiable by his long, slightly pointed nose". He is the offspring of Zhen Zhen, who was born in 2007 and was the fourth cub born at the San Diego Zoo. Yun Chuan "seems to be extremely comfortable exploring the grass or climbing trees", the statement said.

Xin Bao, a nearly 4-year-old female whose name means "precious treasure of prosperity and abundance", is notable for her large, round face and big, fluffy ears. She enjoys sunbathing quietly and focusing on her favorite food, according to the zoo.

Over the past week, the zoo has collaborated closely with Chinese experts to cater to the dietary needs and preferences of the giant pandas. The teams have provided a variety of fresh bamboo and created a local adaptation of *worwotou*, a traditional Chinese bun also known as "panda bread".

To help the pandas adjust to their new home, the teams conducted food-adaptability exercises and weight-monitoring sessions. The statement said that "veterinary teams from both countries are diligently monitoring the pandas' health, tracking their weight,

appetite, and other health indicators daily to ensure they thrive in their new environment."

The arrival of the pandas marks a significant milestone in wildlife conservation and in the ongoing collaboration between the San Diego Zoo and its Chinese counterparts.

The San Diego Zoo is the first US zoo to have a cooperative conservation program with Chinese partners. Located north of downtown San Diego in Balboa Park, it is home to more than 12,000 rare and endangered animals representing over 680 species and subspecies.

## Iran's SCO membership yields fruitful outcomes

By MIKE GU in Hong Kong mikegu@chinadailyhk.com

Iran's new administration is looking to enhance relations with China and other nations as the Middle Eastern country reaps the benefits of its year-old membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, officials and diplomats said.

Cong Peiwu, China's ambassador to Iran, said in an article in the Tehran Times on Monday that "China and Iran are both important developing countries and both adhere to true multilateralism".

"Since Iran successfully joined the SCO one year ago, it has actively participated in various cooperation under the SCO framework and achieved fruitful results," Cong said.

Iran's entry into the SCO has injected new vitality into the organization, which is in line with the expectations of the international community and the common interests of emerging market countries and developing countries, he added.

China stands ready to work with Iran and other SCO partners toward the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind, enhance solidarity and mutual trust, build consensus on cooperation, expand cooperation across the board, actively participate in global governance, and advance the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, in order to "contribute more SCO strength to the lasting peace and common prosperity" of the world, Cong said.

Nasser Kanaani, spokesman of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said at a news conference on Monday that Iran would continue to pursue relations with China, one of the most important countries in the world.

Commenting on the future of relations between Teheran and Beijing in view of Masoud Pezeshkian's election as Iran's new president, Kanaani expressed the hope that

Iran's relations with friendly countries, including China, would be promoted further.

He said Iran's foreign policy was based on promoting constructive interaction with all those countries that were ready to, in a reciprocal and constructive manner while observing mutual respect, work toward the expansion of bilateral ties, Xinhua News Agency reported.

Kanaani also mentioned promoting cultural, trade and political relations with neighboring countries, and resuming ties with some regional states with which relations had been severed.

Speaking at the SCO Green Development Forum, which was held in Qingdao, Shandong province, on Monday, Ali Salajegheh, head of Iran's Department of Environment, said that by leveraging their capacities, SCO members can make a difference for green development in the region, as well as become a perfect model for environmental cooperation at the glob-

al level, according to IRNA news agency.

Developing countries should make social and economic development the main priority, Salajegheh said, adding that the fight against poverty, the development of health and the provision of housing and energy are considered a basic priority in a significant part of the developing world.

Pezeshkian, a reformist and former health minister, was declared Iran's president on Saturday following a runoff election against principlist Saeed Jalili, a former chief negotiator in Iran's nuclear talks with world powers. Pezeshkian secured 16,384,403 votes compared with Jalili's 13,538,179.

Pezeshkian has exchanged views by phone with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, among others, over the past days, according to Iran Press news agency.

## Is Britain changing for the better?

WORLD WATCH By Robert Walker

181 seats, or parliamentarians, in the House of Commons, the largest of any government since 1924. It can, therefore, introduce whatever laws and changes it wishes.

However, the election result masks the deep divisions in the country. Britain does not employ a system of proportional representation in which the division of parliamentary seats between political parties reflects the number of votes cast. Rather, the country is divided into 650 local areas, or constituencies, that each returns to parliament the candidate receiving most votes.

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Inside

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Britain has a newly elected left-of-center government headed by first-time Prime Minister Keir Starmer. The electorate voted for change and this is important since Britain is one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. It is difficult to overstate the change already wrought by the election. Britain has a bicameral legislature with an elected House of Commons and an appointed House of Lords that can delay, but not reject, legislation. The new Labour government has a working majority of

### PATH TO MODERNIZATION

## LIAONING SCRAPS ITS RUSTY PAST TO SHINE AS INNOVATION HUB

High-tech upgrading of traditional industries sees province's reinvigoration

By ZHANG XIAOMIN, WU YONG and XU ZIMING in Shenyang



In a smart factory of major steel-maker Ansteel in Anshan, Liaoning province, not a single worker can be seen on the entire production line.

Staff are predominantly engaged in data monitoring, enabling the workshop to function seamlessly, even in the dark. "Effectively promoting the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries is a challenging task that must be tackled to drive the comprehensive revitalization of Liaoning in the new

era," said Hao Peng, Party secretary of Liaoning. Vigorous efforts being made to propel traditional industries toward high-end development will establish a solid foundation for the construction of a modern industrial system characterized by integrity, advancement and safety, he said.

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# PAGE TWO

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Liaoning, one of China's first major industrial bases, boasts a wide range of industries and sectors such as equipment manufacturing, petrochemicals, and mining, and played a significant national role in the country's development.

However, many traditional manufacturing enterprises in Liaoning now urgently need to revitalize their core operations due to a lack of competitiveness and limited industrial structures.

"Focusing on intelligent initiatives, we support enterprises in digital empowerment, and acceleration of the innovative development of the industrial internet," said Hao, adding that transforming and upgrading enterprises will help traditional industries grow stronger and larger, and achieve high-quality growth.

Liaoning is developing new productive forces tailored to local conditions and focusing on building a modern industrial system featuring the province's distinct advantages, Hao said.

With government support and assistance, Ansteel, or the Anshan Iron and Steel Group Co, has successfully undertaken its transformation. The steelmaker has completed intelligent upgrades on 55 production lines, with CNC (computer numerical control) application to key processes exceeding 80 percent.

Notably, projects such as intelligent mining, dark — or fully automated — factories, and 5G plus smart steelmaking have become benchmark marks for the intelligent transformation and upgrading of numerous traditional industries in Liaoning.

Liaoning Provincial Department of Industry and Information Technology data indicates that the pace of digitalization in traditional industries in Liaoning is accelerating. Nearly 90 provincial-level industrial internet platforms have been established in the province, with 222 digitalized workshops and 115 intelligent factories established.

## Emerging industries

Liaoning boasts unique geographical advantages, a solid industrial foundation and abundant innovation resources, providing great potential for the northeastern province to develop new quality productive forces, said Lu Yangxu, an analyst at the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of Science and Technology for Development.

"The cultivation of new productive forces should be tailored to local conditions and leverage comparative advantages effectively," he said.

Lu suggested the province expand and strengthen emerging industries, enhance the leading role of enterprises in innovation, and stimulate innovation across various enterprises.

Liaoning is currently focusing on the development of 10 strategic emerging industry clusters. Among them are robotics and artificial intelligence, software and information technology services, integrated circuit equipment, biopharmaceuticals and advanced medical equipment, and new energy, according to Provincial Development and Reform Commission sources.

Shenyang's robotics and intelligent manufacturing industry is one of 45 state-level advanced manufacturing clusters.

Siasun Robot and Automation Co, a leader in robotics, is exploring "robot plus AI" applications.

Established in 2000, the Shenyang-based company focuses on robot technology and intelligent manufacturing solutions. It exports products to over 40 countries, and provides services to over 4,000 international companies.

At the company's exhibition hall, a diverse collection of cutting-edge intelligent products is on show. Among them is an AI robot that can engage in real-time conversations with people and attempt to read their emotions.

Zhang Jin, president of Siasun, said the company is gradually developing robots as core support for intelligent manufacturing. Advanced productive forces will also be developed to upgrade traditional industries, foster and strengthen emerging fields, and lay out future industries.

In the first quarter of this year, Liaoning saw a rapid growth in the production of high-tech products. Production of industrial robots increased by 8.5 percent year-on-year, integrated circuit equipment by 31 percent, and new energy vehicles by 46.5 percent, according to Provincial Development and Reform Commission sources.

At Yingkou Jinchun Machinery Co, over 60 CNC machines process a variety of components in a factory workshop spanning 10,000 square meters.

The company is a global leader in producing facilities that make highly efficient photovoltaic cells and parts, and has over 210 customers in more than 20 countries and regions.

Jinchun's executive vice president, Qi Haishen, said the company had taken a path "empowering it toward new productivity". Since its establishment, Jinchun has focused on new fields and industries, and transformed and developed products through its own innovation.

Also located in Yingkou, Kanghui New Materials Technology Co is breathing new life into the polyester materials industry. Using cutting-edge polyester synthesis technology, the company is building an



Robots manufacture a passenger vehicle at a factory of Siasun Robot and Automation Co in Shenyang, Liaoning province, last month.

LI XULUN / XINHUA

# Growth: Reshaping the old to nurture the new

industry-leading production base for film materials, lithium battery separators, high-performance engineering resins, and biodegradable new materials.

## Driven by innovation

Two new ethylenediamine production lines with independent core technologies recently commenced operations at an industrial park on Changxing Island, Dalian.

The lines produce essential fine chemical products, high-quality compounds that are made in relatively small quantities using complex chemical processes.

The production lines were jointly developed by the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Dalian Institute of Chemical Physics (DICP) and local enterprises.

"Through technological innovation, we have rapidly industrialized scientific achievements, reduced production costs, and enhanced the competitiveness of downstream fine chemical industry chains," Chen Jianhua, chairman and president of Hengli Group Co, told China Central Television.

Dalian's well-structured technological innovation platform is helping new products and technologies swiftly transit from the laboratory to the broader market.

The northeastern port city has established 115 national-level scientific innovation platforms, and nearly 900 provincial and municipal-level key laboratories, technology innovation centers, and innovation platforms.

"High-quality development must adhere to innovation as the driving force, focusing on laying out an innovation chain around the industrial chain and vice versa, swiftly transforming technological



An inspection robot at a workshop of the Ansteel Group in Anshan, Liaoning

Focusing on intelligent initiatives, we support enterprises in digital empowerment, and acceleration of the innovative development of the industrial internet."

Hao Peng, Party secretary of Liaoning province

innovation achievements into tangible productivity," said Cheng Nan, director of the technology and standard institute at the China Center for Information Industry Development, a think tank in Beijing.

## Jinpu New Area

In Dalian's Jinpu New Area, China's 10th State-level new area, the outdoor exhibition area of Mixwell Technology (Dalian) Co showcases various vehicles such as hydrogen fuel cell refrigerated trucks and passenger vehicles. Adjacent to them is a boat featuring the company's power system.

"This hydrogen fuel cell boat is equipped with our complete power system, jointly developed by Dalian Maritime University, Mixwell, and the DICP," said Ji Guancheng, general manager of the company.

Since its establishment in 2016, the national-level high-tech enterprise has focused on research and development of its hydrogen fuel cell power system.

The company has experienced rapid growth and its hydrogen fuel cell system is widely used in various vehicles, including buses, passenger cars, and heavy-duty commercial vehicles.

The Jinpu New Area is leveraging its industrial, resource, and technological innovation advantages to help develop the hydrogen energy industry, and collaborating with research institutes such as the DICP to promote scientific research.

It is also boosting exchanges and cooperation with the hydrogen energy industry at home and internationally, and attracting high-quality projects and talent to accelerate development of the hydrogen energy industry.

In the Dalian High-tech Zone, Dalian Rongke Power Co, a service provider for vanadium redox flow batteries, is playing a pioneering role in the global energy storage industry. VRFBs are an emerging technology being developed for the effective storage of renewable energy.

The company said it has built the world's largest intelligent manufacturing base for such equipment. "Our products are widely utilized in areas such as grid peak shaving, renewable energy grid connection, and industrial and commercial microgrids," said Wang Xiaoli, Rongke's general manager.

Hydrogen energy and energy storage are important sectors in the development of emerging industries in Dalian.

By 2023, the scale of strategic emerging industries in Dalian had reached 386.68 billion yuan (\$53.21 billion), a year-on-year increase of 13.2 percent, according to the Economic Daily. The value added amount of strategic emerging industries reached 116.54 billion yuan.

## Pharma flourishes

In Shenyang, capital of Liaoning, Sunshine Pharmaceutical Co, a leader in the biopharmaceutical industry, has a slew of products already on the market and undergoing research.

"Currently, we have 28 products in the pipeline, with nearly half of them first-class new drugs," said Yuan Jie, assistant general manager of the company.

The company places great emphasis on independent research and development, focusing on the development of new drugs to treat kidney disease, tumors, autoimmune diseases, and for metabolic therapies, Yuan said.

Neusoft Medical Systems Co, a leading manufacturer of medical equipment and services, is also taking great strides in innovation.

Thanks to its latest high-end CT equipment, a patient can complete CT scans, image analysis, and surgery in 15 minutes in some cases.

"This device enables a one-stop diagnosis and treatment process," said Han Donglong, senior vice-president of the company. "Previously, patients needed to be moved between medical devices, whereas now the medical devices revolve around the patient, seizing the optimal treatment time," he explained.

Through collaboration with top-tier hospitals and the use of AI technology, the company has developed multiple intelligent diagnostic tools to enhance the quality and efficiency of medical-imaging diagnosis.

The rapid development of Sunshine Pharmaceutical and Neusoft Medical is a microcosm of Shenyang's efforts to build a biopharmaceutical industry cluster and accelerate the cultivation of emerging industries.

In 2023, the biopharmaceutical and medical equipment industry in Shenyang achieved an industrial output value of 28.16 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 5.4 percent, data showed. The city also nurtured three national-level enterprise technology centers.

Liaoning is also forming a strategic emerging industry system with multiple areas including new materials and new energy.

## Province-wide growth

Benefits from Dalian and Shenyang, described as the "twin engines" driving the development of strategic emerging industries in Liaoning, are radiating across the province.

Other cities in Liaoning have accelerated the push toward new quality productive forces by nurturing technology-based enterprises.

In Panjin, Liaoning Zhonglan Electronic Technology Co, an optical electronics manufacturer that produces focus motors and optical lenses, is building a small industrial park centered around its research and production base.

The company hopes to attract upstream suppliers to the park for collaborative development, and the formation of an optical electronics industry cluster.

In Dandong, Dongfang Measurement and Control Technology Co has developed major technological breakthroughs for the mining and construction industries.

The company has achieved intelligent mining with unmanned driving, smart dispatching, intelligent monitoring, and safe operational procedures that can improve efficiency by up to 15 percent.

Optimized intelligent ore dressing, done without the need for workers, has reduced the cost of this process by 5 to 10 percent. It has also achieved significant energy savings and emission reductions compared with traditional ore dressing, which involves the mechanical separation of ore from other minerals.

"The key to high-quality development in Liaoning lies in innovation-driven growth," said Yang Hui, deputy director of the Liaoning Department of Science and Technology, adding that the province's innovation ecosystem is continuously improving and increasing in momentum.

"The greatest variable of technological innovation is being transformed into the greatest factor driving high-quality development in Liaoning," he added.



Clockwise from top left: A smelter of the Ansteel Group operating in Anshan, Liaoning. PAN YULONG / XINHUA Staff members have a discussion at the Ansteel Group's Ironmaking Central Control Center in Anshan on June 15. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY Chemicals used to produce high-tech batteries to more effectively store renewable energy are displayed at Dalian Rongke Power Co in Dalian, Liaoning. ZHANG LEI / XINHUA Visitors watch a robot writing Chinese calligraphy at Siasun's base in Shenyang. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY



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## TOP NEWS

## Trail of damage

A contractor surveys a client's severely damaged Dallas home on Monday after Hurricane Beryl slammed into Galveston, Texas, in the United States. The hurricane knocked out power in nearly 3 million homes and businesses, unleashed heavy rain and killed at least seven people in the state before weakening into a tropical depression.

KAYLEE GREENLEE BEAL / REUTERS



## Key role of innovation stressed

Premier calls for core tech breakthroughs at symposium with experts, entrepreneurs

By CAO DESHENG  
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Premier Li Qiang reiterated on Tuesday the need for innovation-driven development to consolidate and further boost the momentum of the Chinese economy's upturn and foster new growth drivers.

Li made the remarks when chairing a symposium on the economic situation attended by experts and entrepreneurs in Beijing. The meeting aimed to gather opinions and suggestions regarding the current economic situation and future economic work.

The meeting came ahead of the third plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee, a key reform meeting that is scheduled for next week.

During the symposium, experts and business executives shared their views on the economic work, acknowledging the challenging external environment and highlighting the continuous improvement of the Chinese economy.

While emphasizing the acceleration of new driving forces as well as hard-won achievements, they offered suggestions to address prominent problems in economic operations.

Addressing the meeting, Li said that since the start of this year, efforts have been made to promote high-quality development, intensify macroeconomic regulation and accelerate the development of new quality productive forces.

Overall economic operations have remained stable with a con-

tinuous upgrade in economic structure, he said.

The country achieved GDP growth of 5.3 percent in the first quarter despite challenges, with overall price levels and employment remaining stable.

In its latest China Economic Update released last month, the World Bank raised its prediction for China's GDP growth rate this year by 0.3 percentage point to 4.8 percent.

Noting that the factors affecting economic growth have become more complicated than ever before, the premier emphasized the need for an analysis of the economic situation in line with reality, taking into account both achievements and challenges, in order to make decisions in a scientific manner.

Consistent efforts should be made to implement effective macroeconomic policies to achieve the target set for this year's economic growth, he said.

To enhance the positive trend of economic recovery, Li stressed the need to leverage the role of enterprises, provide targeted policy support and facilitate breakthroughs in core technologies in key fields.

It is important to conduct reforms of unfavorable systems and mechanisms, mobilize proactive and creative initiatives across all sectors, unleash the full innovative potential of the whole society, and organize and utilize various resources effectively so that innovative forces will be unleashed consistently, he said.

The premier encouraged entrepreneurs to remain confident about the country's economy, focus on innovative development and strive to strengthen their enterprises.

He also urged experts and scholars to take a forward-looking approach and conduct systematic research to contribute more wisdom to the country's development.

## Ecology: Low-carbon sector a new driving force

From page 1

Juungar banner has optimized its industrial structure, vigorously cultivated and expanded industries related to energy conservation, environmental protection and clean energy, and promoted comprehensive resource conservation and recycling, Du said.

Amid such efforts, the construction of a demonstration project that will not only produce solar and wind energy, but also use the renewable energy to produce hydrogen, is nearing completion in the banner.

The project is expected to annually produce about 10,000 tons of hydrogen and generate 740 million kilowatt-hours of solar energy, reducing carbon dioxide emissions by about 594,000 tons, Du said.

The banner is also forging ahead with a project that consumes carbon dioxide to make arene, an important chemical widely used in medicine and pesticide manufacturing.

Hu Jun, director of the Research Center for Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization, said the robust development of green, low-carbon industries in China is becoming a new engine and new driving force for the country's economic development.

He said that last year, the added value of China's equipment manufacturing industry accounted for 33.6 percent of the total for industrial enterprises above a designated size, while the high-tech manufacturing industry accounted for 15.7 percent.

As of 2023, the country had seen its production and sales volume of new energy vehicles outpace all other countries for nine consecutive years, while its production of solar photovoltaic components led the world for 16 straight years, Hu told a recent forum.

He added that China's manufacturing capacity for wind turbine generators accounts for 60 percent of the global total, emerging as a new economic growth driver.

According to the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, since 2012, China has sustained annual economic growth exceeding 6 percent while maintaining an average annual energy consumption growth rate of 3 percent.

This achievement is underscored by a 26.8 percent decrease in energy

10 million

hectares of natural space, including mountains, forests, grasslands and waterways, will be restored by 2030 under the Shan-Shui Initiative, a massive ecological remediation drive launched in 2016.

consumption per unit of GDP, positioning China as one of the global leaders in rapidly reducing energy intensity, the ministry said.

China's ecological civilization process has won much international recognition.

Inger Andersen, executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme, emphasized ecological civilization as a "powerful concept", adding that "when leaders speak of lucid rivers and green mountains, that's a powerful notion that people can understand".

"So, I think those elements are important in also providing the imagination for people of what's possible in terms of protecting nature," she said.

Andersen especially lauded China's Shan-Shui Initiative, the massive ecological remediation drive that the country launched in 2016. The initiative, whose name translates as "mountains and rivers", is an ambitious, countrywide effort that aims to restore 10 million hectares of natural space, including mountains, forests, grasslands and waterways, by 2030.

To date, more than 6.7 million hectares of land have been restored, according to the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Andersen said the initiative is "hugely ambitious" and, in implementing it, China "is also creating green jobs". About 3 million jobs are expected to be created by 2030, she noted.

"When you see what before looked like the moon landscape and then afterwards looks just green and lush and amazing, you can see what human capacity and commitment can do," she said.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

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## Changes: Election reflects Britain's unease with itself

From page 1

This system resulted in the Labour Party winning 63 percent of the parliamentary seats — 412 — while receiving only 34 percent of the votes cast. The Conservative Party, which formed the previous government, lost 211 seats, leaving it with 121 derived from a 24 percent share of the votes. The remaining 42 percent of votes were divided among 13 smaller parties that together gained just 18 percent of seats, albeit the largest percentage ever.

Given that the turnout at the election was merely 60 percent, the second lowest since 1885, only 20 percent of potential voters lent their support to the incoming government. Recognizing these divisions, Starmer spoke to those not voting Labour in his first speech as prime minister: "I say to you, directly, my government will serve you".

Britain is ill at ease with itself.

The COVID-19 pandemic killed more people than in any country other than the US and Peru. Brexit, the decision to leave the European Union, divided the country: 52 percent for; 48 percent against. Median incomes since the last Labour government in 2010 have risen by only 6 percent, a fifth of the rate of increase seen before the 2007-09 Great Recession. Confidence in the national government fell from 50 percent in 2010 to 33 percent in 2023, with a poll this year indicating that only 39 percent of Britons trust its institutions. Trust in Britain is the lowest among 28 countries whereas the same poll reveals that trust is highest in China.

The election reflected this unease. With opinion polls from the start of campaigning predicting a landslide Labour victory, the Conservative Party promoted fear. Labour, they said, would impose a "£2,000 tax rise for every working family", create an "open door to 100,000 illegal migrants" and put

Britain in "a dangerous place" were they to receive "a super-majority".

The Labour Party, recovering from its worst electoral defeat since 1935, was understandably risk averse. It promised to end the "chaos" of the Conservative government and encouraged people to "vote for change" while being coy about the changes it proposed. It was pressured into matching Conservative promises of not raising taxes, thereby leaving it unclear how its spending pledges could be funded. The British electorate, therefore, voted against policies that it knew and for those that it could not know.

To stay in power, the Labour government recognizes the need to restore national hope and create a collective national purpose. It intends to do this by demonstrating that politics can be "driven by a sense of service to the country, not considerations of party or self-interest". While the new government is unlikely to look first to China for inspiration, it would be

wise to do so since these same values underpin the high levels of trust that the Chinese people have in their institutions.

There are also strong parallels with China in the priority that the Labour government attaches to sustained economic growth and the means of achieving it. In its election manifesto, it presents growth as "the only route to improving the prosperity of our country and the living standards of working people". It proposes "a 10-year infrastructure strategy, aligned with ... industrial strategy and regional development priorities". It seeks to "drive innovation" with 10-year budgets for key R&D institutions that allow for "meaningful partnerships with industry". It intends, too, to roll out gigabit broadband and national 5G coverage by 2030.

Key to its economic ambitions, although scaled back before the election campaign due to budgetary constraints, is the goal of

making Britain "a clean energy superpower". It plans to create a new publicly-owned company to facilitate doubling onshore wind generation, tripling solar power and quadrupling offshore wind energy by 2030.

In these and related areas, China can offer experience and expertise, notably in green energy, 5G technology, nuclear power and electric vehicles. Rather than following the US and European Union in imposing punitive tariffs on electric vehicles imported from China, Britain could seek inward Chinese investment, enabling its goal of net zero to be achieved at a much lower cost.

There is the potential for this to happen. Labour's manifesto explains its intent to "improve the UK's capability to understand and respond to the challenges and opportunities China poses through an audit of our bilateral relationship". David Lammy, the new foreign secretary, similarly advocates "more engagement with China at all levels of government". There is scope, too, for collaboration on global development. The Department

for International Development was created in 1997 under the last Labour government. DFID invested heavily in China as a developing country, and became a global leader in development as opposed to charitable aid. This is no longer true.

However, the new Labour government is committed to "restoring development spending at the level of 0.7 percent of gross national income". It aspires "to create a world free from poverty on a livable planet" and views international development as a means of "making the world a safer, more prosperous place".

China's Belt and Road Initiative, its Global Development Initiative and Global Security Initiative demonstrate how these goals, expressed as achieving a community with a shared future for mankind, can be pursued through mutually beneficial cooperation.

The author is a professor at Jingshi Academy of Beijing Normal University and professor emeritus at Green Templeton College of Oxford University. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## Record number of UK students visits China under program

By ZHAO YIMENG  
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This year's summer camp of the Mandarin Excellence Program kicked off in Beijing last week, with the largest group of students from the United Kingdom visiting China since the program was launched in 2016.

Nearly 1,200 British students from 61 secondary schools are visiting China for 11 days to participate in Chinese language courses and cultural activities. Separate travel groups will visit different parts of the country, covering a total of 10 cities including Beijing and Shanghai.

The Mandarin Excellence Program Intensive Study in China, organized by the Chinese Ministry of Education's Center for Language Education and Cooperation and the British

Council, includes an average eight hours of Chinese language learning each week during secondary school years in the UK, as well as a visit to China for students who are in their third year.

Funded by the UK's Department of Education, the program has so far helped about 11,000 British students improve their proficiency in the Chinese language, according to the organizers.

William Bridgett, a student from Tytherington School in Macclesfield, Cheshire, northwestern England, said that one of the key reasons he joined the program was that it promised an opportunity to visit Beijing.

When Bridgett started attending Mandarin classes in the UK, he found that learning the Chinese language was both interesting and

enjoyable. "I like the writing part, (which is) probably the most difficult, but I find it really self-fulfilling when I'm able to make a beautiful character or sentence," he said.

The students, who already had a fair impression of China thanks to the program, said that they were nonetheless mesmerized by the sheer scale of the Chinese capital and its stunning architectural treasures.

Asha Sen, a student from Alexandra Park School in London, said that she found China to be "cool" in the textbooks, with the mention of its rich history and culture and many tourist attractions.

She said that learning Mandarin has been challenging for her, but she wants to experience both the Chinese language and culture outside of books.

The visiting students will partici-



Online  
See more  
by scanning  
the code.

pate in various activities such as Chinese painting, tea making and local sports to better understand Chinese culture, while learning Mandarin in an immersive environment.

Tom Dearing, principal consultant of the British Council, said the program is expanding and improving every year.

"This year, we have nearly 1,200 pupils coming to China, which is the largest cohort in the program's history," Dearing said in an interview during the opening ceremony of the summer camp at Beijing Language and Culture University.

Unlike previous years, this year's



Two students from Riverside School in the United Kingdom and a Chinese student show off their handmade poster on July 3 at the Tianjin Normal University in Tianjin. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

summer camp includes intensive study sessions, he said, adding that the students will meet with business leaders to have a better understanding of how learning the Chinese language can help them in the future.

Dearing said that some partici-

pants of the program have already received scholarships to study for a master's degree in China, and "that's only the start", as long-term benefits of the program will be clearly visible when these students embark on their professional careers.

## CHINA

## Getting straightened out



A medical worker performs traditional Chinese bone-setting treatment by applying his own weight, with both feet exerting pressure on a patient's back in Garze Tibetan autonomous prefecture, Sichuan province, on Monday. A weeklong free clinic launched in Garze on Monday has attracted over 800 medical volunteers from 160 medical institutions nationwide. CUI JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Briefly

## Driverless cars get support in Beijing

The Beijing municipal government recently announced plans to support the use of autonomous electric buses, ride-hailing services and car rentals recently, in a sign that driverless vehicles are set to get legislative backing for their deployment on the capital's roads. The Beijing Municipal Bureau of Economy and Information Technology has released draft regulations on autonomous vehicles to solicit public feedback. The city aims to address key issues faced by autonomous vehicle innovators in specific areas through legislation. In September 2020, Beijing took the lead in planning and building China's first high-level autonomous driving demonstration zone.

## 3 dead, 2 injured after car hit by falling rocks

Three people were killed and two others injured after rocks rolling down a mountain hit their car in Southwest China's Sichuan province on Monday evening, local authorities said. The accident occurred around 7:30 pm on the S204 highway in Bazhong. The injured were sent to hospital and their conditions are not life-threatening, authorities in Tongjiang county, Bazhong, said.

## Sea mining machine reaches record depth

A prototype of a Chinese-designed deep-sea heavy-duty mining machine has completed a sea trial at a depth exceeding 4,000 meters, marking a significant breakthrough in the country's deep-sea mineral resource development technology. The trial was conducted by the *Pioneer II*, an engineering prototype independently developed by Shanghai Jiao Tong University, the Shanghai municipal government said on Tuesday. The *Pioneer II* completed five diving and seabed mining operations, including a record-breaking dive to 4,102.8 meters, marking the first time a Chinese deep-sea heavy-duty mining vehicle has conducted trial operations at depths exceeding 4,000 meters. XINHUA

## Construction to start on Guxian project

Water and sediment management along the Yellow River gets a boost

By HOU LIQIANG in Jixian, Shanxi  
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After seven decades of planning, the Guxian water resources management project, which will manage water and sediment along the Yellow River, has officially transitioned into the construction phase.

The announcement was made during a conference at the project site in Jixian county, Shanxi province, on Tuesday.

Situated in the heart of the Yellow River's middle reaches, the Guxian project aims to govern 65 percent of the Yellow River Basin's territory, regulate 73 percent of its water flow, and manage 60 percent of its sediment, according to the Ministry of Water Resources.

Primarily designed to address flood control and sediment reduction, the project will also regulate and store water. Complemented by hydropower generation infrastructure, it is anticipated it will enhance water supply, irrigation capabilities and the overall ecological health of the Yellow River Basin.

The Yellow River, the world's most sediment-laden river, is also revered as the cradle of Chinese civilization.



Due to excessive sediment accumulation, the riverbed stands several meters above its surrounding terrain, contributing to recurrent catastrophic floods and alterations in the river's course.

Vice-Minister of Water Resources Wang Baoren told a news conference in Jixian that the Guxian project will help to reduce flood risks by counteracting the continual elevation of the riverbed. He said the project's regula-

tory measures are expected to facilitate the scouring and lowering of the riverbed in the Tongguan section in Shaanxi province, as well as in the lower reaches of the Weihe River, a major tributary of the Yellow River.

"This will safeguard flood control efforts in Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi province, and the Guanzhong Plain region," he added.

Shaanxi's Guanzhong Plain stretches for about 40,000 square kilometers and is one of China's oldest agricultural regions. The densely populated plain is home to over 40 million people.

The Guxian project is also set to fortify the Yellow River's water regulation capacity, ensuring its continuous flow, and enhancing food and energy security within the region.

"Through the coordinated management of multiple water resource projects, a dependable water supply essential for the aquatic ecosystems in the lower reaches and estuarine delta of the Yellow River will be guaranteed, thereby bolstering biodiversity and ecosystem stability in those areas," Wang said.

Thanks to the project, many regions in Shanxi and Shaanxi will no longer be dependent on pump stations for agricultural irrigation, he said, with water from the Guxian reservoir automatically flowing into their irrigated areas.

## Buoyant spirits

A couple show off their marriage certificates on the opening day of the first outdoor marriage registration point on a ferry in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, on Tuesday.

SONG JINYU / FOR CHINA DAILY



## Former geological survey head arrested for leaking State secrets

By YANG ZEKUN  
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A former head of the China Geological Survey, Zhong Ziran, has been arrested for accepting bribes and intentionally leaking State secrets, the Supreme People's Procuratorate announced on Tuesday.

It said the National Commission of Supervision recently concluded investigations of Zhong and has transferred his case to prosecuting

authorities for review and prosecution.

Zhong, a 61-year-old native of Anhui province, started working in 1983 and joined the Communist Party of China in 1985. He served in geological and mineral-related departments for a long time. In July 2014, he became the director and Party secretary of the China Geological Survey, holding the position until September 2022.

He was placed under investigation

in January this year, making him the first senior official under the management of the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee to be investigated this year. He was expelled from the Party last month.

According to the Criminal Law, a functionary of a State organ who intentionally or negligently leaks State secrets shall, if the circumstances are serious, be sentenced to imprisonment of not more than three years or short-term custody. If

the circumstances are especially serious, the offender shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of three to seven years.

In July last year, Sun Guofeng, a former head of the monetary policy department of the People's Bank of China, was convicted of accepting bribes, intentional leaking of State secrets and insider trading, and was sentenced to 16 and a half years in prison and fined 13.1 million yuan (\$1.8 million).

## Moss species may have potential in Mars colony

By LI PEIXUAN in Beijing  
and MAO WEIHUA in Urumqi

A moss species found in China's second-largest desert and many other deserts around the world may hold the key to establishing human settlements on Mars, according to researchers at the Xinjiang Institute of Ecology and Geography.

They say *Syntrichia caninervis* from the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region's Gurbantunggut Desert exhibits extraordinary resilience in harsh environments, making it a promising candidate for a "pioneer plant" on the Red Planet.

"Setting up human outposts on Mars requires plants that can thrive in challenging conditions," said Zhang Daoyuan, a researcher at the institute. "*Syntrichia caninervis*' ability to withstand extreme environments makes it a strong contender."

Researcher Li Xiaoshuang highlighted its ability to survive desiccation. It can lose over 98 percent of its water content and revive within seconds upon rehydration.

"Intact plants even withstood ultralow temperatures, regenerating after five years in a -80 C freezer or a month submerged in liquid nitrogen," Li added.

*Syntrichia caninervis* also demonstrates exceptional resistance to radiation, surviving simulated Martian conditions that included an oxygen-depleted atmosphere, extreme dryness and fluctuating temperatures.

"This research positions *Syntrichia caninervis* as a potential pioneer organism for extraterrestrial environments," Li said. "It could pave the way for creating sustainable human habitats beyond Earth."

The findings were published in the journal *The Innovation* on July 1. The research — a collaboration between Li, Zhang, another researcher at the institute, Zhang Yuanming, and academician Kuang Tingyun of the Chinese Academy of Sciences — was supported by the Xinjiang scientific expedition project and CAS' key research program for frontier sciences.

The team plans further experiments onboard spacecraft to monitor the moss' response to microgravity and various radiation stressors in real-time. Understanding its resilience at a deeper level could unlock applications for colonizing outer space, Li said.

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## Chinese company to build ocean park in Saudi Arabia

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai  
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The largest ocean theme park operator in China, Haichang Ocean Park Holdings, said on Thursday that it will build Saudi Arabia's first large ocean park, which is expected to inject new vitality into the country's tourism industry as it aspires to become a Top 10 tourist destination globally by 2030.

The company said it has previously cooperated on the development of tourism projects in Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia, adding that there is no exact timetable for the start of construction in Saudi Arabia.

Haichang has been engaged in marine-themed tourism for more than two decades. Its parks, in cities including Shanghai, Dalian in Liaoning province, Zhengzhou in Henan province, and Sanya in Hainan province, attract more than 20 million tourists a year.

Saudi Arabia has welcomed Chinese group tours since the start of this month, with the country's Tourism Ministry aiming to make China its third-largest source of international tourists by 2030.

According to online travel agency Ctrip, bookings for Saudi Arabi-

an holidays by Chinese tourists have increased nearly fourfold this month and next when compared to the same period last year.

Haichang said the project will help create job opportunities and promote Saudi Arabia as an international leisure destination by attracting more visitors from China and elsewhere.

"The recreational facilities related to the marine park operated by Haichang Ocean Park are exactly the resources that are scarce in Saudi Arabia's tourism, and the collision of 'desert and sea' creates a theme of contrast, which may bring a new highlight to the country's tourism," said Li Jun, general manager of Haichang's enterprise development department.

In April last year, Haichang and Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Investment signed a memorandum of cooperation on culture- and tourism-related investment opportunities in Saudi Arabia.

In December, Haichang signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Tourism Development Fund of Saudi Arabia to jointly develop a Haichang Ocean Park project in the country that will be a world-class, integrated ocean-themed park resort and a comprehensive tourist destination.

## Premature baby recovers after intensive care

By TAN YINGZI and DENG RUI  
in Chongqing

A baby boy born prematurely at just 26 weeks and weighing only 870 grams has defied the odds after a grueling 80-day battle for survival at the Southwest Hospital of Army Medical University in Chongqing.

Nicknamed "Xiaotuanzi" or "little rice ball", the infant faced a multitude of life-threatening conditions, including respiratory distress, pneumonia, anemia and acute kidney failure.

"Due to his premature development, his organs were extremely fragile," said Chen Sheng, director of the hospital's pediatrics department. "Acute kidney failure, with an 80 percent mortality rate for such premature babies, presented a major hurdle."

To minimize harm, the medical team opted for a special dialysis approach using a closed chest drainage tube due to Xiaotuanzi's thin abdominal wall. The innovative solution, coupled with meticulous care, stabilized his kidney function within 72 hours.

Further challenges arose in late May when worsening retinopathy

threatened his vision. A collaborative effort by the hospital's ophthalmology and anesthesiology departments preserved his eyesight through surgery.

"The key to Xiaotuanzi's recovery was not just precise treatment, but also the unwavering 24-hour care provided by our experienced medical team," Chen said.

That care addressed issues like infection control, breathing difficulties and feeding problems.

After 80 days of treatment, Xiaotuanzi's health turned a corner. His weight grew to a healthy 2.5 kilograms by the time he was discharged on June 25.

In 2018, the hospital discharged a baby who had been born at just 24 weeks and weighing 585 grams.

"While treatment protocols are similar nationwide, meticulous nursing care and collaboration between various departments are paramount in such critical cases," Chen said. "Long-term follow-up is also essential to ensure these babies' continued development and well-being."

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## CHINA

## Kashgar cashing in on tourism boom

Hordes of visitors experiencing Uygur culture in well-preserved ancient city

By CUI JIA in Kashgar, Xinjiang  
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Residents of Kashgar, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, said a recent boom in tourism in the ancient city has cast a spotlight on its Uygur population and local culture, which has been well preserved there.

In the center of Kashgar, which is more than 2,000 years old, visitors can discover the charm of the city in sunshine or moonlight, said native Kadeer Memetmin.

"Some people may prefer to see the city when it's bustling with activity during the day, while others may enjoy strolling around the alleyways and seeing the beauty of the traditional architecture when it gets quiet at night," the 40-year-old said.

Walking through the maze-like neighborhood, tourists find local people making traditional Uygur food, pottery, copper ware and musical instruments. Many of the techniques used in the cooking and crafting of local foods and goods have been listed as intangible cultural heritages at various levels, he said.

"The traditional lifestyle, which has been passed on from one generation to the next, has been preserved well in the ancient city," said Kadeer, whose family has lived in Kashgar for four generations. "It's a great opportunity for the visitors to directly communicate with the craftsmen and learn more about the traditional culture of Kashgar and the richness of its history."

The ancient city contains one of the largest collections of earthen buildings in the world. Boasting a rich Uygur culture, it is home to nearly 40,000 people.

In 2010, a major renovation project was launched as the city sought to raze dilapidated, makeshift buildings that posed significant safety hazards. Builders made sure to remodel homes while keeping their traditional Uygur characteristics, and the project was



Clockwise from top: A tourist (middle) dances with local Uygur performers in a restaurant in the ancient city of Kashgar, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region last month. A hat shop owner receives a customer at his shop in the ancient city. Three tourists take a break at a street corner in the old town of Kashgar. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

completed in 2017. "Every family decorates their houses with elaborate wood carvings, iron art and intricate brick tile decorations. And we also love to plant flowers and trees around our houses. I really hope the visitors can feel our passion for life through those details,"

said Kadeer, adding that residents of the city have been living safer and more comfortable lives since the renovations were completed.

"More importantly, local craftsmen can work in workshops with improved infrastructure, which has helped to better preserve the local

cultural heritages," Kadeer said.

The renovations have also made the ancient city more suitable for travelers, and it has since become one of the most popular tourist destinations in Xinjiang. Official data shows that Kashgar welcomed over 13 million visitors last year, and it

saw 2.1 million visitors in the first quarter of this year, a whopping 424 percent year-on-year increase.

Resident Ametjan Memet said he enjoys singing classic Uygur songs at a traditional tea house near his home, often drawing large crowds of tourists.

"The number of tourists in the city has significantly increased in recent years, especially in the summer season," he said. "And what makes me happy is that they've shown great interest in Uygur music and instruments."

Mawlan Turak was among the first people to cash in on the thriving tourism industry. He runs a small business selling custom-made clothing and jewelry that he designs himself combining traditional Uygur and modern styles. He also rents them to tourists for photo shoots. Mawlan welcomed the tourism boom, but also expressed concern about the potential oversaturation of businesses.

"While tourism can bring prosperity and recognition, it also presents challenges, including excessive commercialization," the fashion designer said. "There has been a surge in the number of stores offering photo-shooting services in the ancient city over the past few years. Everyone doing a similar business could diminish their collective opportunities for success."

Mawlan said he hopes a new regulation aimed at protecting the culture and buildings in Kashgar will encourage residents and business owners to preserve traditions as tourists continue to pour in. "The adoption of the regulation is really necessary and visionary," he said.

The regulation, which took effect on May 1, forbids the demolition of or damage to historical architecture in the ancient city while stipulating that any reconstruction of buildings must receive official approval. It also encourages residents to take part in preservation activities and showcase local culture.

Furthermore, it explicitly cautions against disorderly competition and excessive commercialization. It specifies that business activities must comply with the overall commercial layout and be subject to proper control and management.

Changes have already taken place since the regulation took effect, as many unauthorized renovation projects have been halted, Kadeer said.

"I hope all business owners and visitors will love the ancient city and respect the local culture like the residents do," he said. "The preservation of the ancient city is up to everyone."

## Publication promotes professor's passion for plants

By ZHAO RUIXUE  
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Wang Renqing, a professor from Shandong University in Jinan, Shandong province, has spent over a half century recording plants and their environments in an effort to protect nature.

The 69-year-old professor and his team recently published the *Vegetation of Shandong*, part of a book series on China's vegetation in its coastal areas.

This 1.3-million-word book — written by Wang and his team from data collected over the course of more than 70 years — offers deep insights into the vegetation in Shandong.

"The book not only details the characteristics and types of vegetation in Shandong, but also analyzes the causes of changes seen in vegetation and offers practical suggestions for nature reserve construction," Wang said.

As a top researcher in ecological studies, Wang and his team have also contributed to national-level research projects. Books on vegetation that he co-authored have won him two second-place prizes from the National Natural Science Awards.

Since the 1950s, three generations of ecology scholars at Shandong University — from Wang's mentor Zhou Guangyu to Wang himself, and then to his students — have completed more than 10 series comprising 36 books with solid research



Wang Renqing (left) and one of his students conduct a field study in Shandong province last year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

and profound knowledge.

"Plants are the 'spokespersons' of ecology," said Wang when asked about the reasons he dedicated his life to plant research.

"Understanding vegetation helps us interpret the broader ecological health of a region," he added.

Wang's fascination with ecology began in 1975 when he decided to study botany at Shandong University, specializing in Chinese herbal medicine. After obtaining his bachelor's degree, he chose to pursue a master's in ecology at the university in 1979, driven by a blend of personal interest and the country's efforts to protect the environment. He became one of the first batch of post-graduates of ecology in China.

His academic journey took him across China, from the chilly coniferous forests of the Greater Hinggan Mountains in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region to the tropical rainforests of Hainan province. He also explored the meadow grasslands of Hulunbuir in Inner Mongolia and the arid expanses of the Taklimakan Desert in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

"Each step deepened my understanding and appreciation of our country's diverse ecosystems," Wang said.

He and his team have conducted over 20 national and provincial-level

nature reserve surveys. Their work encompasses major natural vegetation types in China, providing critical information for ecological management and conservation.

Among his research projects was the study of the Yellow River estuary area in Wudi county and Kenli district, two national-level natural protected areas in Shandong. For nearly three decades, Wang documented the area's vegetation, tracing the changes brought by the vegetation systems to the estuary area.

His team published three works on the vegetation and biodiversity of the Yellow River Delta wetland.

"Ecological research demands constant outdoor exploration," Wang said. "Fieldwork often presents dangers, from snakes and insects to challenging terrain. But these challenges are minor compared to the rewards of solving ecological puzzles and discovering the mysteries of nature."

Wang's commitment to ecology extends beyond China's borders. He has led his team on international scientific expeditions to countries including South Korea, Japan, Sweden and Canada, which have added to their collective knowledge.

In recognition of his contributions, Wang received an outstanding contribution award from the Botanical Society of China last year.

## Ancient coin at Harbin museum shows evidence of ethnic integration

HARBIN — At the Jin Shangjing History Museum in Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang province, a gleaming, thumb-sized silver coin attracts curious visitors. The coin, shaped like a double-bladed axe, has a remarkable history.

Minted by the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234) government, it was the first official currency to be made of silver in Chinese history, said Hu Zhiyuan, director of the guidance department of the museum.

The engraved traditional Chinese characters on the silver indicated its information, with Cheng'an referring to the name of the era (1196-1200), and *baohuo* meaning currency, Hu said.

The institutions in charge of forging money and its central government management agency were also inscribed on the coin.

Hu said its unique appearance and Chinese inscriptions reflected the influence of traditional Chinese culture during the Jin Dynasty, showcasing the integration of ethnic cultures during its century-long reign.

The Jin Dynasty, founded by the Jurchen people, ruled over northern and northeastern China, coexisting with the Song, Liao, Yuan and Western Xia regimes that controlled parts of the country during the period.

Hu explained that the Jurchens initially made a living by fishing and hunting and would barter within their tribes. However, they later began using bronze coins from the Liao (916-1125) and Song (960-1279) dynasties ruled by the Khitan and Han people, respectively, as trade between their three groups grew.

In 1125, after the Jin regime overthrew the Liao rulers and

advanced southward into Song territory, a significant influx of currency and craftsmen from the southern part of China reached the Jin's heartland, which had a profound impact on its own monetary system, according to Hu, adding that the shape and layout of the Chinese inscriptions of some coins from the Song and the Jin dynasties are similar — further evidence of ethnic integration.

Hu said that during the century-long interactions between the Song and Jin dynasties, peace prevailed for over 60 years, with the trade of fur, ginseng, tea and textiles flourishing through designated border markets. Peculiar silver coins and ingots of the Jin Dynasty were used and then carried across China.

"Through such ingots discovered in what is now Lintong district of Xi'an, Shaanxi province, researchers can see close economic and trade exchanges

between the Jurchen and other ethnic groups in different regions of China," Hu said.

As the abundance of ice and snow in the winter has drawn more and more tourists to Harbin, an increasing number of visitors are flocking to the museum, delving into the lesser-known stories of the Jurchen and other northern Chinese ethnic groups through its artifacts.

Mu Changqing, deputy director of the museum's cultural relics preservation department, said the museum welcomed nearly 180,000 visitors from January to June this year, with a peak of 15,023 visitors in a single day.

The museum plans to provide multimedia displays, replicate historical scenes and organize educational lectures so visitors can better learn about the history of the Jin Dynasty and the cultures of different ethnic groups.

XINHUA



Two children visit the Jin Shangjing History Museum in Harbin, Heilongjiang province. WANG DAYU / XINHUA

## WORLD

# New right-wing group to shape EU's direction

Alliance emerges as significant force in Parliament, boasting 84 lawmakers

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels  
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The newly established right-wing Patriots for Europe alliance in the European Parliament has great potential to influence the European Union's path forward, experts say.

Officially formed on Monday, it has become the third-largest political group in the 10th European Parliament, which will meet for the first plenary session next week in Strasbourg, France, including voting on whether Ursula von der Leyen will get a second term as European Commission president.

The group boasts 84 members of the European Parliament from 12 EU member states. It was launched only a week ago by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's ruling Fidesz party, with the ANO party of former Czech prime minister Andrej Babis and Austria's Freedom Party led by Herbert Kickl, literally succeeding the now-disbanded Identity and Democracy group.

The shot in the arm for the new group came when France's National Rally and Italy's League announced their participation.

The RN has 30 MEPs, while Fidesz has 11. The League has eight MEPs and the ANO has seven. Other major parties include Spain's Vox, Dutch PVV, Belgium's Vlaams Belang, Portugal's Chega, Czech Republic's Oath and Motorists, Greece's Voice of Reason, Denmark's People's Party and Latvia's First Party.

With 84 EU lawmakers, the new group has surpassed the European Conservatives and Reformists, or ECR, which has 78 MEPs, and the liberal Renew group, which has 76 MEPs, but still trails far behind the two largest groups, the European People's Party, or EPP, and the Socialists and Democrats.

RN President Jordan Bardella was appointed president of the group on Monday.

"As patriotic forces, we are going to work together in order to retake our institutions and reorient policies to serve our nations and peoples," he said.

Matteo Savini of the League said on social media on Monday, "After a long period of work, the big group of patriots, which will be decisive to change the future of Europe, comes to life in Brussels today."

Kinga Gal, a Fidesz MEP who will serve as the first vice-president of the group, told the media, "Our long-term goal is to change European Union policymaking."

Mariann Ory, managing editor of the Eurasia magazine in Budapest, said the new group is the best option under the circumstances and has enormous potential.

"For Viktor Orban, this is a great success, as he has become a major force in a party family where there are successful parties and where he is appreciated instead of the rude attacks and constant frustration that characterize the EPP," she told China Daily, referring to Fidesz's departure from the EPP in 2021.

## Disagreeing on label

Ory disagrees with the labeling of the new group as "far right" by many European politicians and media.

"From a central European perspective, the PFE is not a far-right party family, but simply a right-wing, patriotic party family that stands on common sense on issues such as migration or war," she said. "It is not these parties that are extremist, but the EPP has drifted so far to the left that from there everything is extreme right."

Orban's fundamental goal was to create a large right-wing group, which would essentially bring together the forces of Identity and Democracy and ECR, as well as parties potentially leaving the EPP and could even be the second-largest group in the parliament, Ory said, but the efforts to call for an agreement between Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni of the Brothers of Italy party and the RN's Marine Le Pen failed.

The different views on the Russia-Ukraine conflict and some other factors are among the stumbling blocks, she said.



## Stunts amid ruins

Young Palestinians perform parkour stunts amid the ruins of a building destroyed by Israeli airstrikes, in Al-Zawayda, central Gaza Strip, on Tuesday. Israel pushed on with a major military offensive in Gaza City on Tuesday that the United Nations said has once again displaced tens of thousands of Palestinians. The military ordered evacuations ahead of the raids, but Palestinians said nowhere feels safe.

MAJDI FATHI VIA GETTY IMAGES

# Starmer walks an uneven road on European relations

By JULIAN SHEA in London  
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At the 2019 UK general election, on a pledge to "Get Brexit done", the Conservative Party achieved an 80-seat majority.

At the 2024 general election, Brexit played its part as the Conservative Party was voted out and the Labour Party regained power with a 175-seat majority, as unresolved Brexit issues played a huge role in splitting the right-wing vote.

The United Kingdom's voting system means Labour won with just 34 percent of the popular vote, a result the Electoral Reform Society called "the most disproportional in British electoral history".

This means the party is charged with plotting the future path of the country, knowing that the country is still divided, with Europe one of the most contentious topics.

The rise of the Reform UK party, at the expense of the Conservatives, highlights how volatile Brexit remains, but at the same time, a survey by pollster YouGov carried out during the election campaign showed 53 percent of respondents thought Brexit's negatives outweighed any benefits.

Rebuilding relations with the UK's European neighbors, after a government so keen on putting distance between them, is a priority for Labour, and one about which its messaging is sometimes contradictory.

"With Labour, Britain will stay outside of the European Union. But to seize the opportunities ahead, we must make Brexit work," said the unequivocal statement of the party's 2024 election manifesto.

Not wishing to revisit the past, it sees a very different future. "We will



British Prime Minister Keir Starmer poses for a selfie with Labour Member of Parliament Dawn Butler in London on Monday. PA

reset the relationship and seek to deepen ties with our European friends, neighbors and allies," it continued.

New Foreign Secretary David Lammy's first act was to meet his German, Polish and Swedish counterparts, saying this was "just the beginning" of the reset.

"My message will be simple: Let us seize the opportunity for a reset, working even more closely together to tackle shared challenges," he said.

In the 2016 referendum on Britain's EU membership, Lammy supported the losing Remain campaign.

Now in office, he has already accepted an invitation to attend a meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council in October, an opportunity declined by the last Conservative government.

Former UK national security adviser Kim Darroch told The Guardian that while it was "understandable" Labour leader Keir Starmer had not discussed Europe much in the cam-

paign, "the reality is that, eight years after Brexit, the path to national renewal will be much shorter if it involves a greatly strengthened relationship with Europe".

Starmer spoke to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen the day after the election, with a statement saying they "discussed areas of close cooperation between the UK and the EU," and "emphasized the importance of the unique relationship between the UK and EU in addressing these challenges".

## 'Shared priorities'

Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz said: "I know Keir Starmer personally; we have often spoken and met. He will be a very good, very successful prime minister. I am convinced about that." And in the midst of his own country's parliamentary election, French President Emmanuel Macron found time for a phone call covering "shared priorities, including migration and the economy".

# Analysis: US colleges are closing one per week

By MAY ZHOU in Houston  
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Colleges in the United States are struggling financially, so much so that about one college is shutting its doors every week on average this year, an analysis found.

On June 10, the board of trustees at Pittsburgh Technical College, or PTC, announced that it would cease instruction on Aug 9 but abruptly closed two weeks later.

The school said it had faced declining enrollment, market pressures and inflation in recent years, but the closing is under investigation, WPXI-TV in Pittsburgh reported.

The University of the Arts, or UArts, in Philadelphia abruptly decided on the last day of May that it would close in a week on June 7.

UArts had a history of nearly 150 years. Yet, its enrollment had been declining, down to about 1,300 in the fall of 2022 from about 1,900 in 2018.

The two colleges are recent examples of the larger trend that more schools in the US are closing due to financial struggles.

Other colleges that are either closed or set to close soon this year include the University of Saint Katherine in San Marcos, California; Birmingham-Southern College in Alabama; Hodges University in Fort Myers, Florida;

Lincoln Christian University in Illinois; and Magdalen College of the Liberal Arts in New Hampshire.

An analysis by the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association showed that last year about two school closures happened per month. The rate has increased to one closing per week on average this year.

Enrollment decline is the major factor, and hundreds of less desirable schools are expected to see significant enrollment declines in the coming years due to declining birthrates and smaller shares of students choosing a college path, said David Attis, managing director of research at education consulting company EAB, as reported

by The Washington Post.

An EAB analysis of federal enrollment data estimated that by 2030, 449 colleges are expected to see 25 percent decline in enrollment, and 182 colleges are expected to see a 50 percent decline. By 2040, an estimated 566 colleges are expected to see a 25 percent decline and 247 are expected to see 50 percent.

Such closures often derail a student's plan for higher education and obtaining a degree. The study showed that 47.1 percent of students reenrolled in another postsecondary institution after they experienced a closure.

Agencies contributed to this story.

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# Asian American online grocery stores booming in US

By BELINDA ROBINSON in New York  
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Asian American online grocery stores and delivery services in the United States are growing and reshaping eating habits, as more rare food from the East becomes available in the West with the click of a mouse.

The stores Weee!, Yamibuy and Fantuan, with many others, have seen tremendous growth as they vie to become the leading destination for Asian food, beverages and groceries.

Weee!, an online grocery store, sells food from several cultures, including Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese, delivering fresh groceries to 18

states and dry goods to 48 states.

Since the site launched in 2015, it has specialized in getting hard-to-find and authentic ingredients for customers. The Weee! app serves hundreds of thousands of households, the business said.

Founded by Larry Liu, the company is headquartered in Fremont, California. Most of the platform's customers are Asian, including many first-generation immigrants. In 2021, the private, venture capital-backed company was valued at \$2.8 billion, according to Forbes.

Weee! also markets itself on WeChat to appeal to Chinese customers and encourages its shoppers to upload videos of meals they

made with the company's food.

Nielsen researchers found that Asian Americans, native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the US collectively have \$1.3 trillion in buying power or disposable income.

The online grocery stores serving this specific demographic are able to target the estimated 2.38 million Chinese people who live in the US as of 2021 and nearly 300,000 Chinese students in the country, figures from the US State Department show.

Fantuan is the largest food delivery app focused on Chinese-speaking customers in North America and Australia. Its annual revenue was forecast to be \$100 million last year, Tech Crunch reported.

While the app initially focused on restaurant food delivery, it is now shifting to grocery delivery services.

Crystal Li, public relations director at Fantuan, told China Daily: "Online grocery delivery and errands service are both operating in major cities. In New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and other metropolitan areas, we have the in-store deals feature similar to GroupOn; a user can purchase coupons on the app and use directly in store."

Li said the app has more than 3.6 million users in the US, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom.

"Customers include immigrants, international students, local Asians, for example American-born Chinese/

Canadian-born Chinese, tourists and whoever enjoys authentic Asian cuisine," she said.

Fantuan, based in Vancouver, Canada, closed a \$40 million funding round in December amid a venture capital-backed push for growth.

In January, it acquired Chowbus, another food delivery business, aimed at "solidifying Fantuan's leading position in the US Asian delivery market", Li said.

For decades, Chinatowns across the country were the key destinations for the community and others for noodles, meat, fish, herbs and other food.

But shopping habits for everyone changed drastically amid the pandemic, when many preferred to shop online and have items delivered.

Website Yamibuy is an online Asian snack retailer. It was founded by Alex Zhou, who arrived in Kansas

from Dalian, in China's Liaoning province, in 2007 to study engineering. The company is believed to be worth more than \$100 million.

As a student, Zhou yearned for some of his favorite snacks from home but found it hard to find them locally. That inspired him to create the website that sells the food that he grew up eating.

He told Inc.com that he hopes his Los Angeles-based site honors Chinese culture. At least 75 percent of his customers are East Asian, but it is also popular with those from other cultures.

Li said the overall growth of food delivery apps and online Asian grocery stores comes as customers "seek comfort in the flavors of their hometowns, even while far from home".

Agencies contributed to this story.

## WORLD

## US cities cope with vacant offices, crime

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco  
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In San Francisco's Chinatown, Thomas Tam, owner of Dragon Seed, a custom dress shop, sits behind his counter, observing pedestrians pass by his store. The street outside, once bustling with locals and tourists, now sees only occasional passersby on weekdays.

Dragon Seed, specializing in handmade traditional dresses, has been a Chinatown fixture since 1982. Tam's exquisite qipao dresses have graced the winners of the annual Miss Chinatown USA pageant.

"What a pity people can't see these beautiful outfits," said Tam, looking at the shop windows hidden behind wooden panels — a pandemic-era precaution that shields businesses from attacks or robberies.

Tam received only a few orders this summer, usually the shop's busiest season. "It's the lack of foot traffic since the pandemic," he told China Daily. "People switch to online shopping and would not come downtown for shopping."

It is the same next door for Terry Luk, owner of Pacific Printing, reduced foot traffic and shifting consumer habits. Established decades ago, Luk's print shop has relied heavily on printing menus for restaurants, an industry hit hard by the pandemic.

The closure of numerous restaurants, his main clientele, has left the business struggling. "Luckily, I own the property, otherwise I would not be able to afford the rent," Luk said.

The plight of the Chinatown businesses mirrors the broader challenges facing the downtowns of San Francisco and neighboring Oakland.

But this downward trajectory isn't unique to California cities. Many downtowns across the US are grappling with similar issues. Nearly four years after the pandemic outbreak, office workers and foot traffic remain scarce.

Retail has undergone a fundamental shift, with online shopping becoming the norm. Many cities are also battling crime, drug addiction and homelessness.

The exodus of tech companies from traditional office spaces, coupled with a shift toward hybrid work models, has left downtown San Francisco quiet on weekdays. The city's overall office vacancy rate stood at 36.8 percent in the second quarter, according to data from real estate firm CBRE.

The neighboring city of Oakland tells a similar tale of woe: Empty storefronts dot the business district, and three prominent office towers are in foreclosure.

The lack of weekday foot traffic in downtown areas has left merchants struggling, while rising property crimes and burglaries have fueled a growing sense of unease in Oakland.

The city has seen robberies rising

11 percent, with residential robberies soaring by 118 percent, according to police data in May. In the first four months of 2024 alone, the city experienced more than 1,000 robberies, casting a long shadow over the downtown's recovery.

Oakland's downtown office-vacancy rate hit 21.2 percent in the first quarter this year, a sharp increase from 8.8 percent in 2019 before the pandemic, according to CBRE data.

An October report by Philadelphia's Center City District, "Downtowns Rebound", highlights the varying rates of worker return across different cities in the United States. Those with industries dependent on face-to-face interactions, such as entertainment, hospitality, leisure, and food services, have seen a stronger rebound.

Conversely, cities like Denver, Portland, Oregon, and San Francisco, with a significant presence in the tech sector, have experienced a slower recovery due to the prevalence of remote work. Those cities see a work-from-home average of 2.55 days per week, the report said.

Data from security company Kastle Systems echoes the changing workplace landscape. To identify trends in how workers are returning to the office, the company uses daily security card swipes to measure office occupancy rates, with more than 300,000 users in 10 select cities in the United States.

Nationally, the average occupancy rate is 51.4 percent, with the lowest in San Jose metro at 37.5 percent, followed by Philadelphia and San Francisco at 41.8 percent and 43.5 percent, respectively, according to Kastle's Back to Work Barometer, updated on July 1.

The data shows that occupancy is much lower on Mondays and Fridays, with a low of 33.3 percent on Fridays and a peak of 61.2 percent on Tuesdays.

The Downtown Recovery project at the University of Toronto further emphasizes that trend. The researchers' analysis of mobile device-location data in March reveals that all North American downtowns have exhibited a greater decrease in activity levels during working hours, reflecting a trend toward remote work.

Comparing May 2023 with May 2024, the researchers found that 27 downtowns were in an upward trajectory, while 37 were trending down.

"Whether in public safety, workplace practices, or by diversifying downtown land use, the last three years are a profound reminder that successful cities will be those that respond best to challenges and reshape themselves for new realities," Paul R. Levy, the chief executive of Philadelphia's Center City District, concluded in an article looking at the recovery of US downtowns.



Russian President Vladimir Putin (right) and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visit a stable at Novo-Ogaryovo residence, outside Moscow, on Monday. GAVRIIL GRIGOROV VIA AP

## Putin talks with visiting Modi in Moscow

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin told visiting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday that their countries enjoyed a "special strategic partnership".

For Modi's part, he appreciated Putin's leadership, and he also said India's relationship with Russia is based on "mutual trust and mutual respect".

Modi was speaking in an address to the Indian diaspora on his first visit to Russia in five years.

Speaking on the sidelines of the meeting between Putin and Modi, VTB Bank CEO Andrei Kostin said Russia and India are engaged in constructive discussion around payments as the convertibility of the rupee is hampering bilateral settlements.

Late on Monday, Putin welcomed Modi and gave him a tour around the Russian leader's residence outside Moscow.

"Our official talks are tomor-

row, while today in this comfortable, cozy setting we can probably discuss the same issues, but unofficially," Putin was quoted by TASS as saying.

Earlier, Modi posted photos of his arrival in Moscow on the social media platform X in both Russian and English, saying he was "looking forward to further deepening the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership between our nations".

Later, the two leaders were pictured in videos shared by the Kremlin at Putin's residence in Novo-Ogaryovo near Moscow.

Putin drove Modi around the grounds in a buggy and showed him his stable with horses. According to state news agencies, the two had earlier watched a horse show with performers in national Russian dress.

Modi's trip to Moscow and India's relationship with Russia amid Russia's special military operation in Ukraine raise concerns, the

US State Department said.

Russia has been India's largest weapons provider for decades and New Delhi and Moscow have had close ties since Soviet times. Russia's share of Indian arms imports has shrunk considerably in recent years, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

At the same time, India has become a major purchaser of Russian crude, providing a much-needed export market for Russia after it was dropped by traditional buyers in Europe.

India's month-on-month imports of Russian crude "increased by 8 percent in May, to the highest levels since July 2023", according to data compiled by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

From Russia, Modi will travel to Vienna for the first visit to the Austrian capital by an Indian leader since Indira Gandhi in 1983.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Suspects in murder case identified

By PRIME SARMIENTO  
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Philippine authorities have identified eight suspected persons of interest linked to the abduction and murder of two business executives of Chinese origin in the northern Philippine province of Camarines Sur.

Philippine National Police, or PNP, Public Information Office chief Colonel Jean Fajardo said on Tuesday that the Anti-Kidnapping Group, which is in charge of the case, has eight names — including those who fetched the victims at the airport as these are the last people to see the victims alive.

Fajardo said the group is not yet under custody, while the Philippine News Agency says those involved are five foreigners and three Filipinos.

Fajardo also said the investigation is being conducted discreetly upon the request of the victims' families and the Chinese embassy in Manila, adding that they are also coordinating with their foreign counterparts to obtain more evidence.

According to initial investigations, the two victims, a Chinese national and a Chinese American, arrived in the Philippines on June 20 to meet with people for a possible business venture and an unknown group fetched the victims upon their arrival.

On June 21, the wife of one of the victims received demands for ransom asking for 5 million yuan (\$688,000). The family negotiated with the kidnapers and agreed to send 3 million yuan. After sending the money, the families did not hear anything from the suspects again and two days later, a lawyer of one of the victims reported the matter to Chinese authorities. The Chinese embassy in Manila coordinated with the PNP.

Local residents found on June 24 two unidentified bodies wrapped in a blanket beside the cliff in a village in Camarines Sur. After positively identifying the bodies, the family members allowed the remains of the victims to be cremated at the local crematory.

## Tokyo-Manila military pact may be 'turning point'

By PRIME SARMIENTO  
in Hong Kong

A newly signed military pact between Tokyo and Manila, which will allow Japanese troops to land and use weapons in the Philippines for the first time since World War II, risks bloc confrontation and regional instability, analysts said.

In Manila on Monday, Philippine and Japanese officials signed the Reciprocal Access Agreement, or RAA, enabling both sides to conduct joint combat training. The RAA will take effect after ratification by the Japanese and Philippine legislatures, officials said.

Anna Rosario Malindog-Uy, vice-president for external affairs at the Asian Century Philippines Strategic Studies Institute in Manila, said the RAA may face scrutiny and debate in Japan, as

the country has adopted a Pacifist Constitution since World War II.

She added that the presence of foreign troops in the Philippines, particularly Japanese soldiers, "may raise sovereignty concerns among some sectors of Philippine society".

The Philippines' closer military cooperation with Japan through the RAA may further strain its relationship with China, she pointed out.

Both the Philippines and Japan are treaty allies of the US.

Malindog-Uy said the enhanced defense cooperation among Japan, the Philippines and the US may also encourage other Southeast Asian nations to seek similar agreements.

"This might lead to an arms race, usher in a Cold War atmosphere, bloc confrontation and create a tension-driven ASEAN region," she said.

Mustafa Izzuddin, a senior international affairs analyst at Solaris Strategies Singapore, said the RAA is a "key turning point" for Japan's direct involvement in the dispute over the South China Sea and may "elicit a countervailing response" from China.

"Relations between China and the Philippines continue to fluctuate, and with the signing of the RAA between Japan and the Philippines, China-Philippine relations may be strained," Mustafa said.

## Trading partner

While noting the two countries' dispute over the South China Sea, Mustafa said he hoped that bilateral relations would "not rupture" as China remains a top trading partner of the Philippines.

Lucio Blanco Pitlo III, a research fellow at the Asia Pacific

Pathways to Progress Foundation in Manila, said the pact might provide Japan with a jump-off point to conduct future patrols with the Philippines in the South China Sea.

The signing of the RAA is viewed as a landmark agreement for the Philippines. This is the first time that the country, which suffered under Japanese occupation, has sealed a defense agreement with Japan. It is also Japan's first RAA with an Asian country.

According to officials, the RAA allows entry of members of the visiting forces and civilian staff, as well as access and movement of the vessels, aircraft and official vehicles of the visiting force.

The visiting force may also transport, store and handle weapons, ammunition, explosives and dangerous goods to conduct cooperative activities in the host state.

HOW MUCH DOES A DROP OF WATER MEAN TO AQUATIC LIFE?



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LI DONGHANG AND MA XUEJING / FOR CHINA DAILY

## BUSINESS

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## Schneider Electric leads firms in use of AI in energy optimization

By SHI JING in Shanghai  
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Most companies may be using artificial intelligence to improve efficiency by replacing repetitive work, but some, including those in China, are using it to optimize energy consumption, said Peter Weckesser, executive vice-president and chief digital officer of Schneider Electric.

Weckesser made the comments during his recent visit to Shanghai to attend the four-day 2024 World AI Conference.

Weckesser said AI's value lies in its applicability to industrial scenarios, helping improve productivity efficiency and address the pressing issue of energy transition.

Demand for energy management can be seen in various industries in China, including automotive, steel, cement, glass, water, foods and beverages and chemicals. Data centers, which are energy-intensive, and buildings, which account for 40 percent of the energy consumption globally, also need energy management, he said.

Schneider Electric's latest financial results also reflect the surging market demand. In the first quarter of this year, its revenue reached 8.6 billion euros (\$9.3 billion), up more than 5 percent year-on-year and setting an all-time high for the first quarter.

Sales revenue from energy management businesses grew by almost 9 percent year-on-year. Income generated by China's energy management businesses was up in high single digits. Renewable power, transportation infrastructure projects, combined with energy management offers sold to power grids, buildings and manufacturing companies are the major boosters for Schneider Electric's energy management business expansion in China, according to the company's 2024 first quarter fiscal report.

But there is still much room of growth. Applied at scale, AI can largely improve energy consumption efficiency by collecting energy flow data and creating insights and analytics, said Weckesser.

Schneider Electric's EcoStruxure AI module demonstrated at this year's WAIC is one example. Providing proven AI foundation models and real application scenarios, the module can help industries like automobiles, foods and beverages, semiconductors and machinery to further improve their efficiency by 3 to 5 percent and lower yearly energy consumption by up to 10 percent.

Schneider Electric's AI applications for its clients in China have been quite extensive. The company has used AI algorithms to provide intelligent control strategies for Budweiser's production line in China to improve the filtration efficiency by 15 percent.

Based on AI algorithms and machine learning, Schneider Electric has been helping Bank of Dalian to optimize its control of the cold station in the computer room with a dynamic cooling capacity based on the real-time demand of IT load, saving 31 percent of energy costs.

According to Weckesser, there is reason to anticipate bigger AI-related changes. For example, in the trend of energy transition and "prosumer" (a person who both produces and consumes energy), industrial sites and buildings will all grow into micro-grids, according to Schneider Electric.

"This will be a huge playground for AI to not only help optimize these micro-grids internally but also optimize their interaction, making the network an important source of renewable green energy in the future," he said.

Weckesser said China has been taking the lead worldwide in terms of use of 5G. This enables real-time collection and processing of data, which AI can provide.

Within one of Schneider Electric's factories in Shanghai, 5G is used to communicate with mobile robots, integrating cameras for quality inspection.

"The rest of the world seems relatively conservative in the introduction of 5G into industrial or IoT (internet of things) environments. But China is moving faster than the rest of the world in deploying 5G in industrial applications and in factories," he said.



A view of the booth of Schneider Electric at the 2024 World AI Conference in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A pedestrian walks past the headquarters of the PBOC in Beijing. JIANG QIMING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## Two new tools to guide interest rates

PBOC's temporary repos, reverse repos will also ensure bond market stability

By ZHOU LANXU  
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The People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, has launched a pair of new tools to better guide market interest rates and ensure bond market stability, reinforcing its efforts to build a modern monetary policy system, experts said.

The PBOC said on Monday that, from now on, it would conduct temporary repurchase and reverse repurchase agreements — also known as temporary repos and reverse repos — depending on market conditions.

Essentially, a central bank withdraws money from the banking system via repos, whereby it sells securities to commercial banks with a promise to repurchase them later at a higher price. Conversely, it injects liquidity through reverse repos by buying securities from commercial banks, with an agreement to sell them back later at a higher price.

The operations, with a term of overnight, will be conducted from 4 pm to 4:20 pm on working days as needed, in addition to the central bank's traditional morning operations of seven-day reverse repos.

The interest rates of the tempo-

rary repos and reverse repos will be 20 basis points below and 50 basis points above the seven-day reverse repo rate, or 1.6 percent and 2.3 percent at present, respectively.

This move came after Pan Gongsheng, governor of the PBOC, implied last month that the central bank will designate the seven-day reverse repo rate as the main policy rate benchmark and make efforts to narrow the interest rate corridor — a system that helps manage short-term interest rates in the economy. It is also used by central banks in Europe and the United States.

Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International, said the additional tools will help implement Pan's promise, helping reduce the volatility of short-term market interest rates and clearly convey the central bank's monetary policy signals.

Historical data showed that short-term interest rates in China could experience large fluctuations at month-end and quarter-end, which could, to some degree, disrupt market participants' perception of the central bank's policy stance and hinder the transmission of interest rates from the short term to the long term.

Wang said the new tools will narrow the interest rate corridor signif-

icantly from 245 basis points to 70 basis points and help stabilize expectations of short-term interest rates by setting 1.6 percent as the new lower limit for short-term market rates acceptable to the central bank and 2.3 percent as the upper limit.

The central bank can use temporary repos to absorb excess liquidity and prevent market rates from dropping below 1.6 percent and use temporary reverse repos to keep market rates from exceeding 2.3 percent, he said.

The new move comes close on the heels of the PBOC's agreements with commercial banks last week to borrow and sell treasury bonds, a measure to cool down a bond market rally and a decline in Chinese government bond yield. An excessively low bond yield could ignite pessimistic expectations of economic growth and trigger capital outflows.

Wen Bin, chief economist at China Minsheng Bank, said the PBOC has shown a strong commitment to preventing excessively low bond market rates with both the establishment of the new tools and agreements to sell treasury bonds.

After Monday's announcement, the yield of 10-year Chinese treasury bonds rose to about 2.29 percent on Monday, compared with about 2.26 percent on Friday. It, however, retreated to about 2.27 percent on Tuesday, according to market tracker Wind Info.

## Briefly

## Central bank conducts reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 2 billion yuan (\$280.47 million) 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. A reverse repo is a process in which

the PBOC purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

## Passenger car exports up 28% in June

China's exports of passenger vehicles hit 378,000 units in June, marking a 28 percent increase year-on-

year, said the China Passenger Car Association. With the South American market recovering, exports of Chinese-branded passenger vehicles hit 325,000 units in June, up 31 percent, while exports of luxury vehicles and cars made by Chinese and foreign-invested joint ventures reached 54,000 units, up 12 percent.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## Retail sector to consolidate growth

By FAN FEIFEI  
and OUYANG SHIJIA

China's consumer market is poised to gain recovery momentum this year, and the country's rising middle-income group is playing a vital role in driving consumption growth and unleashing immense retail sales potential, said Daniel Zipser, senior partner of global consultancy McKinsey & Co.

Zipser, who is also the leader of McKinsey's consumer and retail practice in Asia, said in an exclusive interview with China Daily that the country's consumption market has seen a moderate recovery so far and he anticipates this trend to continue. "The times of double-digit growth of consumption are over. I think China has been transitioning into a period of more moderate growth," Zipser said.

He added that although China's consumption sector is in a "mid-sin-

gle-digit growth" phase, the rate is still "remarkable" compared with other markets around the world. Meanwhile, the recovery in the consumer services sector — including domestic and international tourism, food services, dining out and entertainment — is robust.

Zipser remains confident about the long-term prospects of China's consumer market, saying the country's growth over the past two decades derived largely from the rise of the middle-income group, and "there is still substantial potential... for more urbanization, more income increases." The rise of the middle-income group will continue to drive consumption, he added.

He noted that Chinese consumers have become prudent and are very cautious about potential purchases, and when they spend, they try to get the best deal. Although some major e-commerce platforms in China have adopted a low-price strategy to

attract price-sensitive consumers, Chinese shoppers, however, still want to buy premium brands when they can, he said.

Zipser said there is a clear shift from product consumption to service consumption. "We have seen a very strong and healthy recovery of tourism after the pandemic crisis," and that increase in tourism happens both within China and overseas.

China's consumer market has witnessed a sustained recovery. Retail sales, a significant indicator of consumption strength, grew 4.1 percent year-on-year in the first five months, said the National Bureau of Statistics.

Online retail sales jumped 12.4 percent year-on-year during the January-May period. In May, retail sales rose 3.7 percent year-on-year versus 2.3 percent in April, said the NBS.

The country has rolled out a raft

of measures to spur the consumption of products and services such as automobiles, electronics, housing and home decor amid its broader push to boost momentum and stabilize the economy.

Zipser said innovative digital technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data play a crucial part in bolstering the recovery and growth of consumption, and livestreaming e-commerce is an innovation from China over the past couple of years.

In addition, the rise of Generation Z consumers — those born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s — brings opportunities to both local and foreign brands alike, Zipser said.

"I think they're looking for the best products. And if basically local brands can answer your questions and are actually able to provide the highest quality of products, they will be eventually the brand of choice for young Chinese consumers," he said, adding that what the consumers care most about is actually product

quality and the value-for-money they are getting from the product.

"People are not just looking for the cheapest product. They're looking for the lowest price for the brands they want," Zipser said. "If you come up with a new, innovative product, if you come up with a differentiated product, you will be able to actually ask for a higher price for that."

Pan Helin, a member of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology's Expert Committee for Information and Communication Economy, said more efforts should be made to stabilize and expand employment, improve household incomes, and boost people's ability and willingness to spend so as to further spur consumption.

Pan said enterprises should be encouraged to use new-generation information technologies such as big data, AI and cloud computing to create new types of green and intelligent consumer goods.

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## Expo crucial for boosting Sino-South Asian trade

By WANG KEJU  
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The China-South Asia Exposition has emerged as a crucial catalyst for strengthening economic and trade activities between the world's second-largest economy and South Asian countries, and facilitating mutually beneficial partnerships driven by each other's strengths and resources, senior officials said on Tuesday.

The upcoming expo, the eighth edition since 2013, is set to start on July 23 and run until July 28 in Kunming, Southwest China's Yunnan province, said Vice-Minister of Commerce Li Fei at a news conference in Beijing.

China's position as the top trading partner for countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and others in the region has continued to strengthen, with a growing array of South Asian goods finding favor with Chinese consumers such as Pakistan's rice, Sri Lanka's tea, Maldives' seafood and Afghanistan's pine nuts, Li added.

The trade value between China and South Asian countries, according to data from Li's ministry, was nearly \$200 billion in 2023, doubling from a decade ago.

## \$200 billion

value of trade between China and South Asian countries in 2023

This year's event aims to promote and explore the immense potential for cooperation in industries that align with the economic priorities of both China and South Asian countries, with special focuses on sectors such as green energy, modern agriculture, healthcare and cultural tourism, said Liu Yong, vice-governor of Yunnan province.

In particular, China and South Asian countries have demonstrated strong economic complementarity, with vast potential for cooperation in the digital and green economy sectors, officials said.

The mutual willingness to collaborate and the existing foundation for partnership bode well for the immense opportunities for joint efforts in these areas, said Wang Liping, director-general of Li's ministry's department of Asian affairs.

China and Pakistan, for instance, are working together to build a green economic corridor that promotes sustainable development and environmental protection. Additionally, Chinese companies have played an active role in Bangladesh's national data center, emphasizing the importance of nurturing local digital talent and contributing to narrowing the digital divide, Wang added.

The extensive cooperation between China and South Asian countries goes beyond the annual trade expo.

Going forward, China will improve its free trade agreements with South Asian countries, aiming to elevate the level of trade and investment liberalization and facilitation, and unlock the untapped cooperation potential, Li said.

In addition, the two sides will enhance industrial policy exchanges and resource integration, so as to jointly construct a secure, efficient, open, inclusive and mutually beneficial regional industrial and supply chain, Li added.

So far, overseas representatives from 81 countries, regions and international organizations, as well as domestic participants from 27 provincial regions, have confirmed their attendance at the expo.

# BUSINESS

## Ethiopian Airlines flies high on China demand

By ZHU WENQIAN

Ethiopian Airlines, the largest carrier in Africa, said it has seen rapid growth in demand from Chinese travelers to key African cities, and the airline is confident of its growth potential in China.

The Ethiopian national flag carrier said that flights from major Chinese cities to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, have been nearly fully booked this summer, fueled by growing demand of Chinese families taking safari vacations in Africa.

Currently, Ethiopian Airlines operates direct flights connecting Addis Ababa with Beijing, Shanghai, and Chengdu, Sichuan province, as well as twice-daily flights connecting Addis Ababa with Guangzhou, Guangdong province, as China-African trade has been booming between the two cities. It plans to put into use the latest Airbus A350 widebody aircraft in operating those intercontinental routes.



Aman Wole Gurmu

"Ethiopian Airlines has been continuously evaluating our route network, including connections between Chinese cities and Addis Ababa. The decision to launch new flights or increase frequencies is typically based on market demand and operational considerations," said Aman Wole Gurmu, country director of China for Ethiopian Airlines.

"Ethiopian Airlines has shown confidence in its growth potential in China, and the growth is expected to mainly come from increasing passenger traffic between China and Africa, as well as strategic partnerships and collaborations," Gurmu said.

He added that the relationship between the Chinese and Ethiopian governments is stable, and demand for business and diplomatic travel has been constantly increasing. The airline has seen a growing number of passengers, including corporate customers, diplomats and tourists.

In the first half, more than 330,000 passengers have traveled on flights of Ethiopian Airlines between the Chinese mainland and other international cities.

Besides Ethiopia, Chinese travelers have shown robust travel demand to African countries such as South Africa, Kenya, Namibia and Zimbabwe, boosting demand for the carrier's

services, which operates flights to more than 60 destinations in Africa. With simplified entry procedures such as visa-on-arrival policies for multiple African countries, higher travel demand is expected from Chinese consumers.

So far, the number of international tourists traveling to Africa has recovered to 96 percent of pre-pandemic levels, and the number of passengers it transported is approaching the number seen before COVID-19.

For the passenger transportation market, in addition to its strongest African routes, the airline said its South American routes are also attracting attention.

"More guests traveling to South America take our flights to Brazil and Argentina, as transferring in Addis Ababa has advantages in transfer time and flight distances. The number of passengers who flew from Shanghai to South America and transferred in Addis Ababa accounted for more than 20 percent of Shanghai passengers flying to South America," Gurmu said.

"There is no doubt that every year we will invest more in digital marketing programs in China such as daily promotions through social media, and more strategic plans are expected to better promote our brand awareness in the Chinese market," he added.

Meanwhile, Ethiopian Airlines has accelerated the layout of its cargo network in China since the beginning of this year. It newly launched cargo routes from Ezhou, Hubei province, to Addis Ababa, and from Addis Ababa to Liege, Belgium and then to Changsha, Hunan province.

From January to June, the amount of cargo transported by Ethiopian Airlines has exceeded 60,000 metric tons, while the total cargo volume transported in the whole year of 2019 was 70,000 tons. The rapidly growing volume has been supported by strong demand for e-commerce products from China, the carrier said.

In addition, the International Air Transport Association recently released data for global passenger demand in May. Total demand, measured in revenue passenger kilometers, grew by 10.7 percent year-on-year.

"Airlines are doing everything they can to ensure smooth journeys for all travelers over the peak northern summer period," said Willie Walsh, IATA's director general.



The 700th A320 aircraft is delivered at the Airbus final assembly line in Tianjin on Monday.

LI RAN / XINHUA

## Airbus bullish on biz environment in nation

European aircraft maker delivers its 700th A320 jet assembled in Tianjin

By ZHU WENQIAN  
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European aircraft manufacturer Airbus has delivered its 700th A320 family aircraft assembled at its final assembly line in Tianjin, indicating the plane maker's long-term commitment to China, its largest single-country market.

The aircraft, an A320neo with 180 economy class seats, was handed over to Chengdu Airlines on Monday. By the end of June, Chengdu Airlines operated a fleet of 52 aircraft from the A320 family.

"The delivery of the 700th A320 family aircraft assembled in Tianjin underscores the unwavering commitment of our China teams to support Airbus' global A320 family ramp-up plan," said George Xu, Airbus executive vice-president and Airbus China CEO.

"Airbus remains dedicated to strengthening our strategic collaboration with China, reinforcing our long-term commitment to this thriving market," Xu said.

Opened in 2008, the Airbus facility in Tianjin serves as the plane maker's first commercial aircraft assembly line outside of Europe, and the Tianjin center delivered its first A320 in 2009.

Airbus started to expand its A320 fleet's final assembly capacity in Tianjin last year with a second line, and it will contribute to the company's global A320 family ramp-up plan. The new facility is expected to be put into operation and begin delivery in early 2026.

In addition, the entire A320 family aircraft has been able to operate with up to 50 percent sustainable aviation fuel. By 2030, Airbus aims for all its aircraft to be capable of operating with up to 100 percent SAF.

"China's huge civil aviation market has been attractive. In the next 20 years, the demand for single-aisle aircraft in the country is expected to double from the current level," said Zou Jianjun, a professor at the Civil Aviation Management Institute of China.

"Airbus' investment in China showcases its recognition of the final assembly capacities and the development of the aviation supply chain in China. It also indicates the company's confidence in the investment environment of the country," Zou said.

Through 2042, China will need 8,560 new commercial airplanes, including 6,470 single-aisle ones, fueled by its economic growth well

above the global average and an increasing demand for domestic air travel, according to a forecast by US aircraft manufacturer Boeing Co.

Airbus' Tianjin facility has been successfully operating for over 15 years, and has become a role model of successful Sino-European cooperation. It has helped Airbus increase its market share in China.

Globally, Airbus operates four A320 final assembly sites, located in Hamburg, Germany; Toulouse, France; Mobile, Alabama, the United States; and Tianjin, China.

China's air travel market is steadily picking up after the COVID-19 pandemic. In May, the number of passengers who took domestic and international flights reached 58.87 million person-times, up 13.9 percent year-on-year, according to the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

Meanwhile, the sixth C919, China's first domestically developed narrow-body aircraft, has been put into commercial operation by Shanghai-based China Eastern Airlines. The six C919 planes are operating on four domestic commercial routes, and the daily utilization rate of the planes has continued to increase.

Since the first C919 was put into commercial operation in May 2023, the aircraft model has transported more than 300,000 person-times of passengers, China Eastern said.

## Hilly city in Henan gets expert grid protection

By ZHUANG QIANG and PANG BO

In the mountainous Linzhou under the prefecture-level city of Anyang in Henan province, unlike in recent years, this year's rains have seemed to fall more fiercely.

On July 1, shortly after the wet season began, rainwater on Hongqi Canal Ave had already reached ankle-depth, leaving the elderly gathered at a senior activity center — No 7 Courtyard among China State Construction employee buildings — increasingly concerned.

If a potential power outage resulted due to the downpours, their journey home without the benefit of operating elevators would be as challenging as a mountain ascent.

Amid the torrential rains, staffers of State Grid Linzhou Power Supply Co were working to prevent potential power outages in their various areas and jurisdictions of responsibility.

As most streets in Linzhou were rapidly becoming submarine thoroughfares, Hu Zhifang and one of his colleagues began to wade slowly along a 10-kilovolt power distribution line, as he considers that these lines are like veins of a city and need special care to maintain.

Hu, 42, inspected distribution boxes and pole foundations amid the rains, checking the waterproofing facilities at each stop, and looking for potential hazards in pole foundations.

"Rainy day inspections might reveal some safety hazards we usually overlook," he said.

At the entrance to the underground power distribution room at No 7 Courtyard, Hu and his colleague stood for a long time, leaving only after confirming that waterproofing measures were adequate.

Meanwhile, on a winding mountain road, transmission line team leader Cui Bingbin and his members were trudging through thick mud, binoculars at hand, inspecting transmission lines in the rugged hills.

After ascending steep slopes and fording streams, they cleared fallen branches obstructing the lines and checked for foundational and other structural flaws amid the downpour.

"Usually, this line is patrolled in its entirety once a month, but it needs special protection during wind and rain," Cui said.

At the same time, Caojia Village Substation, which is located at the northeast corner of the intersection of Taixing Rd and Luban Ave, was facing particularly tough flood prevention efforts due to its low-lying location.

"Earlier, we had prepared flood prevention sandbags here in May, putting drainage pumps in place, and now we are inspecting the drainage ditches daily to prevent blockages," said Li Guanqi, station master.

As the rains poured down incessantly, Li led his team to recheck the substation's drainage and cable ditches, avoiding any blockage or water accumulation.

"As safety is paramount, we cannot overlook any detail," he added.

Prior to the large-scale rural grid transformation in the city, Linzhou's power grid had poor resistance to natural elements, and the power workers' only weapon was vigilance and diligence, which has become their tradition in maintaining power safety for the city's residents.

"We feel uneasy if we don't recheck and ensure the equipment is fine during windy or rainy weather. Although the grid's ability to withstand natural disasters is improving, we still retain our tradition here," Li said.

The power lines and substations in Linzhou continue to withstand heavy rains, without any power outages.

Wang Kefeng and Jia Xiaopeng contributed to this story.

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## Pop Mart expands Thailand footprint with new store in Bangkok

BANGKOK — Chinese toy company Pop Mart opened its sixth offline store in Bangkok and achieved sales exceeding 10 million yuan (\$1.37 million) on its opening day recently.

Setting a new single-day sales record for overseas stores, the art toy company, renowned for its blind box collectibles, is taking Thailand by storm.

Having lined up at the newly opened Labubu-themed offline store overnight, Nok, a big fan of Pop Mart's popular furry doll, told Xinhua that products in Thailand are often sold out within seconds upon being stocked, with many fans even traveling to China to buy them.

"It's adorable. They have various series that are diverse and creatively designed. Their rotating selections of designer toys offer a constant supply of newness, which is a strong appeal to me," said the 33-year-old office worker.

Apart from the colorful, cute and quirky characters, the "crybaby" series created by a Thai designer is also Nok's favorite. The figures are characterized by large, teary eyes and imaginative costumes.

"Its melancholic yet cute appearance resonates with my emotions. It's comforting and relatable," she said.

Pop Mart's collaboration with local artists has sparked promising reactions in the market. For instance, the crybaby series not only made waves in the Thai market, but is also popular in China, the United States and Europe.

“Our core business is to discover outstanding artists worldwide. We seek out potential artists, help them transform their artwork into intellectual property and bring more joy and warmth to customers.”

Wang Ning, founder of Pop Mart

"Our core business is to discover outstanding artists worldwide. We seek out potential artists, help them transform their artwork into intellectual property and bring more joy and warmth to customers," said Wang Ning, founder of Pop Mart in a recent interview in Bangkok.

The character-based entertainment company serves as an incubator of artists. It handles artwork production, marketing and distribution for selected artists. It also commercializes and promotes artists' creations through branding, social media campaigns, pop-up events and exhibitions.

Merging art with playful, engaging characters has made the com-

pany a key player in the toy industry. By the end of 2023, Pop Mart had opened over 450 offline stores and more than 2,300 Robo Shops in over 30 countries and regions.

The company entered Thailand last September. The unique blind box marketing, as its secret sauce, has been sweeping the Southeast Asian economy.

It features the sale of products in opaque packaging, hiding the items' appearance of special design. What lies within remains a mystery until the seal is broken. Rare or limited editions are mixed in these boxes, adding to the excitement of the unboxing process.

The frequent release of limited edition figures and special series creates a sense of exclusivity and urgency among collectors. Consumers strike to complete their sets, driving repeat purchasing.

"The anticipation of the unknown is addictive. I enjoy the thrill of surprise from unboxing. When you get your desired one, you feel like you have hit the jackpot. If not, we can exchange it with friends from the fan pages," Mint, a 44-year-old Labubu fan who visits the shops every week, told Xinhua.

"When I feel happy, I want a new toy. When I'm upset, the joy of surprise from unboxing heals me. After all, it's affordable," she said.



A consumer takes selfies with a doll at a Pop Mart outlet in Bangkok on Friday.

SUN WEITONG / XINHUA

The engagement of the fan community mirrors the rich collector culture of Thailand. As a host of 12 international toy fairs, the Southeast Asian country has fostered a vibrant collector market. Thailand boasts a tradition of appreciating art and miniatures, from intricately designed temple models to vibrant street art.

Thai consumers, particularly the younger generation, are drawn to trends and aesthetics. Pop Mart's art toy collectibles, featuring adorable and detailed characters, resonated deeply with this cultural affinity, Justin Moon, president of Pop Mart International, told Xinhua.

He said travel retailing is Pop Mart's next priority in Thailand, as the country is a renowned tourism destination. Besides the capital Bangkok, the company plans to open more stores in popular destinations like Chiang Mai and Phuket.

"In the future, Pop Mart can become more than art toys. We plan to leverage the wave that started with fun, excitement, and surprises as a bridge to new businesses that focus on entertaining consumers, such as theme parks, games, or even animation," Moon said.

XINHUA

## BUSINESSFOCUS

## Touch of humor to go with your daily milk

How dairy firms are employing creative strategies to stay abreast of the game amid rising challenges

By WANG ZHUOQIONG  
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Dairy brands in China are adopting creative strategies to navigate some of the industry's emerging challenges, such as a declining birthrate, an aging population, a market traditionally dominated by shelf-stable milk products and increased consumer preference for more cold-chain products.

Sales of packaged milk products fell 2.9 percent in the first quarter compared to the same period last year, mainly due to a recovery in outdoor activities and a shift in consumer spending patterns post-COVID, according to the China Shopper Report 2024 by Bain & Co and Kantar Worldpanel.

Given the situation, it is imperative that Chinese dairy brands create new categories and discover innovative opportunities, said Yan Wei, a principal of the China health and consumer and investor support teams at global management consultancy Roland Berger.

Yan made the remarks during the Food and Beverage Innovation Forum 2024 and FBIF Food Innovation Exhibition held in Shanghai from June 25-27.

Some dairy brands have already taken steps to overcome the challenges.

Haihe Dairy, an over six-decade-old time-honored brand based in Tianjin, has, for instance, designed innovative products specifically for Gen Z consumers. The company has infused local humor and incorporated the relaxed nature of Tianjin residents to come up with offerings such as coriander and avocado-flavored milk.

Zou Yang, chairman of Haihe Dairy, credits its success to Tianjin's inherent sense of humor.

Speaking at the FBIF Forum, Zou described Tianjin as a "Florida" for China, renowned for its *xiangsheng*, or crosstalk comedy.

Viral moments, such as the "diving grandpa" and motorboat surfing during city floods, epitomize the unique humor and laid back attitude of Tianjin residents.

Haihe Dairy has integrated city landmarks and cultural elements into its yogurt product promotions, making "playfulness" a hallmark of its product innovation, Zou said.

"In our collaborative products, we focus on the unique characteristics of Tianjin," Zou said.

Haihe has partnered with Tianjin's traditional bakery, Xianghe Bobo Shop, to open five co-branded fresh milk stores in the city, using Haihe milk in baking pastries.

The company has also collaborated with the Tianjin Museum on culture-themed products and launched co-branded ice cream with the De Yun She Performance Group, known for *xiangsheng* performances. These collaborations have made their products iconic representations of Tianjin.



**Above:** Consumers browse dairy products at a supermarket in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province, in June. JIA MINJIE / FOR CHINA DAILY

**Left:** A view of Chinese cheese producer Milkground's booth during a baking expo in Shanghai in May 2023.

**Below:** Consumers check out dairy products at a supermarket in Shanghai in June 2022.

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Looking ahead, Haihe Dairy plans to explore further collaborations with grilled fish brands to develop iced products and specialty milk beverages, Zou said.

"Our goal is to seamlessly integrate Haihe milk into various consumption scenarios," Zou said, adding that its products sport a playful image in order to better resonate with consumers.

Some dairy producers have chosen to innovate on taste rather than flavors.

Bai Xuedong, vice-president and co-founder of Blue Sea Dairy, said the company's focus on brand innovation is based on surprising Gen Z consumers with changes to taste.

He cited an example of its product "Haomanzu", which means "satisfied" in Chinese, a yogurt incorporating whole strawberries and grapes, differentiating it from other freeze-dried fruit yogurts on the market.

"You have to delight your consumers with something challenging, yet unexpected," said Bai.

But a change of flavor in dairy products is easily copied by competitors, she added. So, Blue Sea Dairy chose to innovate on taste, providing a deliciously luxurious experience of an entire fruit-in-

yogurt product, said Bai.

The company stocks 50 metric tons of seasonal fruits a year in advance, 48 hours from picking and processing to stocking, he said.

Another player, New Raspberry Co Ltd, has also made strides in product innovation by making yogurt a replacement for meals.

Zhang Xingshi, general manager of the company, said it was inspired by the popular fruit oatmeal trend to develop its Chewy Yogurt product.

Combining yogurt with grains and freeze-dried fruits, New Raspberry has positioned yogurt as a potential meal replacement, catering to both necessity and frequent use.

Under the concept of "everything can be chewy" and light eating, New Raspberry launched mini packs of room-temperature chewy yogurt products. These 50-gram packs, containing 10 grams of grains, meet children's pre-meal dessert needs, creating new consumption scenarios, he said.

How to help Chinese consumers eat more natural cheese is what French dairy enterprise Lactalis prioritized in its work in China.

Alexandre Pasquet, general manager of Lactalis North Asia, said Chinese consumers are increasingly focusing on functional and natural dairy products. Lactalis International's leading brands include President, Lactel and Kraft.

While European children start consuming natural cheese early to meet nutritional needs, similar trends are emerging in China, Pasquet said.

Lactalis estimates that natural cheese will gain a higher market share in China. The company is building a factory in Jiangsu province to produce natural cheese and plans to innovate Camembert cheese by incorporating Chinese elements based on local consumer preferences.

Ren Song, chief executive officer of Milkground, a leading cheese producer in China, said the company has carried out innovations through expansion of its consumer groups.

By targeting both young people and middle-aged to elderly consumers, Milkground aims to understand young people's preferences and innovate product categories.

It has upgraded cheese sticks to "Huaruo Sticks", which are low-GI (Glycemic Index) and sugar-free. The product quickly became popular among youngsters after it was launched in May, demonstrating how incorporating floral elements into cheese can resonate with young consumers' emotional needs, said Ren.

Tetra Pak, a global leading food processing and packaging solutions company, has developed many concept products, including protein functional drinks and elderly nutrition milk, based on emerging consumer needs for precise nutrition drinks and sports meal replacements in the Chinese market, said Jessie Ge, its marketing services manager APAC, at the leading food processing and packaging solutions company.

Other leading technologies include its E3/Speed Hyper filling machine, featuring e-beam sterilization technology, which is considered a new global benchmark for paper packaging filling speeds. The technology also helps reduce operational costs and enhances environmental sustainability for dairy companies.

## Traditional, healthy ingredients recipe for success

By WANG ZHUOQIONG

Red and green beans have long been used as the preferred ingredients for snack fillings in East Asia.

Now, a company in Shandong province has found a way to use these as essential ingredients for Chinese-style plant-based ready-to-drink beverages.

Keyang Beverage Co, a leading fillings provider for many food brands in Asia, has seen its revenue skyrocket by 150 percent annually since 2020, driven by strong demand for zero-sugar, zero-fat and zero-calorie beverages from health-conscious Chinese consumers.

In 2020, amid stagnant export growth, Keyang's founder and CEO, Wang Zhonghe, decided to develop the company's own brand. Wang and his team introduced beverages such as red bean water, job's tears water and green bean water.

The company launched the first

bottle of red bean and barley water in China, claiming to retain the original flavor of the ingredients without any additives.

"We were among the first to bring this traditional wellness culture to modern, convenient formats," Wang said at a food and beverage innovation forum in Shanghai last month. "We removed the starch and protein of the beans from the water, making the drinks zero-sugar, zero-fat and zero-calorie, while maintaining the original taste and color of the ingredients."

The product has a gemstone-like color and is rich in polyphenols, potassium, iron and other trace elements, said Wang.

The market for grain-flavor drinks is heating up, with many companies entering this sector.

A strong supply chain is one of Keyang's advantages, said Wang. As a leading company in domestic filling production, Keyang has been

deeply involved in the baking industry for 30 years. The company extracts raw red beans and mung beans without any additives for the beverages, and utilizes the remaining in their filling products.

Jason Yu, general manager of Kantar Worldpanel China, said, "Categories with strong health attributes, such as ready-to-drink juices, ready-to-drink teas, and sports and energy drinks, have seen growth both at home and abroad."

"The consumption of traditional Asian beverages like herbal tea, barley water, and corn silk tea has also seen a notable resurgence in domestic consumption scenarios."

Yu said the growth rate of the packaged beverages sector is significantly higher than other leading fast-moving consumer goods sectors.

According to Kantar Worldpanel China, the overall growth of pack-

aged beverages in 2023 was 10 percent. Although the growth in the first quarter of 2024 was slower, it still achieved an 8 percent increase.

Chinese wellness water, an instant plant-based beverage, aligns with the Chinese concept of "wellness." Common ingredients include red beans, barley, goji berries, red dates, mung beans, chrysanthemum and barley — ingredients perceived as healthy and having both medicinal and dietary uses.

The latest report released by the Qianzhan Industry Research Institute showed that the market size for Chinese wellness water in China reached 450 million yuan (\$61.9 million) in 2023, with year-on-year growth exceeding 350 percent.

More brands have entered a market whose compound annual growth rate is expected to exceed 88 percent over the next five years. The market size is projected to surpass



Red bean and barley water products of Chinese company Keyang Beverage Co are displayed at a store in Beijing in June 2021.

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10 billion yuan by 2028.

According to NielsenIQ, the domestic sugar-free beverage industry generated 24.1 billion yuan in revenue in 2023, a year-on-year increase of 26 percent.

The "2023 China Sugar-Free Tea

Industry White Paper" revealed that online sales of sugar-free tea on Tmall and Taobao increased from 46.8 million yuan in 2018 to 447.3 million yuan in 2022, achieving nearly 10-fold growth over five years.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Self-interest spurred US spook community to hype up smears of China cyber threat

Despite being the world's leading source of cyberattacks and the biggest threat to cybersecurity globally, the United States launched a smear campaign against China earlier this year, accusing it of conducting hacking activities targeting the US and other Western countries.

Out of ulterior political motives, US government departments, such as the National Security Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, spread the lie that a China-backed hacking group known as Volt Typhoon was working to compromise cyber infrastructure at ports, utilities and internet service providers in the US and other Western countries.

"Today, and literally every day, they're actively attacking our economic security, engaging in wholesale theft of our innovation, and our personal and corporate data," FBI Director Christopher Wray scaremongered in a House committee hearing early this year.

But the so-called Volt Typhoon cyber threat narrative is nothing but a US campaign of misinformation and public opinion manipulation aimed at slinging mud at China. Having conducted an investigation, China has found that Volt Typhoon is actually a ransomware cybercriminal group that has nothing to do with the country.

The hyping up of a "cyber threat from China" by US intelligence agencies was actually intended to push for the reauthorization of Section 702 of the

US Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, according to the findings of an investigation by China's National Computer Virus Emergency Response Center and other technical teams.

On April 19, the day when Section 702 was set to expire, the US Senate approved its reauthorization with a vote of 60-34, with President Joe Biden subsequently signing it into law.

The reauthorization indicates that it is the US, rather than any other country, that is the world's largest "surveillance empire". The act allows the US government to continue collecting the communications of non-Americans located outside the country without a warrant for another two years.

The law, which also permits the incidental collection of data of US citizens without a warrant, is a de facto license to snoop. Abusing its technological hegemony, the US is carrying out large-scale, indiscriminate surveillance and espionage activities globally in the guise of safeguarding national security.

China has repeatedly been the victim of cyberattacks by the US. From May 2023 to January 2024, Chinese government entities, academies, scientific research institutes, enterprises and critical infrastructures had recorded more than 45 million cyberattacks from US government-backed hacking organizations, according to the latest findings.

The US is actually staging a farce of "a thief crying 'stop the thief'" by fabricating false narratives of so-called China-sponsored cyberattacks, which will only further strain Sino-US relations.

## Reef report's conclusions valid and damning

While some might dismiss the move as a farce, or even a "trick" of Beijing in its public relations contest with Manila over their maritime disputes, any serious reader of a fact-based report that China has released will come to a different conclusion.

The report released on Monday exposes the grave damage done to the ecosystem around Ren'ai Reef in the South China Sea by the vessel that the Philippines has illegally grounded there.

Highlighting the vulnerability of the marine ecosystem in the region, the report also draws attention to the long-ignored issue of the harm geopolitical tensions and conflicts inflict on global ecological systems and the natural environment.

This has gained greater pertinence with the United States in the throes of full-blown psychosis and fermenting conflicts and wars wherever it can. Addressing the environmental and ecological impacts of these confrontations is a grave concern, as the impacts of hostilities on ecosystems can be irreversible and their repercussions will last much longer than the violence that has produced them.

That China has allowed the Philippines to keep the illegally grounded vessel on the reef for more than a quarter of a century at such a high cost to the marine ecology and environment fully reflects the Chinese side's restraint in the hope that the issue can be settled politically.

China, which has paid a heavy environmental price for its past helter-skelter rush to make up for ecological health, is all too well aware of the immense difficulties involved in rehabilitating ecosystems. Over the past years, as part of these efforts,

it has gained much experience in environmental monitoring and evaluation.

Thus the Survey Report on the Damage to Coral Reef Ecosystem by Illegally Grounded Military Vessel at Ren'ai Reef, released by the South China Sea Ecological Center and the South China Sea Development Research Institute of China's Ministry of Natural Resources, together with other institutes, should be taken seriously for what it is — an objective and professional assessment of the damage being done to a vital and fragile marine ecosystem by Manila's irresponsible move.

The report is the outcome of a scientific survey conducted through satellite remote sensing spanning the past 13 years and a field investigation of the coral reef ecosystem at the reef and its adjacent sea areas in April this year.

The survey found that the grounding of the vessel caused fatal damage to the coral reef, and the prolonged presence of the vessel has greatly inhibited the growth and recovery of coral in the surrounding area. Heavy metal precipitation caused by corrosion of the vessel, coupled with discharge of domestic waste and sewage by onboard personnel has inflicted lasting harm on the coral.

The report also concludes that the health of the reef ecosystem has been severely compromised by Philippine activities in the waters around the reef. Over the past 25 years, the personnel onboard the military vessel have regularly received supplies, burned garbage, discarded waste and sewage, carried out fishing activities and constantly fortified the naturally decaying vessel.

Manila should take the issue of conservation seriously and remove the vessel from the reef as it previously promised to do.

## Aboveboard probe required to quell food fears

Oil transportation tankers in China are in the spotlight after Beijing News reported that tankers are transporting edible oil and chemicals alternatively without proper cleaning after each trip, sparking public concern about food safety.

According to the report, soon after emptying some chemicals, the drivers directly load edible soybean oil into their tanks for the next trip. This has sparked public concerns about possible food safety risks, as the chemicals contain components that are hazardous to human health and can lead to poisoning. The Food Safety Law stipulates that containers, tools or equipment used for storing, transporting and handling food must be clean to prevent food contamination.

Yet, while edible oils are used in cooking and as an ingredient in numerous processed foods, it is not certain where the edible oil being transported was used. Soaring demand has pushed edible oil prices to record highs. But it is mainly their growing use as biofuel that has driven prices up.

A thorough investigation is needed to determine first of all whether the oil being transported in this way was being used for human consumption.

If that should prove to be the case all the links in the chain — the transportation companies and edi-

ble oil producers involved and the local government agencies in charge of food safety — should all be probed to ascertain their accountability. According to the latest media reports, various investigations are now underway. It is hoped that these will be able to get to the bottom of the matter.

Yet food safety is such a sensitive issue, that although these investigations might possibly restore some public trust, the companies concerned cannot pin their hopes on them restoring all the trust that has already been lost. Public trust is so fragile that a single incident that makes the public feel it is being cheated is enough to break it.

It is good to see the central authorities have not only launched a joint investigation into this case, but also organized a national campaign to deal with possible risks related to the whole edible oil industry on Tuesday afternoon, vowing zero-tolerance to food safety issues and harsh punishment of any wrongdoers.

In the event that anything untoward is uncovered, those responsible must be held to account and strict preventive measures implemented to ensure that there is no space for any dangerous practices.

The standards applied in the national cleanup campaign should become the new normal.

## Hao Yanpeng



## Opinion Line

## Reform and opening-up key to modernization along Chinese path

Practice has proven that reform and opening-up are the source of vitality for China's development, an important weapon for the Party and people to catch up with the times, and the right way to uphold and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Since the third plenary session of the 11th Communist Party of China Central Committee held in 1978 kicked off reform and opening-up, the Party and the Chinese people have overcome various difficulties and obstacles, and continuously pushed China's comprehensive

national strength to a new level.

China is undergoing profound changes in its domestic and international environment, with a series of prominent contradictions and challenges having emerged. In November 2013, the third plenary session of the 18th CPC Central Committee opened up a new era of comprehensively deepening reform, promoting reform through overall system design.

A series of reform measures adopted in various fields over the past years have not only made the socialist system with Chinese char-

acteristics more mature, but also significantly improved the country's governance system and governance capacity, and continuously enhanced people's sense of gains, happiness and security.

The country should continue to make good use of this weapon to push reform and opening-up in the new era to a higher level to advance the building of a strong socialist country and achieve the great national rejuvenation through modernization along the Chinese path.

— QSTHEORY.CN

## Beijing supports talks to end conflict in east DRC

China's representative to the United Nations, Geng Shuang, strongly condemned the attack against a Chinese company on July 3 that resulted in the deaths and disappearance of Chinese citizens in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

This incident is the tip of the iceberg of the chaotic situation in the east of the DRC. How to ease the tensions and help settle the complicated political situation there is of significance not just to the stability of the country, but also to the prevention of an all-out war in the region.

Speaking at the UN General Assembly on Monday, Geng urged all armed groups in the DRC to lay down their weapons and withdraw from occupied areas immediately.

In just three months, more than 500 people have been killed in the country by armed groups such as the March 23 Movement, which has rapidly expanded its presence in

the region and even advanced into South Kivu.

A cease-fire between the armed groups is of vital importance for talks aimed at ending the chaotic situation. China supports the efforts of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC, known as MONUSCO, to assist peace building and consolidating efforts in the South Kivu province.

China calls for a greater sense of urgency and more effective measures by the relevant parties to ensure the safety of peacekeepers as a string of attacks against MONUSCO personnel have taken place. China supports "reasonable adjustment" to MONUSCO's mandate to ensure its coordination and complementarity with the regional force.

The meeting between Rwanda's Foreign Minister Vincent Biruta and his Congolese counterpart

Christophe Lutundula in the Angolan capital Luanda for high-level consultations in March this year was a sign that talks could pave the way for security and peace.

Angola has been trying to organize a summit for the presidents of Rwanda and DRC to meet, which will hopefully ease the tensions growing along the border between the two countries.

China supports both the Luanda-led peace process and the East African Community-led Nairobi Process, as both are trying to engage all stakeholders, including the DRC government, Rwandan government, armed groups, civil society organizations, and the international community in finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict in the east of the DRC through dialogue and negotiation. It is to be hoped these efforts bear fruit as soon as possible.

— ZHU YUAN, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## US election deciding factor in Gaza peace process

Despite the growing support in Israel for a cease-fire deal with Hamas that would involve the release of at least some of the Israeli hostages still held by the militant group, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued a tough statement on Sunday night saying he would only agree to a deal that would "allow Israel to resume fighting until all of the objectives of the war have been achieved."

By reiterating his long-held position that the war must continue until Israel has destroyed Hamas' military and governing abilities in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli leader has made it clear that his government has no intention of implementing the UN Security Council resolution that was passed last month on a permanent cease-fire in Gaza.

To ensure the proposal it made could pass the UNSC vote, as most of the 15 members really doubted whether Tel Aviv really agreed with it, the United States claimed its proposal had obtained endorsement of its closest ally. After the resolution

was passed, it bragged of it being a diplomatic success of the US.

In response to Netanyahu's statement, Hamas, which opposes any cease-fire unless it is permanent, said in a statement released on Monday that Israel's continuing military operations across Gaza risked returning "the negotiating process to point zero".

Almost at the same time, Israel bombed Gaza, which local Palestinian residents described as one of the most intense Israeli bombardments since Oct 7. After that, columns of Israeli tanks are reportedly closing in on the center of Gaza from several different directions. All signs indicate that Hamas' warning of the negotiation process going back to the start point is coming true.

The Israeli military's return to Gaza happened one day before the NATO summit convenes in Washington to talk about the Ukraine crisis. The competition between Kyiv and Tel Aviv for US military support is evident.

After President Joe Biden's poor performance in the first public televised debate last week with the Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, who vehemently attacked the Biden administration's policy of unconditional support for Tel Aviv, it is widely predicted that Biden will lose the election in less than four months.

Also, Iran, the major supporter of Hamas and Hezbollah, another rival of Israel, has just seen a new president elected who is still exploring the possibility of improving the external environment for the Islamic republic.

As a proxy war between the US and its regional foes in the Middle East, when and how a cease-fire can be realized in Gaza will not be decided by the negotiations between Tel Aviv and Hamas but whether and how the US will adjust its Middle East policy in the future.

Before that is made clear, blood will continue to be shed in both Gaza and Ukraine.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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## COMMENT

Zhao Zhongxiu

## Deeper reform drives modernization

The Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China will be held in Beijing from July 15 to 18 at a time when the country has reached a critical juncture in its journey toward becoming a high-level socialist market economy.

Reform and opening-up have shaped the destiny of contemporary China. And further deepening reform and expanding opening-up to pursue Chinese modernization is essential to cope with the complex global and domestic situations, adapt to new technological and industrial changes, and meet the rising expectations of the people. They are also essential to remove deep-rooted institutional barriers to development, boost socioeconomic vitality, and use China's institutional advantages to improve national governance.

## Economic system reform is crucial

Reforming the economic system is at the heart of the comprehensive deepening of reform. In this context, the Third Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee is expected to emphasize the importance of allowing the market to play the decisive role in resource allocation, removing the visible and invisible barriers to market access for enterprises, and transforming China's economic advantages into a powerful impetus for development.

The third plenary session is also expected to take measures to improve the macro-economic governance system and the modern enterprise system with Chinese characteristics, improve the institutional mechanism to promote high-quality development, and enhance the vitality of market players. While a large number of competitive State-owned enterprises will continue to emerge, efforts are expected to be made to build a climate favorable for private enterprises, which will help expand the private sector.

With the implementation of these measures, China will continue to strengthen the socialist market economy, and move toward a more prosperous, stable and empowered future.

## High-level opening-up a world opportunity

Opening-up, in fact, is part of overall reform, for it promotes development. Hence, in the next stage, China is expected to push forward high-level, all-round systemic opening-up in terms of rules, regulations, management and standards, and continue to cultivate a high-quality business environment that is market-oriented, rule-based and global in nature.

However, China's economic development faces more uncertainties due to the intensification of the "great power game", the rise of unilateralism and protectionism, the frequent occurrence of natural disasters triggered by climate change, and a new round of scientific, technological and industrial revolutions in the making.

Promoting high-level opening-up will help China better adapt to the new global competitive environment, maintain open and inclusive global and value chains, and counter the West's efforts to contain China through "de-globalization", "decoupling" or "de-risking" measures, so as to strike the right balance between security

**The third plenary session will be the right moment to consolidate the achievements already made by China thanks to reform and opening-up, and to plan for future development.**

and development.

And by getting more countries to participate in the global value chains, China can help other countries to share the dividends of China's economic development and lay a solid material and technological foundation to achieve Chinese-style modernization.

## Boosting total factor productivity

As China enters a new stage of economic development, rising factor costs and the aging population have become major challenges as have the restrictions imposed by advanced economies on the transfer of some core technologies to China. Hence, if China fails to significantly improve total factor productivity, its economic growth rate may further decline. Given these facts, the central government has stressed that cultivating new quality productive forces is necessary for promoting high-quality development.

New quality productive forces are fuelled by revolutionary breakthroughs in technology, novel allocations of factors of production, and transformation and upgrading of industries, with a significant increase in total factor productivity being

its signature pursuit.

The ongoing technological revolution typified by green energy, AI and big data has created both opportunities and challenges. In the process of upgrading the Chinese economy, therefore, it is imperative to ensure the development of new quality productive forces.

China can be expected to take full advantage of its vast size, large population and dynamic market to promote zero-to-one innovations while expediting the one-to-ten application of new technological breakthroughs, accelerating the pace of technological upgrading, and raising the production and innovation capacity in critical industries.

## People-centered development

People-centric development is one of the basic principles driving Chinese modernization. The Party has made it clear that reforms should be people-centric and serve the people. At the third plenary session, a series of major policy reforms aimed at enhancing social equity, and improving the healthcare and social security systems and rural development programs are expected to be introduced, underscoring the Party's commitment to deliver social justice and maintain harmony, and to ensure the fruits of modernization and development are equitably distributed. This people-centric principle not only enhances social stability but also mobilizes public support for reform.

The world today faces many serious challenges including climate change and

regional conflicts that can be effectively addressed only by improving global governance. As a rising global power, China has taken measures to reform the global economic governance system. By promoting multilateralism and offering ways to overcome the challenges, China's agenda for global governance aims to help build a fairer and harmonious international order.

Promoting new quality productive forces is necessary to pursue sustainable development, original and disruptive technological innovations are needed to drive new quality productive forces, while education remains the cornerstone of technological innovation.

So governments and educational departments at all levels should take steps to attract more talents, improve the curriculums, prioritize STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) education, cultivate talents with interdisciplinary knowledge and an international outlook, and form a virtuous cycle of education, science, technology and talents, providing solid support for the development of the new quality productive forces.

The third plenary session will be the right moment to consolidate the achievements already made by China thanks to reform and opening-up, and to plan for future development.

Under the strong leadership of the Party, China is expected to build a high-level socialist market economy by 2035, with the socialist system with Chinese characteristics becoming even more prominent.

*The author is president of the University of International Business and Economics. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

Steve Farr

## Guangzhou a vigorous tale of opening-up

As an expat who has called Guangzhou home for the past decade, I am in awe of China's economic development not only in Guangzhou and Guangdong province but throughout the country. China's journey to becoming the world's second-largest economy is truly remarkable and a case study from which all countries can learn.

Economists are best qualified to share the data of China's unprecedented economic growth. As important as they are, statistics do not necessarily tell the full story of how this "rising tide has lifted all boats".

This beneficial tide especially includes community-wide improvements in people's well-being and their quality of life. People nationwide have benefited from the creation of more jobs, improvement in living standards and the country's technological advancement. China has also modernized and beautified its cities, created educational opportunities and greatly improved the healthcare and social welfare systems.

As for Guangzhou, its economic growth and the gains it has made as one of China's most prosperous and buoyant cities have not been by chance. Instead, they are a result of the foresight of the city's strong leadership. Strategically managing this growth, Guangzhou's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) is aimed at, among other things, developing the city into a global commercial, industrial and integrated transport hub and enhancing its status as a technological, educational and cultural center.

This plan got a boost last year when Guangzhou hosted the "Understanding China - Greater Bay Area Dialogue" and recognized that achieving "self-reliance in science and technology is the key to pursue the Chinese path to modernization".

Becoming self-reliant and pursuing modernization through economic growth, Guangzhou welcomes foreign investors, businesspeople and enterprises by implementing policies favoring and incentivizing high-tech industry, innovation, and research and development. In order to become a major Asia-Pacific R&D hub, Guangzhou is taking measures to attract more investment to become a top investment destination in China.

Of course, this growth and success is also credited to Guangzhou's strategic location in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the impact of the Canton Fair, the largest trade fair in China.

Residents love the city of Guangzhou thanks to the improvement in people's well-being and quality of life. Not to mention the focused and acknowledged efforts to better protect the local environment.

With close to 50 percent green space in Guangzhou, the city is recognized by the United Nations as an "international garden city". Moreover, the UN recently recognized the Guangzhou city government's commitment to improving people's quality of life by awarding it the Best Practices Award for Improving Human Settlements.

The authorities have also taken measures to preserve, promote and balance Guangzhou's traditional Lingnan culture with a modern city's urban culture. Thanks to this economic growth and enhancement, Guangzhou is more vibrant today than ever before.

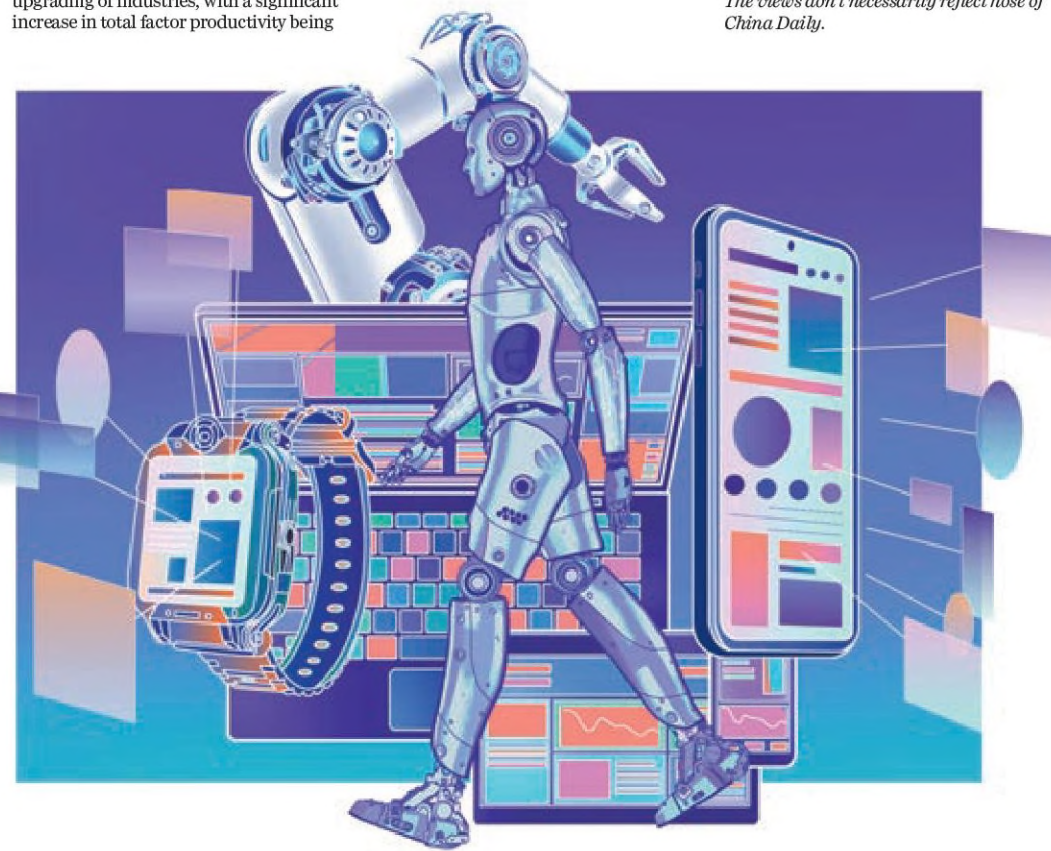
"Education is the great equalizer of our time" and our children deserve the very best. Guangzhou's economic development has benefited all educational institutions, faculty members and students. China has about 500,000 schools, and Guangzhou hosts many of the finest among them. The city's more than 80 higher education institutions rank among the best not only in the country but also the world.

The quality of life in Guangzhou also includes good health, overall well-being and a greater sense of social belonging. No wonder Guangzhou has been consistently ranked among the top cities in the "Amazing China - the Most Attractive Chinese Cities in the Eyes of Foreign Talents" competition. We have witnessed China's unprecedented economic growth as we will continue to rise together on the success of this tide.

*The author is executive director of the Secretariat Office for the Alliance of Guangzhou International Sister-City Universities. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*



**Residents love the city of Guangzhou thanks to the improvement in people's well-being and quality of life.**



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Fakhrul Islam Babu

## Leverage yuan to boost China-Bangladesh trade

In the face of a persistent dollar crisis, Bangladesh is looking to fortify its economic ties with China by leveraging the yuan for bilateral trade. Despite having the regulatory framework in place since September 2022, Bangladeshi businesses have yet to capitalize on this opportunity.

Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's ongoing visit to China is aimed at expediting this initiative, which is pivotal to stabilizing Bangladesh's economy.

China is a significant trading partner of Bangladesh, accounting for 25 percent of its total imports, but the problem of the trade imbalance should be addressed.

The post-COVID-19 economic landscape has exacerbated Bangladesh's financial challenges, with declining reserves, a 10 percent drop in garment exports, and soaring inflation. Despite a \$4.7 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund last year, Bangladesh's export sector continues to struggle. The country's financial strain was underscored when Fitch Ratings downgraded Bangladesh's credit score in May due to dwindling reserves.

In a bid to mitigate the foreign exchange reserve crisis, Bangladesh has sought a loan of 36.5 billion yuan (\$5 billion) from China. Abdur Rouf Talukder,

governor of Bangladesh Bank, the country's central bank, said that this loan, to be taken in yuan, is aimed at alleviate the foreign exchange shortage and cover import costs. The favorable low interest rate, thanks to the Shanghai Interbank Offered Rate, makes this loan more attractive compared than US dollar-denominated loans.

Bangladeshi State Minister for Commerce Ahasanul Islam Titu has proposed using local currencies — the Bangladeshi taka and the Chinese yuan — alongside the US dollar for bilateral trade. This approach could help alleviate the ongoing dollar shortage and expand regional trade.

Unlike the Indian rupee, the Chinese yuan is one of the five high-value currencies recognized by the IMF, making transactions in yuan both feasible and internationally accepted. China's Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen emphasized this point while addressing the media after meeting with Bangladeshi Planning Minister Abdus Salam at the Planning Commission office.

He said that the fluctuation of the dol-

lar rate is now a worldwide problem, which China is also facing, and that China wishes to work with Bangladesh. He highlighted that engaging with Bangladesh in using their currencies — the yuan and the taka — for trade could be a viable alternative to using the highly fluctuating US dollar. In addition to trade, China seeks to collaborate with Bangladesh in other development activities.

Salam echoed this sentiment, acknowledging China's significant role in supporting Bangladesh's five-year plans, and assured that any delays in the disbursement of the promised funds from China would be resolved through discussions.

To foster yuan-denominated trade between Bangladesh and China, several measures need to be implemented:

First, it is necessary to strengthen the banking infrastructure to facilitate the yuan's transactions, and bank officials must be trained to handle yuan-denominated letters of credit and transactions.

Second, conducting awareness and training programs to educate businesses on the benefits and procedures of trading in the yuan can encourage them to switch to yuan-denominated trade and other exchanges.

Third, offering incentives such as reduced transaction fees or favorable

exchange rates for yuan-denominated trade can encourage businesses to shift from dollar- to yuan-transactions.

Fourth, strengthening bilateral agreements to ensure smooth and secure yuan-denominated transactions will foster trust and confidence among businesses.

And fifth, establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation system to track the progress of yuan-denominated trade and address any challenges promptly is vital.

By implementing these measures, Bangladesh can effectively use the yuan for trade, reducing its dependency on the US dollar and strengthening its economic relationship with China. With Sheikh Hasina visiting China, there is renewed optimism that these strategic initiatives will pave the way for a more balanced and resilient bilateral trade framework. The move not only aims to stabilize Bangladesh's economy but also to enhance the economic interdependence between the two countries, fostering a more sustainable and mutually beneficial partnership.

*The author is general secretary of the China Bangladesh Friendship Center Limited and president of Asian Club Limited. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## GLOBAL VIEWS

MAGED REFAAT ABOULMAGD

## Antidote to deglobalization

Belt and Road Initiative is a significant catalyst for a more integrated world and more interconnected global trade

During the past 10 years, there have been calls for deglobalization and decoupling as a means to curb unbalanced trade, rein in immigration, and mend inequalities of assets and wealth. Some consider the world to have entered a period of deglobalization, citing recent events such as Brexit, Trumpism, the Ukraine crisis, problems with supply chains, the global energy crisis and the past decade's decline in foreign direct investment.



Yet it would be a grave mistake to overlook the benefits of globalization which are being ignored to serve populist politics. Benefits such as interconnectivity between cultures, access to markets, lower cost of products, unimpeded trade, spread of technology and innovation, better utilization of human talent, and higher standards of living across the globe are essential for economic growth, human development and societal stability.

During the last three decades the world has also witnessed a gradual erosion of the United Nations' credibility despite the essential usefulness of its many structures, with many impotent organs paralyzed by state rivalries. This trend ignores the fact that if we were to dismantle the UN system today, we would probably reinvent it tomorrow because of the global nature of today's challenges. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the World Health Organization, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, and all other UN organs are in fact useful tools for addressing today's challenges such as global warming, pandemics, poverty and the green energy transition in a collective fashion. In other words, the failures of the UN Security Council in preventing wars and its shortcomings in preserving peace should not cloud our judgment on the usefulness of the UN global system.

Similarly, the World Trade Organization was established with a view to facilitating trade for the benefit of all, managing competition, regulating trade, settling trade disputes, and serving as a forum to negotiate trade agreements. However, its authority and reputation have also been undermined by several practices, including the delayed arbitration

process and inability to agree on new rules for agricultural products — highlighting clashing views between developing and developed countries — rules which favor multinational companies while hindering developing nations from developing their infant industries, and the persistence of protectionist tariffs.

With this negative sentiment engulfing global action, the Belt and Road Initiative stands as a unique avenue to boost investments, create jobs, and upgrade the infrastructure needed for trade, perhaps in a way not seen since the end of World War II. Since it was launched in 2013, the BRI has managed to attract more than 150 partner countries and 30 international organizations, and over 200 BRI agreements have been signed to connect multiple continents across land and sea.

Amid Western criticism and skepticism of the BRI, the US proposed its own Build Back Better World initiative in June 2021, and the European Union proposed the Global Gateway Initiative, a few months later in December. Both plans were anchored on the same fundamentals as the BRI, signifying that China has successfully challenged the existing geopolitical frameworks in Africa, Latin America and even more importantly in East and Southeast Asia. Both Western initiatives were also testament that global trade is essential for human development and growth. Moreover, technology has unleashed powerful globalized trends that are irreversible, whether that is in international travel, finance and trade, or borderless criminal, terrorist and health threats.

There is a problem with the assumption that deglobalization is a fact on the ground. The data does not fully back it up. A closer look at economic data shows that even though governments have increasingly adopted policies aimed at strengthening their own resilience, the world economy is still evolving to become more, not less, globalized in key fields, and more dependent on Chinese supply in particular. Global trade surged during the pandemic, and the world's trade with China accelerated rather than slowed. A pandemic-era shift toward goods and away from services partly accounts for the acceleration. But the growth in trade with China also reflects the fact that China is simply producing quality high-tech exports such as electric vehicles, wind turbines, solar panels and vital electronic and battery

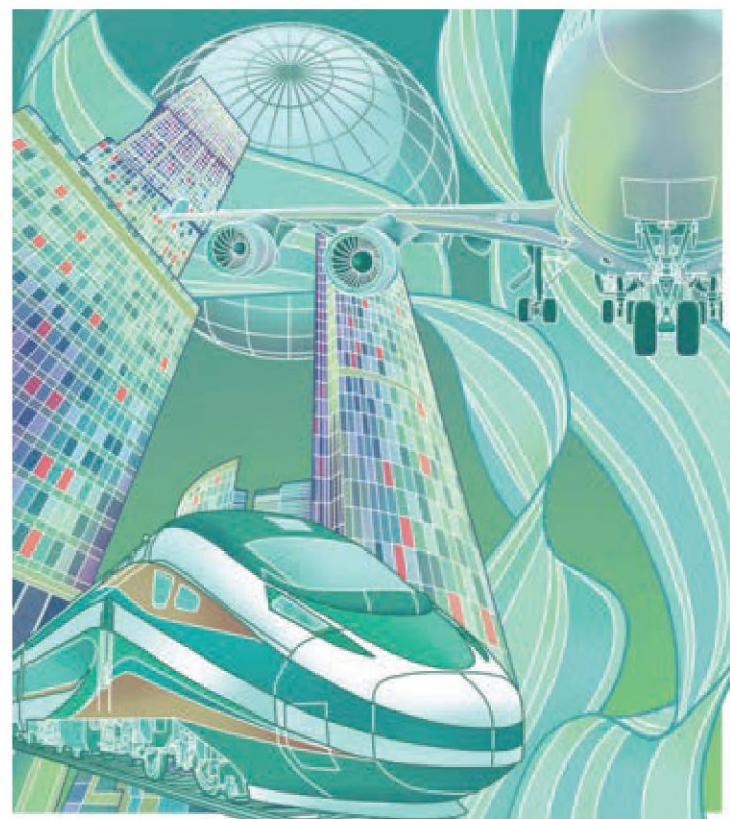
components — at a price few can match.

Tariff wars always get news coverage, yet this should not be seen as evidence of deglobalization. In reality, countries lacking preferential access to the US market, for example, can still do incredibly well with the WTO's standard trade terms. In fact, US imports from Southeast Asia have soared in the past six years. The Southeast Asian members of the Trans-Pacific Partnership increased their exports to the US much more rapidly after Trump withdrew from the TPP than before. In fact, since the introduction of the Trump tariffs, China's economy has only become more central to world trade. Even with the rise in Western tariffs on China, the world's economy is still deeply integrated. If anything, Western-Chinese interdependence has been masked, not severed.

Allowing the WTO and international agreements and institutions to decay only makes the world less efficient in its efforts to safeguard peace and achieve prosperity. Deglobalization could vanish quickly but it could remain until policymakers are able to reform international institutions to bestow them with sufficient power to operate efficiently. Equally important is to accept the reality that while we could form clusters based on our interests or values such as BRICS or OPEC for example, global interconnectivity and trade will remain central to the evolution of human civilization. The great convergence of East and West, North and South as advocated by Kishore Mahbubani may not be as far-fetched a vision as we may think today.

In her book *Empire of Silver: A New Monetary History of China*, Xu Jin argued that China's adoption of silver as in monetary tax payment in 1436 during Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) served as a catalyst for the emergence of an early form of globalized trade. On my part, I would argue that the BRI will be a catalyst for a more integrated world and more interconnected global trade instead of regionalized trade system. The BRI is simply an initiative that the world needs and will strive to make succeed.

*The author is an ambassador member of Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs and a member of Egyptian-Chinese Friendship Association. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

LU FENG AND PAN SONGLIJIANG

## Four-wheel drive

China's quartet of prowess is playing a key role in advancing Belt and Road infrastructure projects

Since the Belt and Road Initiative was proposed more than 10 years ago, various infrastructure projects jointly promoted by BRI partner countries have had an influential impact. Large-scale infrastructure projects have not only changed the landscape of the world economy, but also enhanced the industrialization level and well-being of participating countries, thus becoming textbook cases of contemporary international economic cooperation and development.



Lu Feng



Pan Songlijiang

Large-scale infrastructure projects under the BRI have yielded substantial benefits because China can provide many developing countries with assistance in four major ways to advance BRI cooperation.

The first one is China's strength in the implementation of foreign contracted projects.

Construction and engineering is a direct economic activity that creates the remarkable achievements in BRI infrastructure construction, but many BRI partner countries lack the capabilities for taking on large-scale engineering and construction projects.

China's capabilities in foreign project contracting have greatly increased since the launch of reform and opening-up, which empowers Chinese enterprises to participate in large-scale construction projects under the BRI. Since the BRI was proposed in 2013, Chinese enterprises have contracted projects in over 184 countries and regions and seen their competitiveness rapidly increase to be among global leaders. The scale of contracted projects by Chinese enterprises in BRI partner countries has also increased significantly. However, in recent years, there have been relative or absolute adjustments in growth, suggesting that there are some new circumstances and new contradictions in Belt and Road cooperation that need to be addressed.

The second one is the supply capability for equipment and relevant material.

To build BRI infrastructure projects, it is necessary to invest in capital products such as mechanical equipment and relevant materials. Equipment and materials generally account for the biggest part (around 60 to 70 percent) of the total costs of foreign contracted projects.

China has established a complete industrial system, which can provide most of the equipment and materials needed for large-scale infrastructure construction. Judging from international experience, when a country

offers preferential terms to developing countries for cooperation in implementing infrastructure projects, it usually prefers to use its own equipment and materials. In keeping with international practices, Chinese equipment and materials have been encouraged for use in these projects, which has helped to promote production capacity cooperation among BRI participating countries.

The third factor is China's strength in outward foreign direct investment. Large-scale infrastructure projects usually require hefty capital investment, and necessary capital supply is one of the prerequisites for the planning and implementation of such projects. Most of the BRI participating countries are low- and middle-income countries, and a considerable proportion of them are low-income ones, which lack domestic financing capabilities and face many constraints in getting external funding.

China's strengths in providing funding support play a key role in promoting BRI cooperation. There are two major types of financing methods used by China to promote Belt and Road cooperation — direct financing provided by OFDI and various types of funds, and debt financing provided by various financial institutions.

OFDI means that Chinese companies are building factories, mines, transportation and other infrastructure and manufacturing projects in host countries, which require infrastructure projects on various scales.

Foreign direct investment brings savings and foreign exchange to the host countries, helping to fill in the gaps in these two areas. China has set up a number of international funds to make direct investments in BRI cooperation projects. Since the BRI was proposed, China has also seen the emergence of a number of local Belt and Road investment funds, which focus on equity investment mainly in the infrastructure sector.

The fourth one is China's capabilities in credit and debt financing.

Various types of credit and debt financing are the most important ways for China to fund large-scale Belt and Road infrastructure projects. As can be seen from the relevant cases, the cooperation programs between China and BRI partner countries on specific infrastructure projects often include the provision of loan support by designated financial institutions in China. Even official preferential loans are not provided in the form of grant funds, but rather are linked to cooperation in infrastructure projects.

China has carried out several rounds of institutional and policy reforms and adjustments on foreign credit financing since it launched reform and opening-up, particularly since the turn of the century. The country has formed a diversified debt financing system guided by official aid, mainly constituted by policy

financial institutions, and actively participated in by market-based financial entities, which plays a critical role in boosting large-scale infrastructure construction and interconnectivity along the Belt and Road.

In recent years, China and BRI partner countries have seen various degrees of decline in the growth rate of contracted projects, international trade, and debt financing, as a result of new challenges posed by changes in the global economic environment. The COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions have increased volatility and uncertainty in the global economy, as well as the pressure for adjustment in the international project contracting market. Difficulties in economic recovery, divergence in development trends and rising sovereign debt risks in some developing countries have also created new problems for the traditional financing cooperation mechanism.

To further advance Belt and Road cooperation, it is imperative to improve and innovate the investment and financing methods. Policies should focus on strengthening the identification and prevention of risks in all aspects of financing. Specific improvement measures need to be adopted to enhance the sustainability and the steadiness of BRI financing.

To start with, the practical experiences of Belt and Road cooperation thus far should be assessed, the economic development and debt sustainability of host countries comprehensively evaluated, the pace of cooperation on large-scale infrastructure projects moderately adjusted, and highly efficient projects that are "small but beautiful" should be the focus.

Second, market principles should be applied in contracted projects to gradually increase the ratio of project financing and moderately reduce the weight of policy financing.

Third, full-process risk management and control of joint construction projects need strengthening by identifying investment and financing risks beforehand, preventing risks during the construction period, and governing risks afterward. The effectiveness of policy communication among countries participating in the BRI should be enhanced.

Last, on the premise of scientific and effective governance and reasonable cost sharing, the multilateral governance mechanism of global sovereign debt risks should be innovated.

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JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

## LIFE

All about Gen Z

Z  
WEEKLY

## Hainan: from hidden gem to global hub

Hainan has become a sought-after destination for global youth, drawn by its opportunities, natural beauty, and inclusive policies.

From left to right:

Anne Jing Ping Wen from the US, Vitor Moura from Brazil, Zhong Yutong from China, Jood Ghazwan Sharaf from Bulgaria, Sergi Drago from Spain, Dylan Walker from the US, Melina Gisela Weber from Germany, Andreev Aleksei from Russia.

ALEXANDER ROUX / FOR CHINA DAILY

By MENG WENJIE  
mengwenjie@121st.cn

Jan Kerekes, a Canadian who has lived in South China's Hainan province for six years, traveled extensively around the world before making this island his home.

In the latest episode of China Daily's *Youth Power*, which aired on June 30, Kerekes shared what led him to settle down in Hainan.

Although Kerekes was an experienced traveler, he knew little about Hainan before arriving. Over the past six years, he has witnessed the island transform into a popular destination for global adventurers.

"Hainan is really opening up. The whole world comes here, and you see the opportunities right in front of you," Kerekes said. "It is a place where you can pursue your dreams."

One of the eight young guests in this episode, Andreev Aleksei, a 30-year-old Russian, found Kerekes's story particularly resonant. He visited Hainan in 2017 and gradually fell in love with the place.

"When I went back to my country, I missed the island so much that I had to come back," Aleksei said.

Now a teacher at Hainan University in Haikou, the capital city,

Aleksei highlighted the island's promising opportunities and abundant natural resources.

"Hainan not only hosts the Boao Forum for Asia but it is also the best place for windsurfing and parachuting," he said.

Aleksei also noticed that the road he used to ride his motorcycle along the Mulan Bay coastline in Wenchang, which was narrow and in poor condition four years ago, is now in excellent shape. Additionally, several new highways have been constructed.

"At the end of last year, the Hainan Coastal Scenic Highway opened. It's a road that goes all along the island," he said.

To encourage international talent to come, Hainan has introduced 16 measures to streamline living and working conditions for foreigners. These measures cover various areas, including entry clearance, accommodation and residency, healthcare, investment, professional qualifications, and business development.

For example, Aleksei mentioned that Hainan offers numerous benefits and advantageous policies to assist global talents in establishing businesses in the region.

"[The application process] takes just three days, and it can be completed entirely online,

"We can see that China is not an economy that goes within itself. It goes outward to benefit the rest of humanity."

Jood Ghazwan Sharaf, 27, a Bulgarian student at Tsinghua University

even for foreigners," he said.

Melina Gisela Weber, 31, a German student at Beijing Foreign Studies University who started her business in Beijing, emphasized the importance of getting professional assistance to obtain essential information when launching a business venture in a foreign country.

The young guests also visited the Haikou Municipal Government Service Center to learn more about these measures. There, they met people from around the world with different needs — whether for visas, education, or business.

"I think it's a testament to the inclusivity of the entire province," said Jood Ghazwan Sharaf, a 27-year-old Bulgarian student at Tsinghua University.

Dylan Walker, 27, from the United States, was impressed by the efficiency of the "one window for all" system, a comprehensive

service approach.

"It's like a one-stop service," he said. "You don't have to run all over the place."

Anne Jing Ping Wen, a 24-year-old from the US studying at Peking University, was surprised to see international signs throughout the hall.

"A lot of the signs are in English, which is rare and makes it extremely understandable for foreigners," she said.

In addition to aiding tourists and residents from around the world in their daily lives and business activities, Hainan has made significant economic progress.

One notable example is the Yangpu Economic Development Zone, which has evolved from a small port into Hainan's largest international port.

Established as a state-level development zone and approved by the State Council in 1992, it

benefits from free trade zone policies and is recognized as the "showcase" of the Hainan Free Trade Port.

In the zone, the young guests explored the Yangpu Offshore Wind Power Industrial Park, where they discovered Hainan's commitment to developing its marine economy and striving for a harmonious coexistence with the ocean.

Lin Qingsong, the park's general manager, highlighted Hainan's leading role in wind power development, citing its vast sea area and abundant wind resources.

According to him, while Hainan's wind power utilization is still in its early stages compared to coastal regions like Jiangsu and Guangdong provinces in East and South China, this project stands out as a pioneering model for future large-scale offshore wind power initiatives.

"What caught my attention is that this is the very first model used on the island," said Sergi Drago, a 30-year-old Spanish student from Tsinghua University. "The success of this model here will be replicated in other parts of the island. I'm really looking forward to seeing the next steps in development."

Sharaf was impressed by China's innovative economic experi-

ments and its hands-on approach of "crossing the river by touching the stones".

"We can see that China is not an economy that goes within itself. It goes outward to benefit the rest of humanity," she said. "The experiments that are done here are not limited to Hainan. They also demonstrate that China is willing to work for the future."

As a global resident of Hainan, Aleksei encouraged international tourists to explore the region.

He believes that this island is not only a dynamic free trade model with great potential and various opportunities for the future but also a natural paradise with picturesque coastal views and a laid-back lifestyle that strikes a balance between work and leisure.

"This is quite a unique place in China," Aleksei said. "No matter what purpose brings you here, whether it's tourism, starting a business, or work, just come here, and you will fall in love with it."



Online  
Watch the video  
by scanning  
the code.

## Social Media Digest

## Pawsitive health craze

Recently, there has been a notable increase in the purchase of supplements such as fish oil and glucosamine for joint health, and coenzyme Q10 for heart benefits among young people in China. Interestingly, these health supplements are not intended for themselves but rather for their pets.

According to a survey released by CCTV Finance last year, 75.81 percent of respondents are willing to spend on supplements for their pets, particularly those aged between 18 and 35, in hopes of extending and improving their pets' lives.

Tang Shiyang, who owns two small dogs, told New Weekly that she spends around 400 yuan (\$55.03) monthly on pet supple-

ments. "For larger breeds such as Labrador retrievers, golden retrievers, and German shepherds,



There has been an increase in pet supplement purchases. vcg

the costs for supplements can be two to three times higher than for smaller dogs," she said.

A pet blogger known as Y (pseudonym), who cares for two senior dogs, takes a cautious approach to using supplements. She told New Weekly that despite receiving several pet supplement advertisements each month, she consistently declines them.

Y points out that supplements need to be processed by the liver and kidneys — organs particularly vulnerable in aging dogs.

"Instead of investing in unnecessary supplements for senior dogs, it is more advisable to use the money for regular checkups. If health issues arise, then consider supplements or medications tailored to their specific needs," she suggested.

## Scholarly spirits

In certain major Chinese cities, a new trend has recently emerged where bars are being repurposed into unconventional venues for academic discussions.

In early June, at a rooftop bar in Beijing, a group of young people gathered not for casual drinking, but to participate in an academic lecture on psychology.

The cozy atmosphere, illuminated by warm yellow lights, created an interesting backdrop to the scholarly concepts displayed on PowerPoint slides.

Despite this unusual fusion, as reported by Beijing Youth Daily, the attendance surpassed expectations. Over 60 people attended the event, prompting the bar owner to borrow extra chairs from nearby

areas to accommodate the large audience.

This lecture series at bars is initiated by Zhang Jianing, a graduate of the Communication University of China, who draws inspiration from a historical practice. Zhang points out that in ancient Greece, gatherings like Plato's "The Symposium" involved engaging in academic conversations over wine, setting a precedent for discussing scholarly topics in informal settings.

Hosting lectures in bars breaks away from conventions, offering participants a novel experience and a more relaxed environment for interaction.

Zhang recalled that during his time at university, he and his peers often took part in such cultural exchanges. However, oppor-

tunities like these became rare after graduation.

"We want to share our perspectives with fellow enthusiasts and create a relaxed environment for dialogue," Zhang told Beijing Youth Daily.

MENG WENJIE



Bars in certain major Chinese cities are being repurposed into venues for academic discussions. vcg

## LIFE

# Job opportunities offered across diverse industries

Graduation season sees robust employment opportunities for graduates amid strong demand in both manufacturing and service sectors.

**From left to right:** Students in the "Belt and Road Customized Training Program" at Shenyang Institute of Technology attend a machine tools class. Students participate in a job fair organized by Guangdong Machinery Technician College on May 30. At Beijing Hospitality Institute, students undergo training in culinary service.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY / VCG



By GUI QIAN and QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou and WU YONG in Shenyang

A few weeks ago, Guangdong Machinery Technician College held a job fair for its students, attracting over 152 companies offering more than 3,600 job positions. These opportunities spanned various industries, from intelligent manufacturing to automotive technology and early childhood education.

All class advisors for graduating students attended the event, offering detailed guidance.

Liu Juan, advisor for the school's computer numerical control (CNC) program, noted that each student in her class had already received an average of five job offers, with internships starting at a minimum monthly salary of 5,000 yuan, including free meals and accommodation.

Such scenes are common during the graduation season, with June and July being peak months for university graduates transitioning from campus to the workforce. Job fairs during this time serve as platforms for them to launch their careers.

According to the Human Resources and Social Security Department of Guangdong Province, there is a particularly strong demand for blue-collar workers.

At a job fair hosted by the Guangzhou Huangpu District Federation of Industry and Commerce, the job supply-to-demand ratio reached an impressive 6:1, indicating that for every job seeker, there were six job opportunities available.

In addition to offering over 100 traditional roles in fields like automation control, modern logistics, and graphic design, more than 20 new positions have been introduced, such as AI technology application engineers, data security engineers, and game trainers, providing students with more choices.

For manufacturing enterprises that focus on blue-collar workers, the expansion of technology in recent years has led to greater demand for skilled and high-quality talent. Many companies now proactively contact schools to engage in school-enterprise cooperation for recruitment.

The "Belt and Road Customized Training Program", launched jointly by Wuhan Huazhong Numerical Control Corporation in Central China's Hubei province and Shenyang Institute of Technology in Northeast China's Liaoning province, is a prime example of this kind of cooperation.

Since September 2023, 42 Chinese senior students have been selected for this class, receiving training in both professional skills and Russian. After graduation, these students will work at Huazhong Corporation and other related companies. These companies export a significant number of CNC systems and machine tools to countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, such as Russia and Belarus, where the graduates will work as CNC technicians, performing system debugging and after-sales maintenance.

The program includes over 600 hours of customized Russian courses, taught by more than five Russian teachers. The curriculum covers language, cultural etiquette, and local customs.

As of this writing, all the students in the class have secured their job placements, with companies eagerly recruiting them even before graduation.

Yan Liang, 22, from Qiqihar, Northeast China's Heilongjiang province, is a student in this project. He said the program has made him a versatile talent with both language and technical skills, making him highly sought after in the industry.

Another student, Zhai Shengkai,

“Students may be uncertain when they first enroll, but as they progress, they often discover a bright path ahead.”

Shi Jingying, director of Internship and Career Development Center at the Beijing Hospitality Institute

from Dandong, Liaoning, shares similar feelings. "In our mechanical industry, finding a job is not difficult. I didn't feel any employment pressure or anxiety. Even before joining the customized class, I had already received offers from more than three companies," said the 23-year-old. "After the training, the prospects became even better. I now feel particularly competitive."

In March, the class also included students from Russia and Belarus to study CNC technology and Chinese. Rychkov Rodion, 20, is one of them. He comes from a town near Lake Baikal in Russia, where young people mainly work in the manufacturing and machine industry, coal exploration, and animal husbandry. He studied petroleum exploration at a university back home and joined the training program because he "really likes China and wants to experience Chinese culture firsthand".

"China and Russia have maintained a long-standing friendship. The history lessons I learned in middle school mentioned that China and Russia have supported each other through significant historical moments. The Belt and Road Initiative

can enhance the economic development of participating countries and improve people's living standards," Rodion said.

He highlighted that the program's curriculum is particularly well-designed, aligning with the most advanced social needs, ensuring that the knowledge system matches real-world demands, and providing students with internship opportunities. "I feel very optimistic about my employment prospects," he said.

## Service industry boom

In addition to the demand for talent in the manufacturing sector, the need for professionals in the service industry is also significant.

According to Shi Jingying, director of Internship and Career Development Center at the Beijing Hospitality Institute, the school's flagship program in hotel management offers around 2,600 job positions for approximately 800 graduates each year during its campus recruitment season.

About 35 percent of these graduates work in international high-end hotels and the tourism industry, 5 to 8 percent start their own businesses, and the majority of the rest enter broader service industries such as finance and luxury goods.

"The high job placement rate in relevant fields is a testament to the school's educational achievements. It shows that students are both capable and passionate about their chosen field, and it also reflects the strong desire for skilled professionals in China's hospitality industry," Shi said.

According to her, in recent years, with the rise of cultural and tourism trends across the country, many graduates have ventured into this sector. "This year, at least three graduates of the institute have started their own bed-and-breakfast businesses," she said.

The strong employment out-

comes are attributed to the close alignment of the school's curriculum with industry needs. Chen Xiwen, a graduate from Xiangtan in Central China's Hunan province, secured a position as the secretary to the food and beverage director at a five-star hotel in Hangzhou six months before her graduation, assisting in the management of five restaurants. "The job required three years of work experience, and I landed it right after graduating. Quite impressive, isn't it?" she said proudly.

Chen attributes her success to the in-depth internship experiences she had during her studies. According to her, the school operates a four-star teaching hotel where students undergo a 16-week practical course, gaining firsthand experience in various roles ranging from reception to management positions, and from housekeeping to culinary service.

In addition to this, the school organizes two six-month industry internships, providing students with early exposure to working in high-end hotels and enabling them to start strong upon graduation.

Shi pointed out that guiding graduates' career paths is a core responsibility and educational philosophy for schools offering vocational education.

For students and their families, many of whom have spent years focusing on academic scores throughout primary and secondary education, career planning can sometimes be overlooked.

"I believe the greatest advantage of vocational education is that it provides a clear vision for students to see their future development," Shi said. "Students may be uncertain when they first enroll, but as they progress, they often discover a bright path ahead."

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## LIFE

# Empowering solo living

DIY tutorial channel teaches practical skills for independent living and challenges gender stereotypes, empowering a growing audience of young women.

By LI XINRAN  
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"When you see water dripping like this, it usually means there's something wrong with the rubber hose," Lulu (pseudonym) explained in a video on fixing faucet leaks.

The video was posted on her channel, "Tutorials for Independent Girls", on the Chinese platform Bilibili. Since May, Lulu has been regularly updating her content, and her subscriber count has grown from a few dozen to over 430,000.

Focused on maintenance and improving functionality for women living alone, Lulu primarily shares videos catering to this demographic. She has been creating similar content on other platforms for several years, but the topic has only recently gained significant popularity.

According to the 2023 China Statistical Yearbook, one-person households now make up 16.77 percent of all households. A 2021 report by the Beike Institution, which studies the internet and housing market, projects that the number of young adults aged 20 to 39 living alone is expected to increase from 18 million in 2010 to between 40 million and 70 million in 2030.

"There's a growing demand for tutorial videos of household repair tasks," Lulu said. "I've been living alone for 13 years, and I've learned how to fix many things. My hope is to help as many people as possible, especially girls."

However, Lulu faces controversy because some criticize her for potentially stirring gender divides by only targeting "girls" as the channel's name indicates.

"I didn't choose this name to attract attention or create gender division but to make sure that my videos reach my target audience more easily via algorithms," Lulu clarified.

"Even if you want to believe women are no less capable than men, the reality is that women often face distinct and sometimes greater challenges in society."

Lulu drew from her own experience as an example. She has had a passion for dismantling machines and gadgets since childhood, though her parents had different ideas. "Growing up, my parents often told me what girls should or shouldn't do. However, I believe I should be the one choosing what to learn," she said.

She decided to teach herself useful skills that her parents and society hadn't encouraged her to learn. Although video platforms weren't as vibrant 10 years ago as they are now, there were still basic instructional videos available online.



Top: Lulu (pseudonym) fixes a ceiling fan light in her apartment.  
Above: Lulu showcases all her tools for fixing household appliances.  
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Lulu feels a strong sense of responsibility as a content creator.

"Most of my followers are Gen Zers who are just starting out in the world. Although not all repair tasks are familiar to me at first, I'm committed to learning and practicing so that I can master them and confidently teach my followers," she said.

Lulu admitted that she has faced failures too. Once, she tried to connect a washing machine by converting a single faucet into a dual outlet faucet and made a mistake. She had to hire a professional to fix it, during which she learned the correct method. "Learning is a process for everyone, including myself," she said.

In fact, Lulu has recently been studying for an electrical certificate to expand her knowledge and provide more diverse content for her audience.

She acknowledges that electrical maintenance can be dangerous, and her followers may not be able to replicate it themselves. "They may still need professional assistance, but understanding the basics can save them money and trouble when hiring someone else to do the job," she said.

Lulu's most viewed video to date, posted on May 6, shows how to replace a car's windshield washer fluid and it has garnered over 774,000 views. In the video, Lulu not only demonstrates the procedure but also shares useful tips, such as recommending freeze-proof washer fluid for those living in northern China, where temperatures can drop below freezing in winter.

"Some comments question why I teach such basic tasks or if it's even worth making a video about them," Lulu said. "I admit that some of the tasks are simple, but the truth is that many girls find them intimidating because they are not familiar with gadget internals."

Lulu mentioned that she's not naturally comfortable on camera but decided to film videos to inspire other girls with the message that "we can do it".

Lulu spoke of one follower who said that she, too, had faced discouragement and criticism from her parents and society. She even began to wonder whether being a girl inherently meant she wasn't capable of fixing machines in the first place.

"I was heartened to know that watching my videos gave her the confidence to try," said Lulu.

While her channel aims to empower women, Lulu noted that some male followers also watch and learn from her, even addressing her as "sis".

"I welcome everyone to engage and communicate with me. I enjoy learning and growing alongside my followers," she said.

## Overseas Report

# Framing futures: one photographer's journey of hope

By LI ZIYANG  
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One day in September 2020, Liu Ailun met two little girls in Laos. They were sitting in a tuk-tuk, a common form of public transportation in South-eastern Asia.

Captivated by their cheerful smiles and bright eyes, the 31-year-old Chinese photographer asked their father, who was the driver, if he could take photos of them.

While chatting, Liu learned that the two sisters were of school-age, but their family couldn't afford their school fees. Liu offered to provide financial support for their education and arranged to meet them the next morning, but the father didn't show up.

Determined, Liu managed to locate the family by the end of the day, but they were initially hesitant

to trust him. With a local friend vouching for Liu, the family eventually accepted his generosity. Just four days later, the sisters were enrolled in a primary school.

"I found comfort and inner happiness in helping the girls, so I didn't want to stop," Liu said.

In October 2020, Liu initiated a long-term public welfare project called Hope Vision under his own photography brand — "Hope" is also his daughter's name. The project cooperates with a center for disabled children called Hands of Hope in Vientiane, the capital of Laos.

Each month, Liu gathers a group of volunteers to visit the hearing-impaired children at the center, providing both material support and emotional companionship.

They bring items such as stationery, drinks, food, toys, and other necessities. They also spend half the day engaging with the children by playing games, attending classes, or "chatting" with them using sign language.

When the Songkran Water Festival approaches, they would buy a water gun for each child. "This idea came from my daughter and son,

who enjoy playing with the kids there," Liu said.

In fact, Liu and his two children have set up a family project called Pay it Forward. Occasionally, they help one person in need and suggest that this person also help someone else in whatever way they can, ensuring that the kindness continues and doesn't stop with them.

Liu likes sharing posts about his welfare activities on social media, and whenever he does, he receives numerous supportive messages and even financial contributions from the younger generation in China. Interestingly, even if some of them are unfamiliar with Laos, they still want to help.

"One possible reason, I think, is that many young people today are under so much pressure that they easily feel isolated and purposeless," Liu said. "When they realize they can make a difference for others, their lives become about more than just themselves — they're responding to a distant cry for help."

In August 2023, Liu and China Southern Power Grid Company collaborated on a new welfare initiative called Lights of Hope. Through

this program, the disabled children at Hands of Hope had the opportunity to participate in professional painting classes at least once a week.

Three months later, the children completed a series of artworks. Liu was amazed by their extraordinary creativity, so he decided to organize a special exhibition for these young artists, marking their first-ever exhibition.

Liu himself underwent a serious leg surgery once, so he understands what disabled children go through and how they feel when they face prejudices from others. He was lucky at the time to have the support from his mother, friends, and children so that he could walk out of that challenging and dark period.

"I want these local children to see — like I did — that even if you were born into a dark house, there's someone out there holding a small hammer to break open the rusty locks and open the window to let the light in," he said.

Ever since Liu arrived in Laos at the age of 15, he has fallen in love with the country and its people. Currently, about 60 percent of his daily work is dedicated to welfare pro-



Liu Ailun (first from left) folds paper with children at Hands of Hope in Vientiane, Laos, on Sept 5, 2021. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

jects, with his responsibilities including organizing, planning, communicating, and implementing them.

Liu aims to expand these projects to reach more people and regions in

the coming years.

"I hope that one day, even if I'm no longer in Laos, those I've helped will continue to assist others in need, passing on hope, love, and kindness. This is my biggest wish," he said.