

Tourist magnet

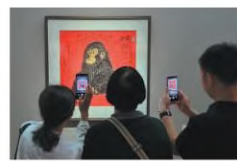
Northwestern region holds growing appeal amid summer travel boom

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Eternal legacy

Renowned late artist bids farewell to world with show of 'latest work'

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# CHINA DAILY

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## Political resolution of Ukraine crisis urged

Xi advocates early cease-fire during meeting with Orban in Beijing

By CAO DESHENG  
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President Xi Jinping said on Monday that a political settlement of the Ukraine crisis and an early cease-fire are in the best interest of all parties, and urged the international community to create conditions for direct dialogue and negotiations between Russia and Ukraine.

Xi made the remarks during a meeting in Beijing with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who arrived in the Chinese capital on Monday morning. "Peace mission 3.0" is how Orban captioned a picture posted on social media soon after his arrival in Beijing.

Orban's visit to the Chinese capital comes on the heels of his trips last week to Moscow and Kyiv, where he proposed that Ukraine consider agreeing to an immediate cease-fire with Russia.

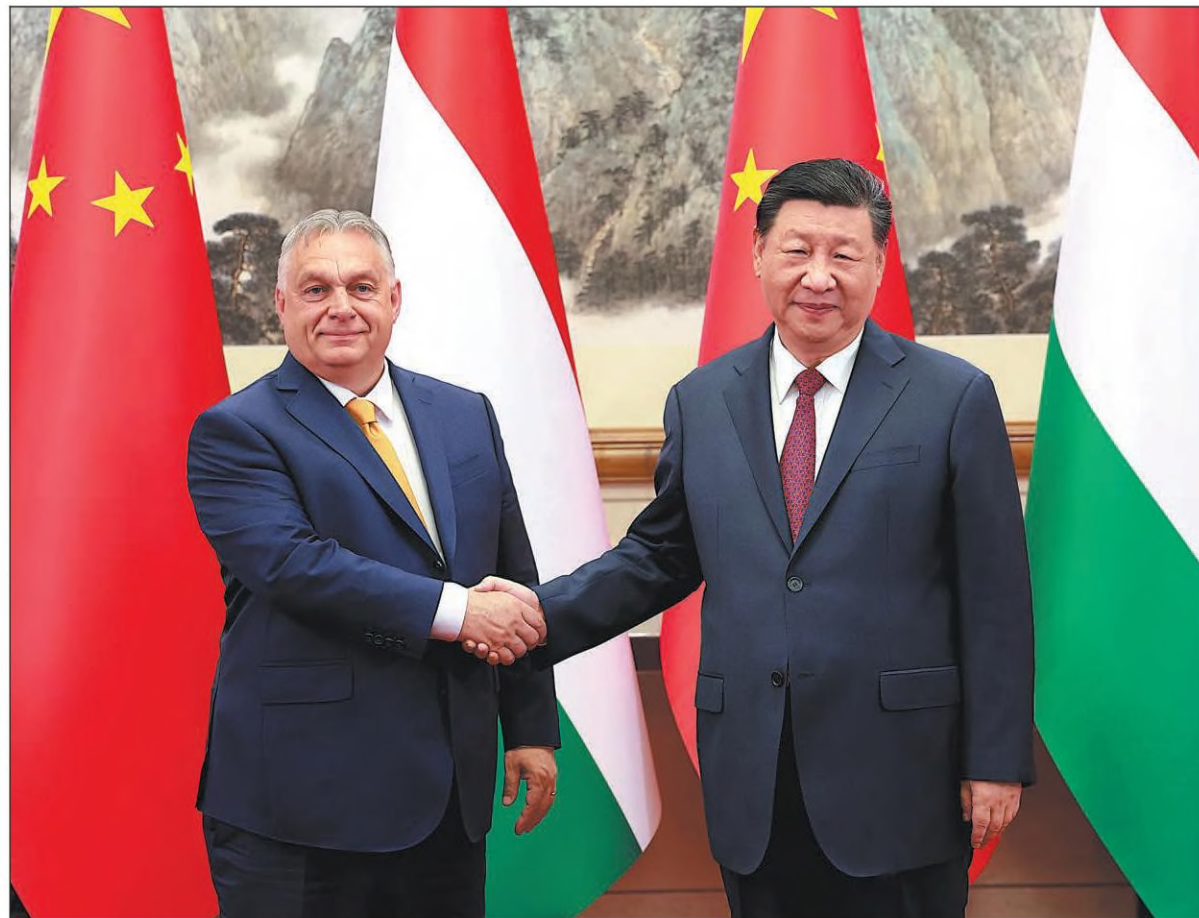
During the meeting in Beijing, the two leaders engaged in in-depth discussions on the Ukraine crisis. Orban briefed Xi about his recent visits to Russia and Ukraine. Xi commended him for his efforts to promote a political resolution of the Ukraine crisis and outlined China's views and propositions on the matter.

Xi said that priority should be given to adhering to the "three principles of no spillover from the battlefield, no escalation of fighting and no adding fuel to the fire by relevant parties", in order to quickly cool down the situation.

He underlined the need for the international community to facilitate direct dialogue and negotiations between Russia and Ukraine. Only when all major powers exert "positive rather than negative influence" can a cease-fire occur, he said.

Xi said that China has been actively facilitating peace talks in its own way, encouraging and supporting all efforts conducive to a peaceful resolution of the crisis. Noting that the basic principles and efforts of China and Hungary are aligned, he said that China is willing to continue its communication with Hungary and relevant parties.

On Wednesday, Xi reiterated



President Xi Jinping meets with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban on Monday in Beijing. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

China's position on the Ukraine crisis during his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Astana, Kazakhstan. He said that China is willing to continue making positive efforts to promote a political settlement of the crisis.

Following his meeting with Xi, Orban posted on social media that China is a "key power" in creating conditions for peace in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. "This is why I came to meet with President Xi in Beijing, just two months after his official visit to Budapest," Orban wrote.

Hungary assumed the rotating presidency of the European Union at the beginning of July.

During his meeting with Orban on Monday, Xi expressed the hope that Hungary would play an active

role in promoting the healthy and stable development of China-EU relations and in achieving positive interactions between them.

Xi also emphasized that there is no geopolitical wrangling or conflict of fundamental interests between China and the EU. China-EU relations are of strategic significance and global influence and should be kept stable and healthy, he said, adding that both sides should work together to address global challenges.

He emphasized the need for both sides to uphold partnership, continue to promote two-way opening-up and strengthen international cooperation, in order to contribute to promoting global peace, stability, development and prosperity.

On bilateral relations, Xi said that

China will further comprehensively deepen reform, promote high-quality development and advance high-level opening-up, which will provide new opportunities for and inject new impetus into China-Hungary cooperation.

He called for maintaining high-level exchanges between the two countries, deepening political mutual trust and enhancing strategic communication and coordination.

Both countries should continue to firmly support each other, strengthen practical cooperation in various fields, and actively participate in the high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative, Xi said.

Recalling Xi's state visit to Hungary in May, Orban said his country advocates strengthening cooperation

with China, and opposes forming "small circles" and stoking bloc confrontation. Hungary is willing to take the opportunity of its rotating presidency of the EU to actively promote the sound development of EU-China relations, he said.

Orban noted that China wants world peace and has put forward a series of important, constructive initiatives amid a turbulent international situation.

China has used practical actions to demonstrate its ability as an important stabilizer in promoting world peace, Orban said. Hungary highly appreciates and values China's role and influence in global affairs, and is willing to closely maintain strategic communication and cooperation with China, he added.

WORLD WATCH  
By Bill Condon

### HK to play key role in resurgence of 'Asian century'

In several Western countries, the "demise of Hong Kong" has become an all-too-common narrative in recent years and the rhetoric has been ratcheted up dramatically to attract or distract voters during an election year.

This is a strategic move by those desperately trying to hold onto power or those vying to win the hearts of their electorates. To be seen as taking a strong stance against China, which has been vilified in the Western media for years, is somehow deemed to reflect strong leadership qualities. And perhaps it does for those with an appetite for conflict or who are consistently engaged in war under the guise of peace.

Concerns are raised daily among friends or colleagues overseas about our public safety in Hong Kong, reflecting the influence of these misleading narratives on their local audiences, particularly in the United States and many European countries.

Interestingly, most of the rhetoric is coming from countries where violent crime, shootings and stabbings are the order of the day. In some cities, people are not free to travel safely at any time of day or night, and in most cases, even their public transport systems are unsafe, and service standards are frighteningly low due to old infrastructure. Extraordinary levels of petty crime are commonplace in most cities in the Western world.

In New York City, New York State Governor Kathy Hochul was forced to send in 750 members of the National Guard to protect commuters. Around the same time, it was reported that a survey conducted by the Citizens Budget Commission of New York suggested that half of the population, or over 4 million people, were planning to leave New York City within the next five years because of the deteriorating quality of life.

While Hong Kong once faced unrest and the COVID-19 pandemic, the city has demonstrated remarkable resilience.

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## Report finds US fabricated 'Volt Typhoon' for funding

By YANG ZEKUN  
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A report released on Monday by China's National Computer Virus Emergency Response Center asserts that United States government agencies orchestrated and hyped up the "Volt Typhoon" cyberthreat narrative to secure additional funding from the US Congress and to bolster the cyber-infiltration capabilities of US intelligence agencies.

According to the report, US gov-

ernment agencies are the "masterminds" behind the "Volt Typhoon" plan, with intelligence agencies taking charge of specific planning and execution. Members of the anti-China faction in the US Congress, various executive units of the US federal government and cybersecurity agencies from countries within the Five Eyes security alliance were involved in the scheme.

Their primary objective was to advocate extending the authorization of Section 702 of the US Foreign

Intelligence Surveillance Act, a law permitting surveillance without warrants, and to request approval by the US Congress for increased funding, the report said.

On Jan 31, a US congressional committee held a hearing on the so-called cyberthreat from China, claiming that a "Chinese state-sponsored" hacking organization referred to as "Volt Typhoon" launched a series of activities affecting networks across critical US infrastructure sectors.

The accusation stemmed from a

joint advisory issued by cybersecurity authorities from the US and the other members of Five Eyes — the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

In April, the emergency response center released a report unveiling the true origins of the "Volt Typhoon" scheme. Recently, a joint technical team meticulously analyzed data from various sources and reconstructed the narrative of this anti-China smear campaign based on the latest investigative findings.

By scrutinizing reports from US institutions, actions taken by US government departments and statements made by key US political figures, the team identified contradictions in the so-called evidence and related statements provided by the US. The team highlighted three major points of suspicion: the US instructing relevant companies to alter already published reports; inconsistencies among US officials and cybersecurity companies regarding the supposed "Volt Typhoon" attacks; and contradictory actions by US cybersecurity authorities.

See Cybersecurity, page 3

## France chooses to go left



People cheer on Sunday as they listen to projected results of the second round of French legislative elections during a rally in Nantes, western France. Final results show a leftist coalition has won the most parliamentary seats in the runoff. LOIC VENANCE / AFP See more, page 7

## BEIJING SWAYED BY THE RHYTHMS OF AFRICAN CULTURE

Museums, art venues, music classes promote continent's appeal

By XIN WEN  
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Africa is seen by many Chinese as a land of immense natural beauty and exotic animals, but awareness about its rich and varied culture is somewhat limited.

In Beijing, cultural aficionados and those who have lived in or visited Africa are trying to deepen



cultural links to the continent by introducing its unique arts and crafts to residents.

Their dedication to promoting Africa is also adding vibrancy to the Chinese capital through venues

that allow visitors to experience Africa's cultural offerings firsthand.

Feng Xinxin, who is in her 30s, lived in Namibia for 11 years from 2008. Her African paintings, sculptures, and images and artworks of rare animals are on display at an Africa-themed coffee shop in a cultural park outside Beijing's north-eastern Fifth Ring Road.

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# PAGE TWO

## Links: Unveiling Beijing's African interests

Handcarved wooden figures that depict deities or ancestors from Western African countries are on display at the Director's Art Shop in Beijing.



"People who appreciate art and pursue it are even more interested in African handicrafts, hoping to find creativity in these artworks. But in our country, African art is still at a nascent stage at present."

Tian He, film director and African art shopowner



Visitors inspect African handicrafts at the Director's Art Shop in Chaoyang district, Beijing. PHOTOS BY TIAN HE / FOR CHINA DAILY

**From page 1**

"When I came back (from Namibia), and chatted with people around me, their first question about Africa was whether it was a war-torn place and if going there was unsafe," said Feng. "People wondered why a woman would go to Africa at such a young age, and they had a particularly skeptical attitude."

"I was asked too many questions and this became a motivation for me to build such a place in Beijing, to let more people truly understand Africa."

**Special bond**

In 2022, she and a partner opened the African Culture and Tourism Center, a coffee shop with an exhibition space showcasing products from the continent, with the idea of promoting African cuisine, art and culture.

Feng, a native of Jinan, Shandong province, said she developed a special bond with Namibia, which she described as untypical of West African nations, during her time there. The country has the world's oldest desert, the Namib, which is located next to the coast.

"People generally think that places where you can see the ocean are far away from deserts," she said. "But it's only in Namibia where you can see a road with the Atlantic Ocean on one side, and the Namib Desert on the other side with giant red sand dunes," she said. "Over there you can also find indigenous groups, such as the Himba."

Feng said compared with Beijing's urban cultural environment, the Southwest African country, where she spent most of her youth, offers a lifestyle she finds more conducive to an enjoyable life.

"Even the heat in Africa is very pure," she said. "Kids who grow up there tend to develop relatively optimistic and open-minded personalities more easily."

"If I hadn't married and had my baby, I might have lived in Africa my whole life," said Feng, who took her 5-month-old son and husband with her to visit Namibia in October.

Feng said her initial reason for opening the African Culture and Tourism Center was to showcase positive aspects about Africa to members of the public, many of whom might have misconceptions about the continent.

"If these handicrafts spark visitors' interest, that's a win," said Feng, who added she needed to cultivate a new life in Beijing.

More than 40 pieces of art from Africa, including wood and egg carvings, stone sculptures, and paintings, are on display in the center's exhibition hall.

Feng said at the venue visitors can have a full visual and tactile experience with African elements.

African artworks are earthy and naturalistic in their approach, Feng said.

Various kinds of crafts are produced on whatever is at hand, such as wood, stone and egg carvings. Many African artists and artisans are not formally trained, which gives them more freedom to be creative, she said.

**Direct, powerful**

Feng's sentiments were echoed by Tian He, a film director living in Beijing who has opened an African handicrafts and art gal-

lery. The Director's Art Shop bills itself as an African museum in Beijing showcasing the continent's art, and the diverse traditions and cultures of different tribes.

"African crafts intrigue me because they are not only unique, but simple, direct, and incredibly powerful," he said, adding African art is straightforward and childlike in its pureness.

Tian was a commercial video director at a Beijing financial company when he traveled to Africa in 2016 for the first time on a business trip and was enchanted by the aesthetic appeal of the handicrafts. On another business trip to Africa in 2017, he purchased dozens of handicraft pieces and brought them back to Beijing to add to his collection.

"Due to the limited space in my apartment, I eventually opened a Taobao store to sell the crafts I brought back from Africa," said Tian.

"They sold well, and I went to Africa again that year after I quit my job at the company. I purchased 1,000 handicraft pieces and imported them to China."

The first shipment of containers filled with handicrafts arrived in China within two months.

"Photography is my expertise," Tian said. "After I received the artworks, I set up a small studio in my living room to take photos of the handicrafts to promote them."

His Taobao shop quickly gained a lot of attention and a loyal customer base, with people in their 20s, 30s and 40s the main buyers.

"The exhibits on the wall in my shop have changed over the years. Overall, the shape of the artifacts near the entrance of the shop is more rounded, and a bit sharper on the store's inner side wall, and fiercer on the northwest side wall," he said, explaining that the arrangements are primarily based on aesthetics that appeal to Chinese people.

On many occasions, customers have bought products based on their emotional reactions to the artifacts.

For example, a mask of the Fang people from Gabon, West Africa, was sold because the buyer said its features reminded him of his occupation. A bronze sculpture from Cameroon in



Above: A wooden head ornament from the Republic of Guinea is displayed at Tian's shop. Below: A 100-year-old Dogon-style wood carving from Mali in Tian's African artifacts collection.



Central Africa was bought by a businessman for his company because it can be seen as an auspicious guardian deity.

**Authentic art intact**

More than 800 handicrafts, priced from 10 to 100,000 yuan (\$1.3 to \$13,757), are tightly packed into the first floor of Tian's store.

The medium-sized shop acts as a portal to a different world, which according to him, highlights the authenticity of African art.

"Languages in Africa have largely been Westernized, with French and English the official languages in many countries on the continent," said Tian.

"However, traditional African art forms have remained relatively intact up to the present day, representing the cultural identity of many communities and becoming a source of income for local artisans."

"People who appreciate art and pursue it are even more interested in African handicrafts, hoping to find creativity in these artworks," he added.

In some Western countries, African art has a long history of appreciation and has been featured in auctions for decades, he said.

Sotheby's, the world's leading auction house, held an African art auction in London last October. A total of 81 pieces of art were sold for a combined \$2.8 million.

The Art Market, one of the largest art market information websites, said that in 2022, more than 2,700 works by African artists worth \$63 million were sold at various auctions, nearly double the number before the COVID-19 pandemic.

"But in our country, African art is still at a nascent stage at present," Tian said, adding that he hopes the shop can become a bridge to better connect Chinese and African art.

**Joyful music**

African music, especially its renowned rhythms, is also gaining popularity in Beijing.

At a music learning center in northern Beijing, students aged from 7 to 50 are learning to play African drums and the

intricate rhythms that characterize the continent.

Teacher, Liu Yaoli, a 27-year-old from Guiyang, Guizhou province, said: "Through music and skills development, students can gain an understanding of rhythm and timing, allowing them to add dynamism to their playing."

"This keeps the learning process engaging, as they're not simply repeating the same patterns. As a result, they develop a unique feel for African drumming."

Liu said most Africans have natural musical talent, and seek to express it in every possible way, especially through performances.

The origins of drumming on the continent are believed to have come from the Mandinka people in West Africa and the goblet-shaped djembe drum around 1300 AD.

There are multiple stories about the origins of drums handed down through oral histories. One of the most common is that the Mandinka people were a naturally optimistic people and constantly sang in their daily lives. Whenever they sang, Mandinka girls would start dancing happily, but the boys could only clap their hands to keep the beat or stand by silently.

In order to involve the boys, a blacksmith crafted a wooden instrument in the shape of a vessel used to crush grains, and covered it with an animal skin. As a result, the first African drum, the djembe, was born.

"People came (to our music base) not just to learn, but also to experience the joy of playing, to release the pressure they face daily," said Liu. "African drums, with their infectious rhythms, create a sense of freedom and happiness, for our students."

**African connection**

African people are also leaving their footprints in Beijing through their interactions with residents.

Davis Murima, a 32-year-old trade officer from Kenya's Ministry of Trade, Investments and Industry, is currently in Beijing on an exchange program at the University of International Business and Economics. Since August, he has volunteered as a docent at Feng's Culture and Tourism Center, sharing his knowledge and explaining to visitors details about the exhibits.

"When I'm here, I learn a lot about how the Chinese are interested in understanding tourism, agriculture, and culture in Africa, and I can interact not only with Chinese but different people from other continents," said Murima.

"It gives me an avenue to understand how culture makes people different, and the diversity of different regions."

He added that his experiences in China have extended beyond Beijing. Murima said he is particularly interested in observing how Chinese society functions so efficiently, with a focus on collaboration.

"Africa has distinctive cultures, and some of these cultures have been well preserved until now, such as the Maasai community in East Africa," Murima said.

"I hope that the unique cultures of Africa can be passed on from generation to generation, traversing oceans and continents, to be known by more people in the world."

## TOP NEWS

## China set to meet growth target

Despite pressures, country on track to achieve 2024 goal of around 5 percent, experts say

By OUYANG SHIJIA  
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China's economy will likely expand by over 5 percent in the first half of this year amid strong policy stimulus, robust industrial production and stable external demand, providing a solid base for achieving its annual growth target of around 5 percent, economists said on Monday.

Looking into the second half of the year, they said the economy is on track for stable growth thanks to the strong performance of the manufacturing sector, resilience in exports and stepped-up macroeconomic policy support.

Meanwhile, they cautioned about pressures from lackluster domestic demand and mounting external uncertainties, saying stronger fiscal stimulus will be key to tackling the issues faced by the economy and more efforts should

be made to boost private investment, spur consumption and further stabilize the property market.

"China's economy has made a good start at the beginning of the year and the economy has continued the recovery trend in the first half of 2024," said Wen Bin, chief economist at China Minsheng Bank. "China's economy will likely grow by around 5.2 percent in the first half, followed by a 4.9 percent growth in the third quarter and a 5.1 percent increase in the fourth quarter."

His remarks came as the market eagerly awaited the release of key economic indicators by the National Bureau of Statistics on July 15, including the second-quarter GDP data.

As the broader economy continues to face pressures from still-weak domestic demand as well as a more complicated and grimmer external environment, Wen said

that he expects to see more government measures to accelerate infrastructure construction, drive large-scale equipment renewal and digest existing housing inventories.

"It is advisable to step up fiscal policy support, further deepen reforms and expand opening-up, which will help strengthen internal driving forces and significantly boost market confidence," he said.

On the monetary front, as the Federal Reserve of the United States is widely tipped to start interest rate cuts in the latter half of 2024, he said that any such cuts would create more room for the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, to ease monetary policy. "The likelihood of further reductions in reserve requirement ratio and interest rate cuts has increased."

China has already announced a series of measures to boost demand, including the issuance of 1 trillion yuan (\$138 billion) worth of ultra-long-term special treasury bonds this year as well as driving large-scale equipment renewal and

trade-in deals for consumer goods.

"With the gradual stabilization of the endogenous driving force, China's economy will continue the recovery trend," said Li Chao, chief economist at Zhesang Securities. "China's real GDP growth rate is estimated to reach 5.2 percent, 5 percent and 4.9 percent in the second quarter, third quarter and fourth quarter, respectively. The country's economic growth rate will likely reach 5.1 percent this year, meeting the annual growth target."

Li's views were echoed by Xiong Yuan, chief economist at Guosheng Securities, who said the second-quarter GDP growth rate will likely be around 5 percent.

"The policy focus is shifting to stabilizing the housing market, boosting demand and advancing reforms," he said. "The country may roll out new measures to reinvigorate the ailing property sector, such as further easing homebuying restrictions in Beijing and cutting the over five-year loan prime rate."

## Tough times for Kishida ahead of LDP election

By CAI HONG  
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Though the election for the post of president of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party is more than two months away, several big shots have thrown down the gauntlet to current leader and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

Former LDP secretary-general Shigeru Ishiba and Digital Transformation Minister Taro Kono have made it clear that they are vying for the top job in the ruling party.

Ryota Takeda, the former minister for internal affairs and communication, organized a dinner on July 1 for Ishiba and former prime minister Yoshihide Suga, who has openly urged Kishida to step aside following his handling of a political fundraising scandal, saying the prime minister should take responsibility for it, the Nippon News Network reported.

Ishiba is expected to get the faction-less members led by Suga and folks from the faction chaired by another of LDP's former secretary-general Toshihiro Nikai on board. The Sankei Shimbun, a Japanese national daily, considers both Suga and Nikai as kingmakers in the LDP.

Ishiba has unsuccessfully run for LDP president four times in the past. Japan's major newspaper Asahi Shimbun said Ishiba, who enjoys broad support of the party's rank and file, may hold an advantage over other candidates this time as criticism continues over the LDP's dependency on factional politics. Ishiba does not belong to any faction.

A Kyodo News poll earlier this month showed that only 10.4 percent of the respondents want Kishida to be re-elected. Ishiba is seen as the most suitable replacement, with 26.2 percent of respondents supporting him.

Meanwhile, the LDP is desperate to repair its image tarnished by a high-profile political fundraising scandal involving the party's factions.

The scandal, in which some LDP lawmakers are alleged to have received thousands of dollars in unreported funds, poses one of the biggest challenges for the party.

In the aftermath of the scandal, the ruling party lost three lower house seats in the by-elections in April. It won two races and lost six in Sunday's by-elections for the Tokyo metropolitan assembly, falling way short of the party's goal of four or more wins.

Liu Jianguo, professor of international relations at Tsinghua University, said the scandal has caused a stir in Japan's politics. "It is not a one-off case but a collective infraction of the Political Funds Control Act by the higher-ups in the LDP factions," the Japan expert said.

"As the LDP has a super-majority in Japan, its politicians dare to defy public opinion," Liu added.

Kishida is also facing strong headwind from within his party.

Pollsters of the Asahi Shimbun newspaper found in mid-June that among the LDP chapters around Japan, only those in three prefec-

tures supported Kishida's re-election, and five prefectures made their objections clear. Eight prefectures said it was hard to answer, while 31 refused to answer.

The newspaper believed that the 39 prefectures had made their euphemistic opposition to Kishida's re-election clear.

Xiang Haoyu, a research fellow in the Department for Asia-Pacific Security and Cooperation at the China Institute of International Studies, said the "unusual public discontent" Suga has spoken about drove home the point that Kishida is losing support in the LDP.

"Suga's remarks showed a heightened sense of crisis in the party," Xiang added.

As an LDP heavyweight, Suga should have been backing the Kishida administration. In September 2021, when Suga resigned as prime minister, Kishida was elected LDP leader with Suga's support, Xiang said.

Harumi Arima, an independent Japanese political commentator, said, "The LDP is increasingly worried that the party under Kishida's leadership might be ousted in the next general election."

The current four-year term of the lower house will expire in October 2025, unless the prime minister dissolves the chamber.

The Sankei Shimbun does not expect 67-year-old Ishiba to be the dramatic change the LDP needs to restore public trust. "There is hope that a new star will emerge from among female, mid-career, or younger members," it said.

The newspaper named former Policy Research Council chairman Koichi Hagiuda, former chief cabinet secretary Katsunobu Kato, former environment minister Shinjiro Koizumi and Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa as the possible new stars.

Meanwhile, all public opinion polls are showing record-low support for the Kishida administration, which is dealing with its most serious crisis ever.

In the June 28-30 Nikkei Shimbun survey, the approval rating for Kishida's Cabinet stood at 25 percent, 3 percentage points down from May.

Approval rating of 30 percent is a threshold widely recognized as the "danger level" for a government in Japan. If it comes down to 20 percent, the cabinet is supposed to resign, according to Kyodo News Agency.

However, Kishida, whose current term as LDP president is set to expire in September, remains eager to seek re-election.

In response to the fundraising scandal, Kishida disbanded his faction to set an example for others, while punishing several veteran lawmakers.

But people in Japan are not satisfied.

The Mainichi Shimbun's editorial criticized the revision to the Political Funds Control Act passed in the ordinary session of the Diet, Japan's parliament, that ended on June 21 for being "full of loopholes" and falling "far short of sweeping reform." The LDP's "inability to clean up its act" and the "dysfunction" of the Kishida administration have been exposed, it said.

## Festive dance

Traditional Odissi dancers perform during the annual Rath Yatra, or chariot festival, on Sunday in Puri, in the Indian state of Odisha. The ancient Hindu tradition celebrates the journey of Lord Jagannath, along with his siblings Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra, from their temple home in Puri to the Gundicha Temple about 2.5 kilometers away. Hundreds of thousands of devotees flock to the seaside temple town during the festival.

AVISHEK DAS / SOPA IMAGES



## Rise: City more robust than others in medium-to-long term

From page 1

Despite current economic challenges and geopolitical complexities, Hong Kong is in a more robust medium-to-long-term position compared with many international counterparts. Unlike many cities in Western countries, where short-term political considerations drive policies, Hong Kong has charted a steadier course, focusing on pragmatic solutions rather than electoral appeal.

This is not to say that there isn't much work to be done in Hong Kong. It is important to acknowledge the efforts of the government and the local business community to navigate these difficult times.

Some observers think China's economic miracle may have led to a certain complacency in Hong Kong, as the property and other key sectors reaped significant financial benefits.

The pandemic's devastating impact resulted in an early wake-up call for the government and business leaders. Recognizing the need to develop new economic growth drivers to compete in a rapidly changing world, they have moved quickly to address the complex challenges ahead. These include adapting to the accelerating pace of technological advancement and the growing influence of generative artificial

intelligence.

Our robust infrastructure and strategic location underpin our role as a global hub for trade and finance. While Hong Kong has navigated periods of uncertainty, its fundamentals as a thriving international business center remain strong. The city's agility and capacity to evolve at a pace unimaginable in Western economies have allowed us to weather challenging times and capitalize on emerging economic trends and opportunities.

Our unique "one country, two systems" framework, strategic location at the heart of Asia, strong relationships, and connectivity with regional neighbors are fundamental to our future prosperity.

So, rather than being "finished", increasing numbers of well-informed people believe that Hong Kong appears poised to leverage its unique strengths and forge new competence in several high-value sectors. This is reflected in the growing number of leading foreign academic and research institutions establishing a presence in the city.

The most high-profile doomsday forecast was from Stephen Roach, former chairman of Morgan Stanley Asia, in his opinion piece in the Financial Times in February. It received extensive social media coverage, and upset many people

in or closely connected to Hong Kong because of its headline: It pains me to say Hong Kong is over.

However, such sensational comments tend to be designed to increase media exposure, particularly on social media, but fail to reflect the reality or capture the opportunities that exist and strategies being deployed to reinvigorate the economy.

Roach believes that Hong Kong's prosperity completely depends on the Chinese mainland's prosperity and economic growth. This view disregards the strategic development of new business opportunities not only within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, but also from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, closer commercial ties with several markets in the Middle East, and deep ties with many existing trade partners.

His subsequent statement last month at the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents' Club reiterated much of the sentiment, and despite talking down Hong Kong's future, he expressed his deep affection for the city, words that seemed somewhat insincere.

Despite the gloomy global economic outlook for 2024, Asia is expected to maintain its position as the engine powering the world's economy, according to views

expressed by the World Economic Forum annual meeting in January.

Observers attribute the region's resilience to the consistent growth and transformation of intraregional trade and investment and its pioneering role in e-commerce.

They agreed that the expansion of intraregional trade networks, the rise of a burgeoning middle class and investments in technological advancements make the "Asian century" seem primed for a resurgence. It is certain that Hong Kong will play an essential role in this resurgence and directly benefit from it.

Much remains to be done, and the government's primary focus must be on economic development while maintaining Hong Kong's international status and leveraging the unique advantages of the "one country, two systems" framework.

It will be crucial for all stakeholders to work closely together to rebuild and strengthen Hong Kong's relationships with international partners and improve the city's global image — efforts that will benefit entire China.

The author is an international partner and member of the Global Advisory Board, Millenium Associates AG. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## Cybersecurity: Surveillance, control over populace unveiled

From page 1

The smear campaign, initiated in early 2023 or possibly earlier, was divided into three phases. Its goals included securing congressional approval for a larger budget alloca-

tion; extending Section 702 of the US Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, which could enhance its intelligence agencies' cyber-infiltration capabilities, especially external attacks and deterrence against competitors; and internal

surveillance and control over the populace, according to the report.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said at a news conference on Monday that the latest report has further exposed that "Volt Typhoon" is merely a farce of media manipulation.

He emphasized that China strongly condemns the irresponsible actions of the US and urges it to offer an explanation, immediately halt the slander and defamation against China and adopt a responsible approach to uphold

peace and security in cyberspace.

The report said that from May 2023 to January this year, US government-backed hacking organizations carried out over 45 million cyberattacks against Chinese government entities, academies, scientific research institutes, enterprises and critical infrastructure, all of which were authorized by Section 702.

The report underscored the threats posed by Section 702 to US citizens and countries worldwide in terms of individual privacy and state sovereignty. It called on governments and people around the world to firmly oppose the actions of US government agencies that exploit cyber technology to infringe on the sovereignty and legitimate interests of other nations.

## Deadly heat



Two visitors pose for a photo on Sunday next to the iconic thermometer that shows a reading of 55 C at the Furnace Creek Visitors Center in Death Valley National Park, California, the United States. TY ONEIL / AP

## CHINA



**Clockwise from top:** A villager displaced by a dike breach at Dongting Lake in Huarong county, Hunan province, takes a rest at a temporary resettlement site on Monday. TIAN WEITAO / FOR CHINA DAILY Rescuers work to seal a leak at the second defense line in Huarong on Monday. YANG HUAFENG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE People receive relief supplies donated from Shanghai at a relocation site on Monday. XU XING / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Repairs to Dongting Lake dike completed after late-night effort

More than 100,000 cubic meters of rock have been used

By ZHAO RUINAN in Nanchang and ZOU SHUO in Huarong, Hunan

Flood control and rescue efforts at Dongting Lake in Hunan province reached a crucial phase late on Monday night, with a breached dike sealed at around 10:30 pm.

The breach, 226 meters wide, occurred at around 5:48 pm on Friday at a dike in Tuanzhou, a township in Huarong county in the city of Yueyang, which is part of a dike network around Dongting Lake, China's second-largest freshwater lake.

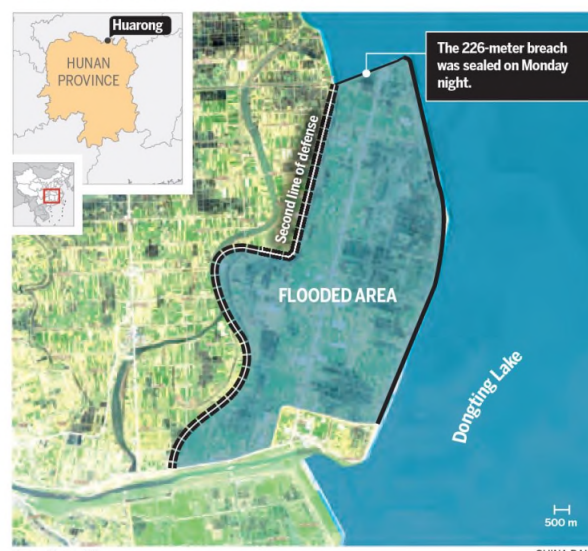
Zhang Yingchun, Hunan's executive vice-governor, said more than 100,000 cubic meters of rock have been used in sealing off the breach, and crews had been sealing off 3.5 meters of the breach an hour.

Following the dike breach, a large volume of water from Dongting Lake rushed into the Tuanzhou dike region, flooding 47.6 square kilometers of the region's total area of 55 sq km.

At least 7,000 residents were evacuated after the dike burst.

Several local schools have been turned into temporary shelters, housing about 4,000 residents and providing essential items such as quilts, towels and buckets to disaster victims. Professional medical personnel are available around the clock to those who have been displaced.

### THE BREACH LOCATION



"Our home was affected twice. Back in 1996, there was another flood and then this year. I think the resettlement process is now very good," Tuanzhou resident Cai Shusheng told China Global Television Network.

After the dike breach, an embankment considered the second line of defense was threatened on Monday.

The embankment, about 2 kilometers from the breached dike and 14.3 km long, separates Tuanzhou from the nearby township of Qiannan.

Multiple piping hazards — the movement of water through chan-

nels in the embankment — were observed, but they have been brought under control, local authorities said on Monday.

More than 300 police officers and firefighters have been working at the site to deal with the piping effect.

Zhu Dongtie, head of Hunan's Department of Water Resources, said the embankment has not been used to prevent flooding since 1996, and it was built to a much lower standard than the dike.

Twenty-four incidents of leakage and piping at the embankment have been dealt with, he said.

Despite all the difficulties and challenges, the embankment must be safeguarded, he added.

The dike breach followed 17 days of heavy rainfall in Hunan, the longest continuous period of heavy rain since 1961.

The National Development and Reform Commission has allocated 200 million yuan (\$27.5 million) to support disaster-affected parts of Hunan, including the counties of Huarong and Pingjiang in Yueyang, and in neighboring Jiangxi province.

In Jiangxi, the flood control situation remains severe due to prolonged high water levels on the Yangtze River and at Poyang Lake.

Water levels at Poyang Lake, China's largest freshwater lake, have been high since June 27, when the water level exceeded the warning level.

By the end of Sunday night, the water level at Xingzi Station, a key hydrological station on Poyang Lake, still exceeded the warning level by 2.19 meters.

Floods and other geological disasters have affected more than 1.6 million people in Jiangxi in cities such as Nanchang, Jiujiang and Jingdezhen, causing direct economic losses of 2.23 billion yuan.

According to the Ministry of Water Resources' Yangtze River Water Resources Commission, as the river basin's inflow recedes, stations in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze are expected to see water levels gradually fall below the warning level from mid to late July.

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## Unmanned aerial taxis to take off in Guangzhou

By QU QUANLIN in Guangzhou  
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The dream of riding in an unmanned aerial taxi is set to become a reality in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, with a local company engaged in the development and operation of electric vertical takeoff and landing aircraft expected to obtain operational certification soon.

"We are expecting to receive operational certification this year to make riding in an aerial taxi a reality," said Wang Zhao, chief operating officer of EHang Holdings, one of the world's leading urban air mobility companies, which is based in Guangzhou.

The company is now engaged in internal testing for its flying application for the much-anticipated EH 216-S aircraft, according to Wang.

"Once it is officially launched, the prices will be slightly higher than those of ride-hailing services," he said.

Wang was speaking in Guangzhou, the provincial capital, on Friday at a conference on the promotion of the high-quality development of the low-altitude economy and the acceleration of the construction of a full unmanned transport system.

The system would integrate the operation and regulation of unmanned equipment and infrastructure across sea, land and air applications, including drones, unmanned vehicles, unmanned ships and eVTOL aircraft.

Guangzhou has outlined 20 specific measures aimed at fostering the high-quality development of its low-altitude economy and related industries, including the establishment of a dedicated 10 billion yuan (\$1.37 billion) venture capital fund.

In addition to flying taxis, a number of prominent drone companies headquartered in Guangzhou have developed commercial applications in agriculture, firefighting, express delivery and tourism, according to the local government.

The conference outlined 12 application scenarios for the city's low-altitude economy and full-space unmanned systems: transportation; cultural tourism; logistics delivery; regulatory inspections; agricultural and forestry protection; emergency rescue; unmanned taxis; unmanned buses; unmanned sanitation and cleaning; unmanned heavy truck fleets; unmanned light truck cargo transport; and unmanned shipping.

One hundred takeoff and landing stations will be established across the city by 2027, according to an

announcement made during the conference.

Operational certification for EHang aerial taxis would make Guangzhou the first Chinese city to operate commercial unmanned flights, according to Wang.

The company has already obtained the first type certificate — approval of the design of a civil aviation product — production certificate and standard airworthiness certificate for passenger-carrying pilotless eVTOL aircraft issued by the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

The company has launched successful demonstration flights of its eVTOL aircraft in carrying passengers, logistics, smart city management and aerial lighting shows.

### 100 stations

for takeoff and landing of electric unmanned aircraft will be established across Guangzhou by 2027.

The scale of the low-altitude economy in Guangzhou is set to reach 150 billion yuan, according to an implementation plan for its development that was unveiled in May.

"Developing the low-altitude economy and the full-space unmanned system are new quality productive forces for the city to drive high-quality growth," said Guo Yonghang, Party chief of Guangzhou.

The city will promote research and manufacturing by supporting cooperation between enterprises, universities and research institutions, with acceleration of the opening of low-altitude airspace and the launch of routes in more fields, he said.

"Infrastructure will be built to adapt to a transportation system that integrates air, land, sea and space transportation management," Guo said.

Guangzhou will also promote open collaboration with other cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area on the low-altitude economy.

"The establishment of the alliance is conducive to more efficiently organizing the low-altitude economy industry chain, avoiding a large amount of low-level redundant construction and disorderly development, and is of practical significance for the healthy development of the industry in the Bay Area," said Ding Ning, executive vice-president of the Shenzhen Institute of Artificial Intelligence and Robotics.

## Pakistani managers receive training at Hainan airport

By CHEN BOWEN in Haikou  
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Management training provided recently for people who will work at the New Gwadar International Airport in Pakistan is expected to foster greater collaboration in the aviation sector with China.

The course, which was taught in Haikou, Hainan province, trained 20 senior managers from the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority.

"It provided a comprehensive understanding of airport operations, Chinese aeronautical regulations, airport management, aviation safety, aircraft maintenance, security and logistics," said Subhash Chader, senior assistant director of communication, navigation and surveillance in the electronics engineering division of the PCAA.

Muhammad Qayyam Khalid, senior deputy director of the authority's commercial development and cargo operations, said: "The technological innovation and infrastructure at Hainan's airports are a testament to the province's remarkable progress in recent decades. The unique architecture of the airports reflects careful planning and design to meet the needs of travelers."

Luo Ning, a representative from the international support center at the ground service department of Haikou Meilan International Airport, said the course facilitated mutual exchange among airports. He said he hoped the gathering would spark continued communication, in-depth discussions and ongoing progress toward deeper learning opportunities and mutual empowerment.

Huang Mengling, the operations control supervisor of the terminal management department at Haikou Meilan International Airport, highlighted how such interactions not only provided valuable insights on airport construction to countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, but also served as a precious experience in promoting the integration and development of diverse cultures.

"Through sincere sharing and mutual assistance, a cultural exchange and integration bridge has been established, laying a solid foundation for future cooperative development," she said.

During the training course, participants visited Hainan Free Trade Port's one-stop aircraft maintenance industrial base to explore potential cooperation opportunities with Pakistan in related industries.

With a total investment of about 1.62 billion yuan (\$223 million) and a footprint of about 15 hectares, the one-stop maintenance base aims to leverage the policy advantages of the port to capture more of the aircraft maintenance market. It aims to become a high-level, intelligent, one-stop aircraft maintenance platform serving the global market.

Khalid said Pakistan and Hainan can collaborate on aircraft maintenance services, leveraging the province's expertise and facilities to support Pakistani airline companies. The New Gwadar International Airport in Pakistan, built with Chinese aid, is one of the pivotal projects under the framework of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is part of the BRI.

## Breach blamed on ancient construction techniques

By ZHOU HUIYING  
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The Water Resources Department in Central China's Hunan province has attributed a recent dike breach at Dongting Lake to inherent weaknesses in its structure that date back to its construction centuries ago.

The breached dike, in Huarong county, is part of a network of flood storage embankments built throughout the Dongting Lake area.

Unlike traditional river levees, they are designed to create designated flood zones, alleviating the pressure on main waterways

when water levels are high.

The Dongting Lake system's complexity stems from its interconnected embankments, separating the lake from the river and various sections of the lake itself. Originally built during the Three Kingdoms period (220-280), with additional structures added during the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911), the embankments have limitations due to the technology of the time.

"The embankments were built on sandbars and mud flats, with some sections even crossing original river channels," an official from the department told China Central Television. "Without proper founda-

tion construction techniques, inherent defects were introduced."

The department said several geological issues plague the embankments: sandy foundations allowing water seepage; soft foundations susceptible to landslides when water levels are high; and the poor soil quality of the embankments themselves, which leads to weaknesses and instability.

Compounding these problems was the lack of scientific analysis during initial construction. Embankment lines often followed the natural curves of sandbars, resulting in sharp bends in the river channel. Erosion during flood sea-

sons further exacerbated these weaknesses.

Experts said methods like reverse filtration and water storage back pressure can be used to address piping — the movement of water through small channels within the embankment. However, swift action is crucial.

"If clear water emerges, the situation is manageable," the department said.

"But the presence of sand or debris indicates a more serious situation. Continued flow of sand and debris can erode the embankment's base, increasing the risk of a breach."

## CHINA

## Sculpture culture



Visitors view sculptures at the 14th National Exhibition of Fine Arts at the Zhejiang Art Museum in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on Monday. The exhibition, which opened on Monday and runs to Aug 4, is displaying 343 pieces selected from more than 2,600 works submitted by artists from across the nation. They cover a wide range of themes, including national development and prosperity, people's happiness, technological development and rural revitalization. LI ZHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## 'Professional store closers' help companies avoid liability

Judicial measures needed to address the issue to protect consumers' rights

By JIANG CHENGLONG  
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More judicial measures are needed to address the issue of "professional store closers", people who specialize in helping unprofitable companies with prepaid services "close shop" to evade debts and handle subsequent consumer rights disputes.

For years, incidents have frequently occurred where prepaid service providers, such as gyms, hair salons and educational training institutions close down or cease operations after consumers have recharged their membership cards.

However, in recent years, these companies have often changed their legal representative and shareholder identities to professional store closers to evade debts and consumer accountability.

After becoming the new legal representative, the professional store closers assume the company's debts and have a set of tactics to deal with consumers seeking their rights. They can receive substantial amounts of money from the companies.

Li Ya, a partner and lawyer at Bei-

jing Zhongwen Law Firm, said the problem has attracted nationwide attention and should be addressed in several ways, including legal and administrative means.

Many of the professional store closers are already indebted and might have been blacklisted for credit issues, so taking on more debt has little impact on them, according to Li.

Last month, the Supreme People's Court issued a draft judicial interpretation regarding the handling of civil disputes in prepaid services cases. It stipulated that operators who collect prepayments but are unable to fulfill their contractual obligations due to operational difficulties should promptly liquidate.

Moreover, if a third party helps the operator evade debts, causing consumer losses, the court should support consumers in requesting compensation from the third party and the operator.

The newly revised Company Law, which came into effect on July 1, also stipulates that if company shareholders abuse the independent legal status of the company and limited liability of shareholders to evade debts, seriously harming the inter-

ests of the company's creditors, they should bear joint liability for the company's debts.

These measures can help address the problems brought about by professional store closers, Li said.

Additionally, market supervision departments should clearly define the thresholds for changes in legal representatives and shareholders, and conduct technical reviews when necessary to prevent dishonest individuals from becoming executives, he added.

In May, a court in Beijing's Fengtai district disclosed a case related to a professional store closer on its WeChat account.

A consumer surnamed Wang had recharged and purchased classes multiple times at a yoga studio, spending tens of thousands of yuan. In October, Wang suddenly found herself unable to book classes through the online channel, with no response from customer service, and the studio was shut.

She contacted other members of the yoga studio and was told the studio had closed half a month earlier, with its legal representative and shareholders having changed before the closure.

Other members showed her the WeChat posts of the new company's legal representative, surnamed Xue. Several posts from Xue said: "If

your store is no longer operating for some reason, we can help you deal with the liabilities."

Wang quickly realized that Xue was a typical professional store closer.

With over 8,000 yuan (\$1,100) left unused in her yoga membership, Wang sued Xue in Fengtai court, demanding compensation for the unused amount on her membership card.

At trial, Xue admitted that in September, the original legal representative of the yoga studio, surnamed Liu, had signed a transfer agreement with him, transferring 100 percent of the company's shares, making Xue the legal representative and sole shareholder.

Several days later, Xue applied to the Fengtai market supervision department to deregister the yoga studio, with the liquidation report saying that all debts and credits had been settled — which was untrue.

The court ordered Xue to compensate Wang for the unused amount on her membership card.

Similar cases have garnered significant attention on Chinese social media.

Li said that in reality, due to the time and financial costs of filing a lawsuit, most consumers often choose to forgo defending their rights.

## Intl exchange gives coast guard officers perspective

By CHEN BOWEN in Haikou  
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Young coast guard officers from China and Vietnam wrapped up a five-day exchange program last week, highlighting a growing partnership focused on maritime law enforcement cooperation in the South China Sea.

The program, organized by the China Coast Guard's South China Sea Branch, aimed to foster friendship and understanding between the two nations' future maritime leaders. It provided a platform for officers to participate in visits to coast guard units, observe ship drills and engage in discussions on law enforcement practices. Cultural activities, including ocean-themed tours and sports competitions, rounded out the exchange.

Participants emphasized the program's role in promoting mutual learning and collaboration, saying such exchanges are crucial for expanding knowledge, sharpening skills and building stronger relationships.

Discussions focused on challenges and best practices in each country's maritime law enforcement, offering fresh perspectives and innovative approaches.

"Sharing knowledge and experiences paves the way for mutual improvement in operational capabilities," said Lieutenant Colonel Liu Jing, a Chinese law enforcement officer. "Our collaboration can set a benchmark for regional cooperation."

The exchange program complements existing efforts between the China and Vietnam coast guards. Since signing a Memorandum of Cooperation in 2016, the two sides have conducted joint patrols and exercises, facilitated ship visits, and established a communication channel for exchanging information on illegal fishing and maritime emergencies.

"Improved coordination and mutual understanding will make future collaboration in handling emergencies and conducting joint patrols more effective," said Major Wang Chongyang of the China Coast Guard's South China Sea Branch.

Both sides expressed a commitment to building on this progress.

"We will uphold the tradition of camaraderie established by previous generations, further strengthen communication and deepen law enforcement cooperation," said Colonel Wang Weixiong, from the China Coast Guard Headquarters.

Vietnamese participants echoed that sentiment, highlighting the program's impact.

"China's professionalism and adherence to tradition have enhanced our understanding and cooperation," said Nguyen Quoc Ngu of the Vietnam Coast Guard. "We hope these exchanges continue with even more diverse content in the future."

Since the signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation, the two sides have held seven high-level meetings, conducted over 10 joint patrols and exercises, and conducted ship visits in 2016, 2017, and last year. Through the China-Vietnam Coast Guard liaison mechanism, both parties regularly exchange information on fishing vessels engaged in illegal activities, share clues on illegal maritime activities and promptly report on the situation of distressed individuals at sea.

"In the future, the China and Vietnam coast guards will further deepen and expand exchanges at all levels and in all areas," said Major Cai Wang, a staff officer with the South China Sea Branch of the China Coast Guard. "We will intensify ship visits, joint exercises and joint law enforcement patrols, collaborate on handling maritime emergencies, and contribute to maintaining maritime security and stability in the region."



China Coast Guard officers introduce shipborne equipment to their Vietnam counterparts aboard the Coast Guard ship Nanxun in Hainan province on Thursday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## SF Intra-city offers HK delivery drivers better pay

By WU MENGLEI and ZHANG TIANYUAN in Hong Kong

Hangzhou SF Intra-city Industrial, a delivery company on the Chinese mainland, has been recruiting a large number of drivers in Hong Kong by offering higher hourly earnings since entering the market in the city this month.

The launch of SoFast, SF Intra-city's new brand in Hong Kong, marks the first time the company has extended its delivery service beyond the mainland.

"Expanding the instant delivery business into the Hong Kong market is an important part of the group's overseas expansion," the company said in a statement.

SoFast will begin deliveries in the densely populated Yau Tsim Mong district in Kowloon and will gradually expand to cover more regions, with the goal of providing citywide coverage by the end of the year.

SF Intra-city, which started as a business unit of logistics giant SF Holding in 2015 and has been operating independently since 2019, provides services including the delivery of food, jewelry, fresh flowers and personal documents to enterprises and individuals.

In the food delivery sector, Meituan, a mainland food delivery service that entered the Hong Kong market last year, had 44 percent of

the market in March, making it one of the largest platforms in the city, according to data by market research firm Measurable AI.

To stand out among the intense competition, SoFast promises to offer delivery riders hourly earnings of up to HK\$300 (\$38). According to price comparison website MoneyHero, Hong Kong food delivery giant Foodpanda offers riders up to HK\$105 per hour, while Deliveroo pays delivery employees an hourly rate of up to HK\$120.

Drivers registered with SoFast will be allowed to choose their tasks based on their schedules without fixed time restrictions or minimum orders.

Ivan Chu Siu-lun, convener of the Hong Kong Sustainable Development Research Institute, a local think tank, said, "The main reason delivery drivers have a high hourly wage is that the platform generously shares the lion's share of the profits earned, primarily by calculating the value of each delivered item, allowing drivers to earn more for more work."

Logistics expert Zhao Xiaomin said SF Intra-city's hourly wage for drivers is highly competitive in the Hong Kong market.

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## Shanghai presents cat-friendly night at the museum

By ZHANG KUN in Shanghai  
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The Shanghai Museum announced groundbreaking plans on Monday for cat-friendly sessions for the upcoming exhibition *On Top of the Pyramid: The Civilization of Ancient Egypt*, which may give cat lovers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to have a night safari at the museum with their furry friends.

The exhibition, opening on July 18, will be the largest showcase of Egyptian art in China. The first exhibition of ancient Egyptian art curated by Chinese scholars and researchers, it will run for 13 months and features 788 objects selected from the collection of seven Egyptian museums and archaeological institutions. Among the highlights of the exhibition will be artifacts unearthed from the Saqqara site near Cairo, where ruins of a temple dedicated to Bastet, a cat deity dating back to 600 BC, were discovered.

"In ancient Egypt, Bastet was widely recognized as a symbol for

### 788 artifacts

from seven Egyptian museums and archaeological institutions will be exhibited for 13 months in Shanghai.

spirituality and protection," said Chu Xiaobo, director of the Shanghai Museum. "The Egyptian admiration for Bastet goes beyond time and space, coincidental to people's fondness for the feline companion today. As part of the new initiatives for the exhibition, we have decided to host regular evening sessions for cat lovers on 10 consecutive Saturday evenings, starting on July 27."

While visiting the exhibition, attendees will be able to take photos with their pets in the specially designed Cat Temple area of the *Secrets of Saqqara* exhibition hall. They can also enjoy activities such as "Traveling through Egypt with Pets", "Taking Photos with a Giant Cat Sculpture", "Interactive Cat Paws", and "Cat Paw Messages".

Each participant will receive an exclusive customized "Meow Night" limited edition fridge magnet. Attendees who bring their pet cats will have the chance to receive special cat-themed cultural gifts and experience the blessings of an ancient civilization.

It will be a first for any museum in the world, and the Shanghai Museum has "consulted professionals, done extensive research and taken all possible measures to ensure the safety of the cultural relics and a good experience for the museum visitors", Chu said.

The Shanghai Museum will cap the number of visitors for the cat-friendly Saturday night sessions at 2,000, about half the quota for previous evening sessions. Not everyone can bring a cat though, as the museum set the cap for feline visitors at 200 for each session.

"We will have an insurance policy for each of the cats, and there will be medical staff, vets and other pet professionals on standby during the evening," Chu said. "In case a cat runs off, well-trained professionals with adequate tools will be able to

catch it in time."

Other facilities, such as pet strollers, sedatives for stressed cats, and a depository for cats, will be available.

"We will have the exhibition space properly cleaned and disinfected afterward, so that the next morning visitors coming in will not have to worry about allergies or any other health problems," said Li Feng, deputy director of the museum.

The museum is also working with airlines, trying to facilitate the introduction of pet-friendly flights.

"This may be a bit too complicated, and for now we recommend checking your cat in the cargo hold if you want to travel from other cities to Shanghai with your cat," Li said.

Aside from the cat-friendly sessions, the Shanghai Museum will collaborate with tourism and high-technology companies to introduce an Egypt-themed tour on the Huangpu River and an immersive expedition that takes people on a virtual journey to ancient Egypt. It will also market more than 1,000 new pieces of merchandise featuring Egyptian art and culture.

## CHINA

## Satellites supervise Fujian tea production

As tea is being produced in East China's Fujian province, two remote sensing satellites in orbit are busy monitoring the planting and maintenance of the crops.

The satellites, both launched in 2022, can obtain images with a resolution higher than half a meter and a width of 15 kilometers. They serve the tea-producing area in Anxi county, Fujian, which is famous for its tea industry.

The output value of the province's whole tea industry chain exceeded 150 billion yuan (\$21.1 billion) in 2022, while its tea exports exceeded 3.5 billion yuan. Both ranked first in the country.

With a tea plantation area of about 240,667 hectares, the province achieved a raw tea output of 520,000 metric tons in 2022.

In order to drive intelligent tea production, Fujian has applied remote sensing to provide accurate data analysis and services for tea planting, processing and sales.

Using remote sensing images, technicians have combined meteorological, soil, agricultural and hydrological data. With this information, the satellites have created a digital database with indexes on subjects such as elevation, slope, accumulated temperature and precipitation, said Wei Leichen, deputy general manager of Satellite Link Bridge, one of the developers of the two satellites.

Satellite remote sensing is capable of monitoring a large area obtaining key information that is crucial for tea farmers, including disease, pests, soil moisture and nutrients in real time.

Conversely, the collection of remote sensing data also requires tea farmers to provide relevant data such as how their tea gardens are fertilized. Such interactions have made monitoring more efficient and comprehensive, according to Wei.

In addition to the tea industry, the remote sensing data from the two satellites have been applied in other fields such as agriculture, forestry, land, meteorology and environmental protection in Fujian.

Remote sensing technology

XINHUA



Tea plantations cover slopes in Anxi county, Fujian province. HUANG DONGHUA / FOR CHINA DAILY

improves the yield and quality of crops, reduces production costs and plays a key role in facilitating the sustainable development of agriculture and in reducing carbon emissions, Wei said.

"The emissions of the tea industry mainly come from tea gardens, especially excessive nitrogen fertilizer and soil acidification, product processing, distribution and consumption," said Gao Shuilian, an associate professor at Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University.

The province has implemented precise and improved fertilization methods on its tea fields.

Liao Hong, an agronomist at Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University, started promoting eco-friendly tea farms in the Wuyi Mountains in the province in 2018. Her team found the perennial planting of tea trees consumed excessive soil nutrients and caused soil degradation.

To improve the quality of both soil and tea, they proposed an eco-friendly approach featuring interplanting tea with soybeans in summer and rapeseed in winter.

Phosphorus and potassium, released from the soil during the cultivation of rapeseed, return to the field after flowering and it improves soil fertility. After spring tea is collected, soybean is interplanted between the plots to provide more nitrogen and promote green fertilization.

In addition, Anxi county has built a carbon footprint monitoring system for *tieguanyin*, the best oolong tea variety produced there, Lin Liyan, head of the county's science and technology bureau, was quoted by Science and Technology Daily as saying. Lin added that the green development method, with low energy consumption, low pollution and low emissions, has taken shape in the county's tea industry.

Lan Siren, president of the Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University, suggested deepening the integration of big data, photoelectric information, digital economy and tea industry and beefing up its green development.



Chen Geng (middle) stands with some of his Tibetan students at Zhuhai No 4 Middle School in Zhuhai, Guangdong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Zhuhai teacher goes extra mile for Xizang students

'Father Chen' is a constant companion for his charges, who are far from home

By ZHENG CAIXIONG  
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Chen Geng is always very busy during festivals and holidays.

As the director of the Xizang department of Zhuhai No 4 Middle School in Guangdong province, Chen spends every New Year's Day, Spring Festival, National Day, Dragon Boat Festival and other major holidays with his students from the Xizang autonomous region in his school.

"The children left their parents in Xizang and came to study in Zhuhai, and it was inevitable they would not adapt quickly to the new environment and climate," Chen said. "Therefore, our love and care for them has become particularly important."

Coastal Zhuhai in South China and Xizang, in the snowy plateau region in western China, are more than 3,000 kilometers apart.

Over the past 10 years, Chen has been focused on building a home for the Tibetan children studying in Zhuhai, situated at the mouth of the Pearl River in Guangdong.

Due to the long journey, the Xizang students only return home to see their parents during summer vacation. When they do, Chen always personally accompanies them back to Xizang.

Though the journey is far, Chen adheres to the habit of making home visits to understand more about the students' living condi-

tions and family backgrounds.

He has made such visits throughout Xizang, including the cities and prefectures of Lhasa, Nagqu, Nyingchi, Shigatse and Ngari. "The longer I get along with them, the more I regard the Tibetan students as my own children," Chen said.

As their long-term companion, Chen has become familiar with the students' dietary habits, lifestyles, interests and hobbies, and has formed deep teacher-student relationships with them.

Instead of sir, they refer to him as "Father Chen".

This year, Zhuhai No 4 Middle School is celebrating its 10th anniversary of the establishment of its classes for Xizang students. The school now has 258 students from Xizang in seven classes, and more than 70 percent of them come from herding families.

Chen usually arrives at the school at 6:30 each morning to lead his students in exercises. Breakfast begins at 7 am, followed by reading lessons at 7:15.

In addition to teaching classes, Chen checks the students' dormitory to ensure hygiene and is responsible for their food, clothing, housing and transportation — like a "butler", he said.

"I don't have any weekends at all now," Chen said as he smiled helplessly.

"The children cannot return home, nor can the teachers," he said, adding that the teachers in his department are usually on standby

365 days a year for any issues that may arise. "We are both teachers and parents."

When the students feel homesick, Chen often sacrifices his personal time to comfort them, talking and doing exercises with them. He also often invites them to his home as guests.

And when a student falls ill and is hospitalized, he usually visits them in hospital every day they are there. On some occasions, he stays at the hospital indefinitely, until the student has fully recovered.

Xizang student Drolma Yangzom said she feels that Chen can read their minds when they are not happy. "We might feel homesick, as we come from Xizang. Unlike other teachers in the school, Chen is not very strict with us," she said. "In addition to encouraging us to study hard, he is always very concerned about us in daily life."

Drolma Latso, a third year junior high school student, said Chen is a very caring teacher. "He often brings us food and often asks us if we are satisfied with the cafeteria food," Drolma Latso said.

Every month, Chen also takes the students to visit local museums, educational institutes and well-known enterprises in Zhuhai to learn and conduct research.

"For these Tibetan children, the school is not just an educational venue, but also their home," he said.

It is precisely this kind of companionship and dedication that has gradually opened up the hearts of

Tibetan children, making Zhuhai become their "second hometown".

In May, Chen was awarded the title of "Good Samaritan of Zhuhai" due to the great love he has shown his students.

Along the corridors of the teaching wing of the department, pictures of outstanding graduates from Xizang adorn the walls. "This is where I am most worthy of 'showing off'," Chen said as he gazed at the photos, beaming with pride.

More than 60 Xizang students have been admitted to top universities in China since 2018. Over the past three years, over 60 percent of them have been enrolled in such institutions.

"More than 90 percent of the Tibetan students have passed the national college entrance examination, or *gaokao*, to study at universities and colleges after they graduated in Zhuhai," he said.

Some of them have gone on to establish careers for themselves, including as teachers, doctors and police officers, according to Chen.

"Seeing students achieve success and gain something is my greatest happiness," Chen said, adding that he believes every teacher has the same feeling.

He said 90 percent of the Tibetan students at the school return to Xizang.

"They have attachments to their hometowns and are willing to go back and develop them," he said.

Li Jiajia contributed to this story.

## Tibetans flock to ethnic games event

LHASA — Though Migmar Qungda, a 76-year-old herder, spent an entire morning moving between several competition areas at the Lhasa Sports and Cultural Center on a recent Sunday, he said he believed that his day-long hitchhiking journey to the venue was totally worthwhile.

The senior lives in Palgon county, Nagchu city, which is about 360 kilometers away from Lhasa, capital of the Xizang autonomous region. He enjoys playing *xuizi*, a strategic Tibetan dice game, and *jiren*, a traditional Tibetan board game.

"I am very good at those games and have been playing them since I was young," Migmar Qungda said. "When I learned that Lhasa was hosting the Farmers and Herders Games with my favorite events included, I decided to come and watch. The games offer our herders a chance to participate in sports and compete. My two sons will take care of our cattle in my absence."

Both *xuizi* and *jiren* were fea-

tured as part of the first Lhasa Farmers and Herders Games, a new attempt at mass fitness activities on the roof of the world. The competition ran from June 22 to 27.

It featured 19 events divided into two main categories: competitive and traditional ethnic events. Besides, *xuizi* and *jiren*, the traditional ethnic events included *guduo* (a traditional Tibetan sport where participants throw stones tied to ropes), yak racing and Tibetan chess. The competitive category featured games such as table tennis and various track and field events. Over 500 athletes from Lhasa participated.

Thirty-seven-year-old farmer Losang Chosphe, from Dagze district, took part in the *jiren* competition, which has a history spanning several hundred years. The game is played in a manner similar to billiards; players have to slide small, metal discs into holes in the corners of the board using their fingers.

"The games give our farmers and herders a platform to show-

case our ethnic traditional sports," he said.

Losang Chosphe's fellow villager, Lhapa Drolma, said she enjoyed participating in the *yajia* event, also known as "elephant tug-of-war", particularly because it was so close to home. She said she looks forward to taking part in similar activities in the future.

At the games, Sonam Dekyi served as a referee for the *yajia*, a traditional sport among Tibetan people. There were five *yajia* categories at the games, with 42 participants.

"*Yajia* is a game that farmers and herders often play during village festivals, but their techniques are not very professional, and they don't know how to protect themselves," Sonam Dekyi said. "Before the competition, the referees explained the rules to the participants to prevent fouls. The competition is much more standardized compared to the ones they have in their villages."

Migmar Qungda, director of the Lhasa Sports Bureau, said tradi-

tional Tibetan activities such as yak racing, stone lifting and Tibetan chess are common among local farmers and herders. The games aimed to provide them with a platform to showcase their sporting spirit and offer a higher-level platform for competitive exchange.

"These events are highly characteristic of Xizang," she said. "Nowadays, the living standards of our farmers and herders have greatly improved, and their demand for spiritual and cultural activities has increased. We held the games to meet their spiritual and sports needs, and we also hope the games will showcase the spirit of our rural Tibetans."

China's rural sports have experienced a surge in popularity recently. An amateur soccer tournament in Rongjiang county, Guizhou province, gained unexpected popularity. It was dubbed *cun chao* by Chinese netizens, meaning "Village Super League".

In addition, village basketball and volleyball tournaments have also thrived across China, infusing ethnic cultural characteristics into sports events. The success of these rural sports tournaments has sparked a tourism boom and



Athletes compete in a yak racing event during the Farmers and Herders Games in Lhasa, Xizang autonomous region, on June 23. LI LIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

brought substantial economic benefits.

Migmar Qungda also expects the ethnically distinct Farmers and Herders Games to draw more attention and promote sports consumption.

"During the games, we organized complementary activities

such as a food carnival, an exhibition of specialty agricultural products and a sports experience zone. This initiative aims to foster the integrated development of sports with agricultural, pastoral culture and tourism," she said.

XINHUA

## WORLD

## Netanyahu's terms cast doubts over Gaza truce

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong  
jan@chinadaily.com

The cease-fire talks between Palestinian militant group Hamas and Israel have seen its momentum dented after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued a list of "nonnegotiable" conditions in relation to Israel's objectives in Gaza, despite international calls amid heavy casualties and humanitarian disasters.

The news came after Hamas delivered its acceptance of three-phase arrangements to negotiator countries, the United States, Egypt and Qatar, while Israel continued its bombardment in Gaza, with Palestinian families fleeing their homes and hospitals and Israeli settlers bulldozing the northern entrance of Palestinian city Salfit in the occupied West Bank, Wafa News Agency reported.

Late on July 7, Netanyahu presented a list of Israeli demands just as the Israeli negotiating team was preparing to depart for further talks in Cairo and Doha expected later this week.

According to a statement published on the Israeli prime minister's website, it was Netanyahu's "steadfast position" against the attempt to halt Israel Defense Forces' action in Rafah that "led Hamas to enter negotiations".

It noted that any deal would allow Israel to resume fighting "until all of objectives of the war have been achieved". There would also be "no smuggling of weapons to Hamas from Egypt to the Gaza border" and no return of "thousands of armed terrorists to the northern Gaza Strip".

Also, Israel would "maximize the number of living hostages



People wave Palestinian national flags during a march in solidarity with the people of Gaza in the city of Tangier in Morocco on Sunday amid the ongoing conflict in the Gaza Strip. FADEL SENNA / AFP

who will be released from Hamas captivity".

"The plan that has been agreed to by Israel and which has been welcomed by (United States President Joe Biden) will allow Israel to (retrieve) hostages without infringing on the other objectives of the war," said the statement.

Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid, on his X account, questioned the timing of what he referred to as "provocative messages" from the Netanyahu government, pointing out that all parties were in "a critical moment in the negotiations" and that "the lives of the (Israeli) abductees depend on it".

## Losing faith

Soon after Netanyahu's announcement, The Times of Israel reported that Sharon Alony Cunio, a freed hostage whose husband was still being held in Gaza, said she was "losing faith".

"I was very optimistic, but as

the days pass you suddenly notice that the messages that come out are more focused on the gaps (between the sides)," she was quoted as telling Army Radio. "Don't jeopardize the deal with statements."

Cunio, along with her 3-year-old twin daughters, was freed from Gaza in November following an Israel-Hamas prisoner swap deal.

The Times of Israel also reported that the statement from Netanyahu's office was met with anger by Israeli security officials and mediators who reportedly accused the prime minister of trying to sabotage the deal.

It was widely reported over the weekend that Hamas had dropped a demand that Israel first commit to a permanent cease-fire before signing the agreement, and accepted a proposal from Washington to resume talks on releasing Israeli hostages, including soldiers.

Abdul Wahed Jalal Nori, an ana-

lyst and lecturer at the Department of Fundamental and Interdisciplinary Studies at the International Islamic University Malaysia, told China Daily that the tough stance taken by Netanyahu might "risk derailing the talks" because Hamas will view the new conditions as "unacceptable".

"The more Netanyahu insists on continuing the conflict, the deeper the enmity grows," said Abdul Wahed.

He said Hamas' willingness to enter the negotiations is aimed at ending the hostilities, with an initial cease-fire followed by discussions on issues like blockade-lifting and reconstruction aid.

"If those things are not achieved, the conflict will continue. Therefore, a more balanced strategy, incorporating security concerns with genuine humanitarian considerations and diplomatic flexibility, might offer a better path toward lasting peace and stability," said Abdul Wahed.

## Left-wing bloc springs surprise in French polls

Alliance secures most seats in second round but fails to win enough to govern

By MOHAMMAD ARIF ULLAH in Paris  
For China Daily

France is heading toward a hung parliament, with its new leftist alliance securing the most seats in the second round of national elections on Sunday but failing to win enough to comfortably govern.

According to final results published by France's Interior Ministry, the New Popular Front, or NFP, has 182 seats. President Emmanuel Macron's alliance has 168 seats. And the far-right National Rally, or RN, and its coalition has 143 seats. The conservative party Les Republicains, or LR, gained 46 seats. And other left, independent, and regionalist candidates took the remaining seats in the total of 577.

Macron had earlier dissolved Parliament and called the snap election after the far right trounced his centrist alliance in elections in June for the European Parliament.

In the first round of the national election on June 30, RN and its allies took the lead. The NFP alliance was second, and Macron's alliance was third.

Seventy-six of Parliament's 577 lawmakers were elected in the first round and, despite Sunday night's upset, RN's historic seat gain in the first round still stands.

Party head Jordan Bardella criticized what he called the "Republican Front" after the second round, saying a backroom deal had blocked RN and built support for Macron, leaving the country rudderless.

But Jean-Luc Melenchon of the far-left La France Insoumise, or LFI, party, declared on Sunday: "The defeat of the president and his coalition is confirmed. The PM must go. The president must call on the New Popular Front to govern."

## Calling for an agreement

Former prime minister Edouard Philippe, a leader of Macron's alliance, responded by calling for an "agreement" between political forces, but said he would exclude the hard-left LFI party from any alliance despite it being a key part of NFP.

Prime Minister Gabriel Attal submitted his resignation on Monday, but Macron refused and asked him to stay on for the sake of stability.

The president nominates France's prime minister but the candidate must then be approved by Parliament and usually comes from the party or coalition with the most seats.

Anne Charlene Bezzina, a law professor at the University of Rouen, said: "Today, we don't have any majority or any opposition. This is a complex situation."

Martial Foucault, a professor at Sciences Po University in Paris, agreed, noting: "Voters voted morally for an ungovernable France."

Between the first and second rounds, more than 200 candidates from various parties who qualified for the second round stepped aside, to allow a better-placed rival to go head-to-head with the RN candidate in their constituencies, increasing the chances of defeating them.

Yves Sintomer, head of the political science department at Paris 8 University, said on Sunday: "If there had been the number of possible triangular elections announced (with three candidates) after the first round, the National Rally would probably have an absolute majority today."

Negotiations around forming the next government will continue among party chiefs, with them first looking for a coalition government with an outright majority of 289 seats. Failing that, a minority government capable of surviving a no-confidence vote would be an option.

Mathieu Gallard, a research director at Ipsos France, said on Monday on the French TV channel France 2: "The parties will end up finding agreements and coalitions. The eye will turn toward the left but it will be in a delicate situation if it wants to govern because it is at the mercy of the opposition."

Emmanuel Riviere, a political analyst and professor at Sciences Po University in Paris, said in the French daily La Tribune on Monday: "The way parties are carrying on makes a coalition almost impossible. It's all gone pear-shaped because every camp's been painting the others as villains. They've blown their disagreements way out of proportion."

Tristan Haute, a political science researcher at Universite de Lille, told French Radio France Bleu on Monday: "Forming a government will be a tough game."

## Starmer faces multiple challenges as new UK PM

By JULIAN SHEA in London  
julian@mail.chinadaily.com

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has a full in-tray awaiting him as he gets used to life in Downing Street following his Labour Party's resounding victory in last week's general election.

Starmer on Saturday gathered his newly appointed Cabinet behind a bold new agenda that focuses on overhauling the nation's struggling public services and mending strained international relationships. He embarked on a whistle-stop tour of the UK on Sunday, aiming to rebuild relations with devolved administrations. His itinerary began with an evening stop in Scotland, followed by visits to Northern Ireland and Wales before heading back to London.

At a news conference on Saturday, Starmer expressed his intention to go beyond merely discussing challenges with the first ministers and trying "to establish a way of working across the United Kingdom that will be different and better to the way of working that we've had in recent years".

In his first speech as prime minister on Friday, Starmer said he hopes his government could heal the lack of trust that the public had in politicians after 14 years of rule under five different Con-

servative Party prime ministers. "This wound, this lack of trust can only be healed with actions, not words," he said.

It will indeed soon be time for actions, not words as he faces up to major challenges and duties at home and abroad in his new job.

## NATO summit

The first one will be attending the NATO summit in Washington, DC, starting on Tuesday.

Currently, NATO members are expected to spend 2 percent of GDP on defense, the previous Conservative government had supported an increase to 2.5 percent. During the election campaign, Starmer refused to answer questions from the Politico website about where he stood on the matter, but he will soon find that he cannot duck the issue.

He will have the advantage of familiarity when he makes his NATO debut, however, as he met several leaders at the D-Day 80th anniversary commemorations in Normandy in June.

There, Starmer met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, whose fortunes are an integral part of another challenge he faces, and who was one of the first world leaders to congratulate him on his win.

"Ukraine and the UK have been and will continue to be reliable

allies through thick and thin," Zelensky wrote on social media platform X.

Over the last two years, the fallout of the Russia-Ukraine conflict has caused huge disruption to energy prices, which have been a major contributor to Britain's cost-of-living crisis, another significant election issue.

Labour's answer is to set up a new publicly-owned clean energy company called GB Energy, which it is claimed will deliver 100 percent clean power by 2030, save money and make the country energy-independent.

Ed Matthew, campaigns director at independent climate change think tank E3G, said the election result meant Starmer "now has a historic public mandate to accelerate climate action, invest in the industries of the future and restore UK climate leadership. The UK is back in the race to net-zero."

## Gaza policy

Another major international issue with an impact at home for Starmer is the ongoing crisis in Gaza.

In an interview on radio station LBC last October, Starmer, who is a former human rights lawyer, said Israel "has the right" to withhold power and water from Palestinians in Gaza, adding "Obviously, every-

thing should be done within international law", but this stance continues to fuel resentment against Labour.

The party's winning margin in the election could have been even bigger had it not lost several seats, and come close to losing others, in areas where the voter demographic made Gaza a particularly volatile issue.

And then there is immigration — something on which the Conservatives placed great emphasis in the election campaign, but which contributed significantly to the rise of the right-wing Reform UK party, which cost the Conservatives votes across the country.

Huge political and financial capital was expended by the previous Conservative government on a proposal to send people to Rwanda, with no results, and during the campaign, Starmer promised that should he win, he would "get rid of the policy straight away".

Starmer announced on Saturday that he would terminate the controversial policy of sending illegal migrants to Rwanda.

The full cost to taxpayers and the financial consequences of abandoning the Rwanda deportation policy remain unclear. Additionally, the future of 52,000 migrants previously slated for deportation is now uncertain, reported the BBC.

## Tokyo governor Koike wins third term

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo  
jiangxueqing@chinadaily.com.cn

The reelection of Yuriko Koike for a third term as Tokyo governor on Sunday temporarily eased the growing criticism against Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's Cabinet and his ruling Liberal Democratic Party, or LDP, but it has not reversed the trend, experts said.

The LDP is seen as supporting Koike, the first woman to lead the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, even though she is not a member of the party.

A record number of 56 candidates ran for the 2024 Tokyo gubernatorial election. Koike, 71, received 42.77 percent of the vote.



Yuriko Koike gestures as she is set to be reelected as governor of Tokyo on Sunday. KYODO VIA REUTERS

Shinji Ishimaru, 41, former mayor of Akitakata in Hiroshima Prefecture, came second with 24.3 percent of the vote. Renho, 56, an opposition-backed former member of the House of Councillors, came in

third with 18.81 percent of the vote.

Local elections are closely related to national politics. The outcome of the Tokyo gubernatorial election, the largest local election, garnered significant attention due to several defeats for the LDP in major elections this year.

The LDP's losing streak reflected a backlash caused by a slush-fund scandal involving factions at the ruling party, said Ukeru Magosaki, a former senior official with Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

"If Governor Koike were to be defeated, the Kishida administration would become unstable, and there would be a possibility of the LDP losing in the next House of Representatives election," said Magosaki.

"However, with Koike's victory this

time, this trend has temporarily come to a halt," added Magosaki, who is also co-representative of the Association for Inheriting and Propagating the Murayama Statement, a civic group dedicated to upholding the 1995 Murayama Statement admitting Japan's wartime mistakes.

"Nevertheless, it is merely a pause in the momentum pushing the LDP and the Kishida administration into a corner, and it has not reversed the trend. The main issue is whether Kishida can deflect criticism within the LDP and secure reelection as the party's president. The current situation remains uncertain," he said.

## Impact of scandal

To minimize the negative impact of the slush fund scandal on Koike, the LDP did not openly endorse her, blurring the ties between Koike and the LDP so it was not a focal point

of the election, Magosaki said.

The results of the election showed that many voters preferred to passively maintain the status quo, said Kazuyuki Hamada, international political economist and former member of the House of Councillors. "Koike, who safely managed two terms over eight years, was judged to pose less risk than the numerous new candidates," said Hamada.

While Koike achieved a landslide victory, the key to her success lay in the fact that her opponents failed to appeal to voters with specific policies that met their expectations, Hamada added.

Renho emphasized issues of "politics and money" but many Tokyo residents were more swayed by Koike's policies, he said.

He noted that the results of the gubernatorial election are expected to significantly influence the LDP

presidential election and the next general election.

In the July 7 by-elections for the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly — the prefectural parliament of Tokyo Metropolis — the LDP fielded candidates in eight of the nine constituencies contested, suffering a dismal outcome of two wins and six losses.

Runner-up Ishimaru, who attracted attention in the Tokyo gubernatorial election through his youthful image and social media campaign, has declared his intention to enter national politics.

Ishimaru may run in the same electoral district in Hiroshima as Kishida, which presents a potentially difficult challenge for the prime minister, said Hamada.

"It is clear that there is growing disappointment and distrust among voters toward established parties like the LDP," he said.

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## WORLD

## Xi's vision can boost global development

Experts applaud president's strategic outlook on fostering shared prosperity

By XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong,  
REN QI in Dushanbe, Tajikistan and  
WANG XIAODONG in Nairobi, Kenya

President Xi Jinping's trip to Central Asia will boost the region's development, while his speech at the SCO summit offers a comprehensive vision for a stable, prosperous and cooperative world, experts say.

From July 2 to July 6, Xi attended the 24th Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the Kazakh capital Astana and paid state visits to Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. The visits will accelerate the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative and promote regional development in various fields, analysts said.

The focus of Xi's meetings with Central Asian leaders was the implementation of the BRI, a project that enhances trade, infrastructure investments, as well as technological cooperation between China and Central Asian countries, said Sergey Suvorov, an associate professor at the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation.

"The BRI will boost trade between the participating countries, increase GDP dynamics and create additional jobs. Central Asian countries can also leverage their advantageous geographical locations on transit corridors to enhance their economic potential," Suvorov said.

Oleg Timofeev, an associate professor at Russia's RUDN University, said forming transcontinental transport corridors is a focal point of regional cooperation since the launch of the BRI in 2013.

Central Asian political circles have been exploring ways to integrate the

BRI with local infrastructure projects such as Kazakhstan's Nurly Zhol (Bright Road), Timofeev said.

Pritchin Stanislav, an expert at the Primakov Readings Forum and head of the Central Asia Sector at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations in Moscow, said China has emerged as the main trading partner and investor for most Central Asian countries, significantly boosting economic ties with them.

The advancement of China's technologies and education will positively influence the development of Central Asia, Stanislav said.

## A common home

On Thursday, Xi delivered a speech at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Plus meeting in Astana, calling for building a common home of solidarity, peace and tranquility, prosperity and development, good-neighborliness and friendship, as well as fairness and justice.

The speech highlighted the necessity of mutual learning and exchange among civilizations, pointing to the potential for collective growth and understanding, said Khalid Taimur Akram, executive director of Pakistan Research Center for a Community with Shared Future.

The SCO has been a beacon of international cooperation and a driving force for global development, and its success lies in its adaptability to global changes through solidarity and cooperation, ensuring a prosperous and peaceful future for humanity, Akram said.

Tahir Farooq, editor-in-chief of Daily Ittehad Media Group and Pakistan Economic Net, highlighted the speech's pivotal points of global sig-

nificance. "His emphasis on stability, cooperation and mutual development resonates deeply with the current geopolitical climate. ... His speech reiterated the importance of multilateralism, stressing the need for a fair and just international order and advocating for reforms in global governance structures to ensure they are more inclusive and representative of all nations," Farooq said.

Xi's call for collective action on various fronts, from economic development to climate change, underscores the interconnectedness of global challenges and the need for a unified response, he added.

Dennis Munene, executive director of the China-Africa Center at the Africa Policy Institute in Nairobi, Kenya, said that unlike some Western-led groups, the SCO advocates non-alliance and nonconfrontation, and does not target any third party, which should be cherished in a world facing increasing confrontations and conflicts. "The success of the SCO is a testament to the common aspirations of various countries to pursue a more just and equitable global governance and build a prosperous and peaceful world," he said.

Anthony Moretti, an associate professor of the Communication and Organizational Leadership Department at Robert Morris University in Pennsylvania, described the "common home" as a place where friendship and sincerity permeate all conversations. If the SCO Plus continues to strengthen relationships among its members, it will enhance prospects for peace and positive trade across the board, Moretti said.

Yang Ran in Beijing and Yifan Xu in Washington contributed to the story.

Contact the writers at yangran1@chinadaily.com.cn.

## Circle of unity



People dressed in white dance in circles during World Circle Dance Day in Krakow, Poland, on Sunday. Circle dancing, an ancient and communal dance style performed in circles or processions, dates back thousands of years and is found in cultures worldwide. It serves as both a celebration of significant community events and a means to foster a strong sense of community. OMAR MARQUES VIA GETTY IMAGES

## Briefly

CHINA  
Guinea-Bissau President Embalo to visit country

The President of Guinea-Bissau Umaro Sissoco Embalo will pay a state visit to China from Tuesday to Saturday at the invitation of President Xi Jinping, according to the Foreign Ministry. During the visit, Xi will hold a welcoming ceremony and a banquet, and the two heads of state will hold talks. Premier Li Qiang will also meet with Embalo, Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said. Beijing believes the visit will inject strong impetus into China's relations with Guinea-Bissau and boost bilateral friendship and cooperation, Lin added.

SOUTH KOREA  
Samsung workers stage strike over pay, benefits

Samsung Electronics workers began a three-day strike for better pay on Monday, with their union pointing to further action should South Korea's biggest conglomerate continue to fall short of its demands. Union officials said about 3,000 strikers attended a rally in the rain near Samsung's headquarters in Hwaseong, south of Seoul. Samsung management has been locked in negotiations with the union since January, with the two sides failing to narrow differences on benefits and a rejected 5.1 percent pay raise offer from the company.

INDONESIA  
Landslide kills 11 in illegal gold mine

A landslide triggered by torrential rains crashed onto an unauthorized gold mining operation on Indonesia's Sulawesi Island, killing at least 11 people, officials said on Monday. The landslide on Sunday morning in Bone Bolango regency, Gorontalo Province, killed miners and residents living near the mine, said Heriyanto, head of the local rescue agency. He said rescuers pulled out 23 people, including six injured, and recovered 11 bodies. Some 45 others are missing, he said.

CHINA DAILY—AGENCIES

## Real estate developer with roots in China thrives on US market knowledge

By RENALI in Los Angeles  
renali@chinadailyusa.com

Nestled at the crossroads of Irvine and Tustin, two bustling commercial hubs in Southern California, stands a two-story building that houses a co-working office business.

The property in Irvine is owned by Gemdale USA Corp, a Pasadena-based developer with roots in China and a strong US presence.

"As a Chinese real estate company, we have not only established a reputable presence but have also thrived in the industry. This success depends on our strategy and profound understanding of cultural differences between East and West," Wang Lei, executive vice-president of Gemdale USA, told China Daily.

Gemdale has developed 18 diverse projects across the country, amassing assets worth \$3 billion since it was established in 2014.

Successful projects include the 350 Bush office building in downtown San Francisco and a high-end apartment complex in downtown New York City.

At its peak, the company had 80 employees, with 80 percent being Americans. Although the company has slowed its development pace and

reduced its size amid the pandemic, it still maintains a workforce of 50 employees.

"In China, real estate development often focuses on the city centers of first-tier cities. However, in the US, first-tier cities like New York, San Francisco, Chicago and Los Angeles have city centers that are entirely different from those in China," Wang explained.

"City centers in China are bustling, safe and clean, but in these large American cities, they are often neither safe nor clean," he said. "Many people do not want to live in city centers because they are unsafe, unclean and inconvenient."

Due to a lack of understanding of the US business environment and real estate markets, some foreign companies bring concepts like "city center" from their home countries, he said.

However, those concepts don't always work in the US, which can result in many unfinished projects, Wang said.

Gemdale has avoided building high-rises in city centers, instead choosing affluent, clean and safe areas near city centers for rental industrial development, as well as developing projects in industry-focused areas.

Wang said the company's Chinese team followed American local culture and business and listened to input of its American team, selecting and evaluating project sites accordingly.

Suburban multifamily assets have continued to outperform in Southern California. In July 2022, Gemdale secured \$94.3 million in financing for a 189-unit multi-housing development in the East Bay suburb of Pleasant Hill, the first new apartment complex in downtown Pleasant Hill in 30 years.

Life science deals are also mounting due to rising demand for lab space. In September 2022, Gemdale and Harbor Associates initiated a joint venture and acquired a 113,991-square-foot office and lab property in Los Angeles County for \$29.7 million.

In July 2023, the company secured a \$575 million construction loan for a life science campus project in San Diego that was fully preleased by an American listed company Neurocrine Biosciences for 12 years.



Wang Lei

"These successes stem from two factors: correct decision-making by the head office and leveraging the American local team, developing projects based on American commercial operations and understanding. This is very important for Chinese companies to survive in the US market," Wang said.

"We won't be developing new office buildings unless there is a substantial market recovery. Instead, we will maintain our focus on investing in rental apartments, as they are less affected by cyclical adjustments," Wang said, adding that the company is also exploring other real estate sectors such as industrial and e-commerce planning.

As a Chinese American, Wang expressed gratitude as a beneficiary of China's reform and opening-up policy. "I believe this policy has been instrumental in my life," he said.

After graduating from Huazhong University of Science and Technology in China, Wang received a scholarship from the National University of Singapore, among the students to study there after the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Singapore.

"The first half of my career was dedicated to assisting foreign companies

in expanding within China, while the second half focused on facilitating the expansion of Chinese companies abroad," Wang said. "I have always had a 'Chinese heart' and hoped to bring the knowledge I gained back to China."

After working abroad and then returning to China for 10 years, Wang went to Northwestern University in Illinois in 1999 to study management. In 2001, he joined WSP, one of the world's leading engineering and professional services firms.

In 2008, WSP entered the Chinese market, prompting Wang to return to Shanghai to oversee business in the Greater China region.

In 2010, when Disney planned to establish a Disneyland in Shanghai, they invited Wang to join the team responsible for developing the project.

"I was very willing because this was about building Disneyland in China. I was the first development executive with the employee number 0001, and the team eventually grew to over 1,200 people," Wang recalled.

The biggest challenge for the Disney project was dealing with cultural and compliance issues when an American company entered China, he said.

Adjustments were needed in areas such as bidding processes, fire safety standards and infrastructure construction.

"Overall, through these efforts, we not only ensured the smooth progress of the project but also demonstrated a successful cooperation experience between Chinese and American enterprises," Wang said.

One significant challenge is the disparity in infrastructure development speed between China and the US.

In China, a project can go from land acquisition to groundbreaking in six months, whereas in the US, it may take two to three years.

"This speed difference can be very challenging for new companies," Wang said. "Without understanding this operational mode, companies will be very disappointed."

Communication between Chinese and American enterprises require more mutual understanding and independent knowledge, according to Wang.

"Many times, it is a matter of concepts. If the concepts are correct, fewer detours will be taken. If the concepts are incorrect, more detours will be encountered. Therefore, strengthening communication, whether between people or businesses, is very important," Wang added.

## Boeing to plead guilty to defrauding US over plane crashes

By AI HEPING in New York  
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Boeing will plead guilty to conspiracy to defraud the US government stemming from two plane crashes of its 737 MAX jetliners that killed 346 people and pay \$487.2 million in fines, the US Justice Department (DOJ) said.

The airplane manufacturer confirmed that it had reached the deal with the DOJ in a court filing Sunday evening and had no further comment.

Federal prosecutors alleged Boeing committed conspiracy to defraud the government by misleading regulators about a flight-control system that was implicated in the crashes, which

occurred in Indonesia in October 2018 and in Ethiopia less than five months later.

Companies with felony convictions can be suspended or barred as US defense contractors. The company was awarded Defense Department contracts last year valued at \$22.8 billion, nearly 40 percent of its revenue, according to federal data.

In addition to the \$487.2 million in fines — the maximum allowed by law — Boeing agreed to invest at least \$455 million over the next three years to strengthen its compliance and safety programs, the DOJ said.

Boeing's decision to plead guilty doesn't provide immunity to any employees or corporate executives.

The plea deal covers only wrongdoing by Boeing before the two crashes. It doesn't give Boeing immunity for other incidents, including a panel that blew off a MAX jetliner during an Alaska Airlines flight in January, a DOJ official said.

The company will be put on probation for three years, supervised by the US District Court for the Northern District of Texas.

The DOJ said it expected to file the written plea agreement with the court by July 19. The judge overseeing the case in Texas could accept the agreement or reject it, likely leading to new negotiations between the DOJ and Boeing.

The agreement also requires

Boeing's board of directors to meet with families of the crash, who were briefed a week ago on the outlines of the deal.

They oppose the deal and want the aircraft maker to pay \$24.8 billion, the DOJ said.

"The families are highly disappointed that the DOJ fails to account for the two crashes," said Robert Clifford in a statement to China Daily on Monday. Clifford is the lead counsel for families in the civil litigation pending in US District Court in Chicago.

"Much more evidence has been presented over the last five years that demonstrates that the culture of Boeing putting profits over safety hasn't changed. This plea agreement

only furthers that skewed corporate objective," Clifford said.

Paul Cassell, a lawyer for more than a dozen of the families, told The New York Times that they had sought an admission of fault in the deaths of those killed in the crashes and had hoped for stiffer consequences for the company and its executives, including a trial.

"This sweetheart deal fails to recognize that because of Boeing's conspiracy, 346 people died," he said. "Through crafty lawyering between Boeing and the DOJ, the deadly consequences of Boeing's crime are being hidden."

Family members of some victims on Monday gave CNN statements that

blasted the plea agreement.

"Miscarriage of justice is a gross understatement in describing this," said a statement from Zipporah Kuria of England, who lost her father, Joseph, in the Ethiopian Airlines crash. "It is an atrocious abomination."

"Without full transparency and accountability nothing will change," said a statement from California resident Ike Riffel, who lost his two sons, Melvin and Bennett, in the crash. "With this deal, there will be no investigation, there will be no expert witness testimony, there will be no perpetrators of these crimes to answer the charges in court."

Agencies contributed to this story.

## BUSINESS

# Epson banks on local ties for expansion

Japanese electronics company plans to offer more green products in nation

By FAN FEIFEI  
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Seiko Epson Corp will intensify efforts to expand its presence in China by strengthening cooperation with local partners, and plans to offer more environmentally friendly products in the world's second-largest economy, a senior executive of the Japanese electronics company said.

Tetsuya Iwasaki, CEO of Epson China, said in an interview with China Daily that the Chinese market plays a significant role in Epson's global roadmap, with print heads, robotics and electronic components businesses accounting for a high proportion.

He said the company's print heads business is gaining momentum in China, with the growth rate reaching about 10 percent, promising immense development potential.

"If foreign-funded enterprises want to succeed in China, they need to actively integrate into the Chinese market," Iwasaki said.

He said the company will step up localization efforts and introduce to the global market innovative achievements from China that are in accordance with local conditions.

For instance, the company has rolled out a WeChat cloud printing service to satisfy the needs of Chinese users who are inclined to communicate through the instant messaging platform.

He said the Chinese authorities have attached great importance to fostering new quality productive forces and emphasizing the key role of technological innovation, which coincides with Epson's "efficient, compact and precision" philosophy.

Iwasaki said China's intensified push to advance high-standard opening-up has injected strong confidence into foreign companies, including Epson.

The Japanese company will expand its cooperation with local partners in China and innovate business models constantly to better cater to demand from the Chinese market, he added.

According to Epson's Environmental Vision 2050, the company seeks to become carbon-negative and eliminate the use of exhaustible underground resources such as oil and metals by 2050.

Iwasaki said Epson's vision is consistent with China's dual-carbon goals

and in line with the concept of green and sustainable development, and the company has made great efforts toward environmental protection.

Epson, present in China for more than 40 years and one of the first multinational companies to enter the Chinese market, has grown and developed in tandem with China during the period, witnessing rapid growth in the fields of print heads, robotics and inkjet printers. Iwasaki said the company's success in the Chinese market remains crucial to its global strategic layout.

China has rolled out multiple policies to attract foreign investment. The government released an action plan proposing 24 measures in March, including expanding market access, fostering a level playing field and facilitating the flow of innovation factors.

Experts said China's continuous innovation in the field of mobile internet and digital transformation has brought about new opportunities for multinational corporations like Epson.

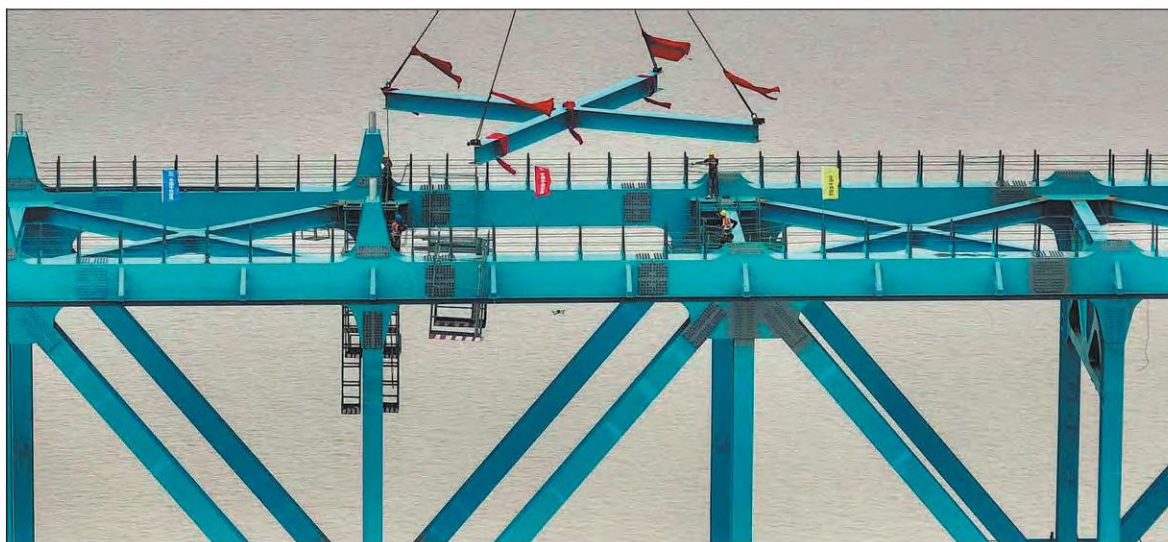
Data from the Ministry of Commerce showed that foreign direct investment, or FDI, into the Chinese mainland, in terms of actual use, stood at 412.5 billion yuan (\$56.7 billion) in the first five months of this year.

The manufacturing sector attracted 28.4 percent, or 117.1 billion yuan, of the total FDI inflow, up 2.8 percentage points from the same period last year.

Foreign companies have accelerated their localization steps in China in recent years, while high-tech industries and advanced manufacturing have become important sectors for foreign investment in China, said Zhang Jianping, director of the China Center for Regional Economic Cooperation, which is part of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

The country's measures to boost its foreign investment inflow have demonstrated its determination to high-standard opening-up and in attracting multinational companies to participate in the construction of Chinese modernization, Zhang said.

He added that the implementation of a new round of opening-up measures, such as the Foreign Investment Law, the shortened negative list for market entry and pilot free trade zones, have created favorable conditions for foreign businesses to invest in China.



A drone image shows the construction site of the Yellow River Super Bridge on the Xiong'an-Shangqiu high-speed railway. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Significant HSR progress on Yellow River bridge

By ZHUANG QIANG and PANG BO

A key north-south high-speed railway reached a new milestone when its super bridge traversing China's second longest river witnessed full connection of trussed steel beams on Friday.

Workers from China Railway No 4 Engineering Group Co Ltd (CREC4) worked on the Yellow River Super Bridge, which uses some 43,000 metric tons of steel on its 1,600-meter-long body, for the HSR linking Xiong'an New Area in North China's Hebei province with Shangqiu in Central China's Henan province.

The bridge, linking Taiqian county in Henan and Liangshan county in Shandong, is also the world's

longest ballastless track bridge with continuous girders.

The 552-kilometer Xiong'an-Shangqiu HSR is part of the 639-km Beijing-Xiong'an-Shangqiu HSR, which aims to boost the development of Xiong'an, established in April 2017 by the central authorities.

Spanning the three counties of Xiongqian, Rongcheng and Anxin in Hebei, Xiong'an New Area aims to relieve Beijing of functions non-essential to its role as the national capital in a bid to seek a new development model for densely populated areas.

The new area, dubbed "a strategy crucial for a millennium to come", will help advance the coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.

While the Beijing-Xiong'an-Shangqiu HSR will have 18 railway stations, the Xiong'an-Shangqiu section will have 16 stations allowing trains to run at a designed speed of 350 kilometers per hour.

The CREC4 builders are undertaking the line's No 11 bid, which extends for 17.38 km, starting from Taiqian county in Henan's Puyang and ending at Jining, which administers Liangshan county.

"During construction work on the super bridge, we've followed stringent work procedures and scientific allocation of the builders, machines and building materials, so as to usher in the successful job and help the super bridge become a quality and model project," said Xing Wenbin, a CREC4 project manager in charge of

the 4th sub-branch of the No 11 Bid Project for Exterior Lines of Xiong'an-Shangqiu HSR.

Starting its construction in September 2022, the Xiong'an-Shangqiu HSR is expected to open to traffic in September 2026, said Wen Liangcheng, a CREC4 publicity official.

It has been learned that the Xiong'an-Shangqiu section of Beijing-Xiong'an-Shangqiu HSR will also be an important part of the Beijing-Hong Kong-Taiwan HSR, included in the country's "eight verticals and eight horizontals" HSR network. Upon operation, it will connect with the Beijing-Xiong'an section, and some other high-speed railways in the country.

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## Novartis finds prescription for success in China

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai  
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The China market functions as an indispensable growth engine for the international business of Switzerland-based Novartis, and the pharmaceutical company expects to maintain double-digit growth in China over the next two years, said a senior company executive.

Novartis achieved a growth of 17 percent in China, the second-largest pharmaceutical market worldwide, last year, making it one of the fastest-growing drugmakers in the country. In the first three months, its quarterly sales revenue in China hit \$1 billion for the first time.

"This showed that we're growing even more than last year," said Patrick Horber, president of the international unit for Novartis, during an exclusive interview in Shanghai on Wednesday.

"And I expect that we'll grow further this year as we'll continue our

efforts of doing clinical trials in China, introducing innovative therapies into the country and bringing more products into the country's National Reimbursement Drug List," Horber said.

In 2023, the company's eight new products and indications were approved in China. So far this year, there have already been four approvals. "An important reason for the accelerated pace is the country's evolving regulatory policies, which show a higher favor for innovative, high-quality products," he said.

The rapid growth in the China market also proved that the company has a portfolio that matches the country's healthcare needs in many areas, including cardiovascular and oncology.

Aiming to bring breakthrough treatment options to cancer patients in China, Novartis announced last week that the Novartis China Haiyan Radioligand Manufacturing Site in Haiyan county, Zhejiang

province, which neighbors Shanghai, began construction work.

With an estimated investment of 600 million yuan (\$83 million), the radiopharmaceutical production site, the first of its kind in the country, aims to expand production and supply capacities of innovative radioligand therapies in China and beyond. The site is scheduled to kick-start production by the end of 2026.

Radioligand therapy is a new generation of targeted therapeutic radiopharmaceuticals that can be selectively targeted to bind to corresponding diseased tissues, using radiation energy to kill tumors. Due to the moderate distance of the radiation, it can minimize damage to healthy cells and allow patients to have a better quality of life, explained medical experts.

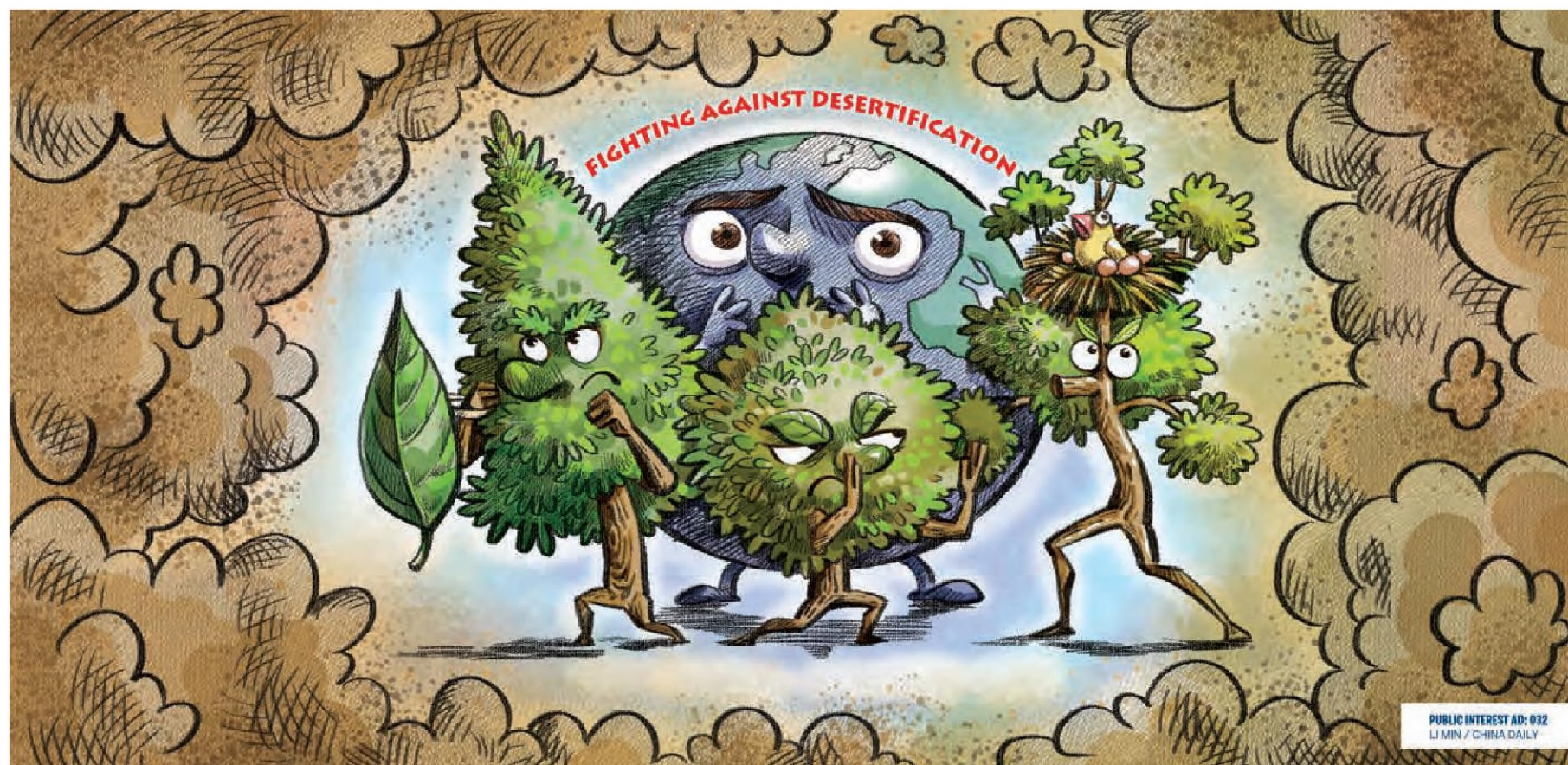
Novartis has about 10 radioligand therapy-related products in development, covering a range of tumor types. Pluvicto, an innova-

tive medicine for Novartis' targeted radioligand therapy, has been approved in the United States and the European Union to treat a type of prostate cancer in 2022.

"Regarding China, we're scheduled to submit a new drug approval filing for the medicine within this year, and we're already looking forward to offering them ... in China," said Horber.

According to a report by Precedence Research, the global radiopharmaceutical market is expected to grow from \$5.2 billion in 2022 to approximately \$13.67 billion in 2032.

"We will increase capacity accordingly if the radioligand therapies penetrate into the China market well in the future. Also, with our manufacturing site abiding by global standards, we may produce supply for markets outside China as well," said Horber, adding that the company has previously built similar facilities in the US, Spain and Italy.



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## BUSINESSFOCUS

## Northwest China broadening tourist appeal

Booking volumes to region have surged this summer, with growing number of flights linking cities

By ZHU WENQIAN  
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Small cities in Northwest China, with their cooler temperatures and ethnic diversity, have seen significant growth in booking volumes of travel products this summer, with the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region becoming a particularly popular tourism destination.

In the past few years, the period between late June and October has been the peak travel season for Altay in northern Xinjiang. Since the airing of the hit, eight-episode miniseries *To the Wonder*, Altay has seen a growing number of visitors and is set to attract more travelers.

As of early June, Altay received 2.67 million person-times of travelers, up 80 percent year-on-year, and the region achieved a tourism revenue of 2.2 billion yuan (\$303 million), surging 93 percent year-on-year, data from the local cultural and tourism department showed.

Besides, hotel bookings in Northwest China's small cities such as Zhangye, Jiayuguan, and Jiuquan in Gansu province have increased by more than 40 percent year-on-year this summer, higher than the growth rates seen in major cities, according to Beijing-based online travel agency Qunar.

"This summer, more domestic airlines are operating regional flights from major cities to small cities. It has helped tourists save travel time and has further driven the summer tourism consumption boom of small cities in Northwest China," said Xiao Peng, a researcher with the big data research institute of Qunar.

In July and August, bookings of flights from major Chinese cities to more than 40 small ones in Northwest China have jumped over 60 percent year-on-year, and carriers have increased flight frequencies for routes connecting Northwest China, Qunar said.

Qunar recently reached an agreement with Guangzhou-based 9Air, a low-budget



**Above:** Visitors enjoy the colorful Danxia landform in Zhangye, Gansu province, in June. SUN LIJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY  
**Below:** A herdsman prepares a donkey for arriving tourists to photograph in Altay, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on July 1. XIA SHIYAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

airline, to give complimentary flight tickets to college students in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, for destinations such as Zhangye and Jiayuguan.

"We hope to help more young people have the opportunity to explore those small cities in China, and we will continue to give away complimentary flight tickets to students," said Ren Fen, vice-president of Qunar.

In recent years, more domestic flights have been launched to connect small and major cities, further driving the popularity of tourism markets in regions such as Northwest China. Now, travelers can easily arrive at some scenic spots with direct flights to their nearby small cities, as opposed to long road journeys earlier.

For instance, Zhangye Ganzhou Airport, a small airport in Gansu, handles flights operated by seven carriers. These flights connect Zhangye with major cities such as Shanghai, Xi'an, Shaanxi province; Lanzhou, Gansu; and Chengdu, Sichuan province. In January, a direct flight connecting Beijing and Zhangye was launched.

Jiayuguan Jiuquan Airport, another small airport in Gansu, has seen eight carriers launch 16 routes, connecting Jiayuguan with major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu and Xi'an. In the first half of this year, the booking volumes of flights from major domestic cities to Jiayuguan surged nearly 180 percent year-on-year, Qunar found.

Unlike busy major airports, over 70 percent of small airports operate an average of one flight daily. Yet, those regional flights have been playing an important role in enhancing connections between major cities and small cities in China, Qunar said.

In the domestic air travel market, smaller carriers operate more regional flights to compete with major carriers. This summer, 9Air launched new flights connecting Guangzhou with Manzhouli, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, as well as Jieyang, Guangdong, and Turpan in Xinjiang.

Among State-owned carriers, Shanghai-based China Eastern Airlines and Guangzhou-based China Southern Air-

lines account for relatively higher market shares in the regional aviation market in China.

This summer, China Southern plans to increase flight frequencies on more than 100 routes, and launch new flights that connect Altay with cities such as Shanghai; Shenzhen, Guangdong; Wuhan, Hubei province; Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region; and Harbin, Heilongjiang province, bringing the total number of routes connecting other cities with Altay to 10 nationwide and 52 flights per week.

China Southern also operates three routes within Xinjiang. The carrier said it plans to launch more themed flights to Altay and enable more passengers to experience the ethnic minority culture and local customs on the planes.

Themed flights include the offering of special food such as cheese and sea buckthorn juice, with flight attendants in ethnic clothing interacting with passengers in some interesting question and answer sessions. The cabin is also decorated with ele-

ments of the series of *To the Wonder*, China Southern said.

Teng Congcong, director of *To the Wonder*, said she directed the series with a female perspective and delicate emotional expressions, and it has showcased the spirit of northern Xinjiang herders. She expects that Xinjiang, a place with a magnificent landscape, will attract more travelers.

By 2035, the average number of flights taken per person annually and the number of people who have experienced taking flights are expected to double over levels seen in 2019, according to a plan by the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

Since last year, a number of small cities in China, such as Zibo in Shandong province and Tianshui in Gansu, have become popular tourism destinations with their delicious barbecues and *malatang*, or spicy hot pot, and more county-level cities are starting to focus on developing their cultural and tourism markets.

"With increased travel demand to small cities and the growth of local spending power, it is estimated that the number of regional flights that connect major cities and small cities will be further increased," Xiao of Qunar said.

"Such flights will allow more people who have never taken flights to have the opportunity, and enable people who live in major cities to visit more smaller cities," he added.

Meanwhile, domestic companies have increased efforts to build more high-quality accommodation in Northwest China.

China's largest online travel agency Trip.com Group and the Nalati scenic area in Xinjiang together built a rural resort in Altay, which started operating in late June. This is the seventh rural resort built by Trip.com in Xinjiang.

The rural resort, located 10 kilometers from a top-level ski resort, is surrounded by rivers, mountains and grasslands, and is expected to help upgrade the quality of local accommodations, the travel agency said.

So far, Trip.com has launched 31 rural resorts nationwide, and local employees account for 80 percent of the staff members. Thus, it has helped increase the per capita annual income of rural areas by more than 40,000 yuan.



## Trendy travel bug bites young Chinese

By ZHU WENQIAN

Young Chinese tourists are adopting trendy travel options for visits abroad this summer, including watching pop concerts, participating in music festivals and visiting landmark attractions nearby.

Several Chinese students who completed the National College Entrance Examination in June plan to travel abroad with friends this summer to watch concerts and take tours of surrounding attractions.

Tourism companies have launched targeted products to satisfy this growing demand.

Trip.com Group, China's largest online travel agency, recently collaborated with South Korean television station SBS for the first time to launch travel packages that combine the admission tickets of concerts and scenic spots, as well as hotels.

Besides offering an official channel for ticket purchases, the packages also provide options for travelers to take cars to and from concert venues. These were sold out overnight immediately after the first group of products was launched in June.

"It has been often difficult to obtain tickets for top-tier overseas events and perform-

ances. The information gap caused by language barriers and the speed of the internet has also provided opportunities for some criminals targeting the overseas performance and tourism market, and many fans have fallen for fake tickets earlier," said Zhou Huijie, an analyst of the research institute of Trip.com.

"The concert package launched by Trip.com offers a friendly price for students, satisfying their desire to enjoy traveling while watching overseas performances," Zhou said.

The main consumer groups who bought the packages were born in the 1990s and after the year 2000, which together accounted for 77 percent of the total, and they are mainly from Shanghai, Beijing, as well as Guangdong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Sichuan and Fujian provinces.

On social media platforms in China, there have been a large number of posts about the experiences of booking concert tours overseas. Several have inquired online about the official ticket purchasing options for concerts, while others have sought out people who can join them in watching these overseas shows.

The popularity of the upcoming star-studded SBS Gayo Daejeon Summer in July has

skyrocketed among K-pop fans in South Korea and China. Fans have expressed concerns about whether they can get admission tickets to the concert.

Most official websites in South Korea don't provide Chinese language versions, so it has been difficult for Chinese fans to buy tickets with a good view of the show.

Previously, Trip.com had achieved positive results in distributing overseas performance tickets as an agent. Popular South Korean singer IU held a concert in Hong Kong in May, and all the available concert tickets on Trip.com were sold out within 30 seconds of launch.

Besides, booking volumes for travel products to Hong Kong surged by sixfold after the availability of the concert tickets, indicating the strong driving force of concerts on the local tourism market, Trip.com said.

Summer is the peak travel season for Chinese consumers. So far, the booking volumes for outbound tourism products have surged 150 percent over last summer, according to Qunar, a Beijing-based online travel agency.

Some countries, including Malaysia, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, which have issued visa-free



A Chinese visitor group arrives at Busan, South Korea, in June. Summer is the peak travel season for Chinese travelers. YONHAP NEWS AGENCY

entry policies to Chinese travelers, are expected to see the popularity of their tourism markets exceed levels recorded in the pre-pandemic period of 2019, according to Qunar.

In addition, the average prices of international flights have declined by 22 per-

cent year-on-year with the increase in international flights. The supply of international hotel accommodation has also resumed to the level seen in 2019, and the average prices of international hotel rooms have fallen from rates seen in 2023, Qunar said.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Disparaging of Orban's shuttle diplomacy belies NATO's transition in purpose

**H**ungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban described his Monday visit to Beijing as "Peace Mission 3.0".

Orban and Chinese President Xi Jinping have demonstrated similar positions on a series of issues of global concern, including the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, with both having repeatedly called for a cease-fire and a negotiated end to it.

Unfortunately, when it comes to the Ukraine crisis, the Hungarian leader has been a lone voice in the European Union. While everyone across the EU and North Atlantic Treaty Organization seems to want to see the war end, they have very different visions about how peace should be accomplished and how it will be manifest.

In contrast with the mainstream idea in Brussels of peace after the ultimate goal of permanently debilitating Russia has been attained, Orban has opposed EU sanctions on Russia and resisted financial and military aid to Ukraine as well as negotiations on EU membership for Ukraine.

This is why the Hungarian leader's whirlwind visits have invited strong criticism from the EU and NATO members.

The EU leaders have pointed out that he is not representing the bloc, with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell saying in a statement that the Hungarian prime minister is not representing the EU in any form.

The White House naturally has also been critical of his initiative, claiming it "will not advance the cause of peace and is counterproductive to promoting Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence".

Orban's Beijing visit comes after a visit to Kyiv last Tuesday, trying to persuade Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky to consider a cease-fire. On Friday, he was in Moscow, talking with Russian President Vladimir Putin about "ways to a negotiated end" to the conflict.

Unfortunately, his endeavors have been met with both Kyiv and Moscow reiterating their previous conditions for a cease-fire. As things stand at the moment, their positions remain "far apart", the Hungarian leader said after visiting the two capitals.

Yet his efforts come just before the NATO summit in Washington that Orban will be attending, his country being a member of that organization. Any message he might be able to deliver of a willingness to ease those entrenched positions in the interest of peace will get straight to the source of the current hostilities in Europe — NATO having allowed itself to be hijacked by the United States' aggressive national security strategy to overpower perceived challenges to what it regards as its god-given right to do as it likes.

A signed article by Orban, published on the website of the US magazine Newsweek the day he visited Moscow, made clear his view on this, and why he is out of step with other European leaders. In it he said the alliance had forsaken its founding values, stating bluntly: "The agenda is no longer peace, it is war."

It is natural that Orban should visit China as part of his diplomatic efforts. President Xi paid a state visit to Hungary in May and China is one of the few countries that is still able to talk to both of the antagonists in the conflict. It is also one of the very few that is consistent in its neutrality and its own efforts to mediate a cease-fire.

In his meeting with Orban on Monday, President Xi again stressed that it is in the best interest of all parties to end the conflict as soon as possible and seek a political solution. Xi also repeated his call for the international community to create the conditions for the resumption of direct dialogue and negotiation between the two sides. Only when all major countries exert positive energy instead of negative energy will a cease-fire be attained, Xi said. That is something the NATO leaders should reflect on when they meet in Washington.

## Chinese path key to human rights progress

**T**he 56th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, held in Geneva from June 18 to July 12, unanimously adopted China's report on the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review last week.

China took advantage of the opportunity to share its position on the recommendations proposed by other countries as part of the UPR process, as well as the progress the country has made since it rolled out 30 new measures that the Chinese government promised to take to safeguard human rights.

The UPR is an important platform for countries to carry out equal-footed, candid exchanges and constructive dialogue and cooperation. It is encouraging to see that many countries, including Russia, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, the United Arab Emirates, Algeria, Zambia, Gambia and Venezuela, spoke highly of China's efforts and achievements in advancing its human rights cause.

China's achievements in protecting human rights and its contribution to the international human rights cause are generally well recognized by the international community. The majority of countries and organizations taking part in the session of the UN human rights body reviewed China's report in an impartial, objective, nonselective, nonconfrontational and non-politicized manner, made constructive comments, and spoke highly of China's efforts and achievements in the development of human rights. They also expressed their appreciation for China's open and frank attitude in participating in the fourth round of the universal human rights review, and commended China for its open and candid participation in the fourth cycle of the UPR, and affirmed that China accepted the majority of recommendations based on its national realities and the will of its people.

The UN human rights body's adoption of China's report has enhanced the understanding and recognition of the development of China's human rights cause and strengthened exchanges and mutual learning between China and all parties for further progress on their respective human rights path.

The China report adopted by the UN Human Rights Council is not only a review and summary of the development of China's human rights cause over a period of time, but also a solemn declaration that China's human rights cause will continue to move forward. Adhering to a people-centered development philosophy, the country is steadily raising the level of human rights protection as its modernization advances.

China will continue to raise the level of its human rights protection, and work for fairer and more equitable, reasonable and inclusive global governance on human rights. It calls on all parties to protect human rights through security, to advance human rights through development, and to promote human rights through cooperation, communication and mutual learning.

While it is natural that a handful of countries should strike different notes on the China report, China welcomes and remains open to all constructive suggestions that are proposed in good faith to help it improve its human rights conditions.

But the country firmly rejects any condescending lecturing about human rights by those self-claimed human rights champions intent on dictating to it what to do according to their models. There is no one-size-fits-all human rights protection model. The human rights development paths independently chosen by various countries are not superior or inferior, only distinctive. The key to the historic achievements of China's human rights cause lies in it taking a human rights development path that conforms to the trend of the times and suits its national conditions.

China firmly opposes the politicization, instrumentalization and weaponization of human rights issues, and firmly opposes interference in its internal affairs under the pretext of human rights issues. It will continue to unsparingly follow the Chinese human rights development path and promote the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation along the Chinese path of modernization. China will continue to make new contributions to the world's human rights cause.

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## Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## Securing embankments a must for lasting relief from flooding

The ongoing flood situation in the Dongting Lake area in Hunan province is concerning, and the top authorities have required relevant officials to go to the frontline and the most affected areas for strengthening on-site manpower and material management to ensure the flood control and relief work is carried out in an orderly manner.

According to a news conference by the province's flood relief authorities held in Huarong county, where a dike on the Dongting Lake has breached, the 7,680 people who needed to be evacuated from Tuanzhou township have all been safely settled. The local government is making an all-out effort to repair the breach in the dike.

Satellite images of Huarong and the surrounding areas attest to the severity of the flood. Those affected by the

flooding were safely evacuated thanks to careful organization and efficient action by governments at all levels, the army, all sectors of society, as well as people's self-help and mutual-assistance groups.

The dike breach has caused massive flooding, requiring flood control and relief measures to be implemented to the letter. All people involved should work with one goal in mind, to effectively and orderly carry out flood fighting, to minimize disaster losses and prevent secondary disasters.

All civil servants should go to the places where they are needed the most so that they can better detect the problems, judge the flood situation, and organize rescue and relief work.

Only by going to the front line can they feel the pain of the people who have lost their homes, and perceive

the urgency of scientific flood control.

While all efforts should be made to plug the dike breach, which is an arduous task, more efforts are needed to fortify the embankment between Tuanzhou and neighboring Qiannan. The dike breach should serve as a lesson for all to prepare for emergency response in the future.

The Dongting Lake area has not seen flooding in 28 years, thanks to many embankments being built. However, now those embankments have earthworm or rat holes and could collapse under the impact of floodwaters. While people's attention is focused on plugging the dike breach, we must not neglect the inspection of the embankments and fix any weakened parts. Only by being on high alert, can we ensure the safety of all the embankments.

— BEIJING NEWS

## OpenAI's closed door boost to local LLM developers

Beginning Tuesday, US-based OpenAI will block application programming interface traffic from countries and regions that are not on its supported list, which, while posing a challenge to certain domestic artificial intelligence companies, might also push the latter to focus more on innovation.

Quite a few AI startups in the Chinese mainland, which are "unsupported" by OpenAI, have been developing large language models or AI applications by integrating with the OpenAI API. Those might suffer from OpenAI's blocking of data traffic.

By doing so, OpenAI has actually exited the mainland market and given up the opportunity of training LLMs

in the large market, giving domestic LLM companies an opportunity to accelerate their independent R&D and encourage more startups to opt for domestically produced LLMs.

China doesn't lag far behind the US in terms of LLM development. Its developed LLMs account for 36 percent of the global whole compared to the US' 44 percent, according to the Global Digital Economy White Paper 2024 released by the Global Digital Economy Conference on July 2.

And despite the US leading in fundamental model research and development, China holds a strong position in the number of AI patents and the installation of industrial robots. In 2022, China accounted for 61.1 percent

of the global AI patents, surpassing the 20.9 percent held by the US. The installation of industrial robots in China reached 290,300 units in 2022, which is 7.4 times the 39,500 units in the US at that time.

From all aspects, the gap between the US and China is not that huge. As startups in China will now have to turn to integrating with domestic LLM developers, there will be huge amounts of linguistic materials for the latter to train their models with. That's how China's advantage of a large, active population with access to the internet will be made use of in speeding up the development of its AI sector.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## A happy birthday card from US' stacked deck

Beijing has every reason to take the statement related to the Dalai Lama and Xizang that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken issued on Saturday as a provocation.

While it has become routine for the top US diplomat to issue such a Happy Birthday message on July 6 every year, the stressing that Tibetans should have the "ability to freely choose and venerate religious leaders without interference", indicates that Washington thinks the Dalai Lama is counting his days.

The US lawmakers passed a Xizang-related law last month and a group of them, led by former House speaker Nancy Pelosi, paid a surprise visit to the Dalai Lama in Dharamshala, India, almost at the same time.

The interventionist law and the topics discussed by the US visitors and the Dalai Lama clearly indicate that the US has never been concerned about the

Tibetans' freedom to choose and venerate their religious leaders, but that it will lose a long-term agent on the Xizang front after the Dalai Lama passes away.

Although the US' "commitment to support efforts to preserve Tibetans' distinct linguistic, cultural, and religious heritage" appears to be a no-harm-done cliché, echoing the global call to protect world cultural diversity, Washington's implicit preposition for that commitment is these Tibetan heritages are being threatened by Beijing.

Since the US is the largest sponsor of the Tibetan separatist forces around the world, including the Dalai Lama clique, to protect the Tibetans' culture, language and religion is just an excuse for the US to justify its attempts to play the "Xizang card" against Beijing, an integral part of its overall China containment strategy.

Washington is dealing from the

same deck when it cites so-called concerns about human rights, democracy and freedom in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and Taiwan. The stability, fast socio-economic development, and continuous improvement of people's livelihoods as well as well-protected cultural, linguistic and religious diversities, in the case of Xizang, are the best rebuttal to the US' card play.

The Dalai Lama is by no means a pure religious figure, but a political exile cloaked in monastic robes, as the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said at a news conference on Monday.

The US should keep its promise on Xizang-related issues and stop endorsing the secessionist activities of the Tibetan separatists in any form. The US' brazen interference in the Xizang affairs constitutes the greatest "interference" for the Tibetans to freely choose and venerate religious leaders.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

## COMMENT

Yao Wen

## China, Bangladesh always cooperate toward a better future

At the invitation of Premier Li Qiang, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is paying an official visit to China from Monday to Wednesday. This is Sheikh Hasina's fifth visit to China but her first in five years.

This visit is significant, as it will enable the two sides to build on the past achievements and forge bilateral relations in the future. During the visit, Sheikh Hasina will have meetings with Chinese leaders. The visit, therefore, will inject vibrant impetus into bilateral relations and cooperation in various fields, and help produce new achievements in the China-Bangladesh strategic partnership of cooperation and elevate bilateral ties to new heights.

**Friendship lasts from one generation to another**

The friendship between China and Bangladesh was founded and nurtured by the older generation of leaders of both countries. In the 49 years since the establishment of diplomatic ties, China and Bangladesh have always respected and treated each other as equals, pursued mutual benefit and win-win results, supported each other on issues concerning each other's core interests, and worked together on the path to realizing their respective development and revitalization, thus setting a shining example of friendly coexistence and win-win cooperation.

The amicable cooperation between China and Bangladesh exhibits strong vitality, dynamism, and growth potential, is not targeted at any third party, and is welcomed and supported by the people of both countries, contributing to regional and international peace and stability, as well as fostering development and prosperity.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has reiterated that China is Bangladesh's most trustworthy development partner and most reliable friend. This is the most vivid portrayal of the relationship between the two countries.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations 49 years ago, China and Bangladesh have made remarkable achievements in their respective national construction, economic development and modernization drive. China has become the world's second-largest economy, won the biggest poverty-alleviation battle in history, built a moderately prosperous society in all respects on schedule, and advanced the great cause of building China into a strong country and achieving national rejuvenation through Chinese modernization.

Bangladesh seeks to be self-reliant in feeding its nearly 180 million people, and to maintain long-term political stability and realize rapid economic development. The country's average annual GDP growth rate in the past decade has exceeded 6 percent, and its GDP is more than \$450 billion and per capita GDP nearly \$2,800. Its economic strength has risen to be second in South Asia.

Bangladesh has transformed from one of the poorest countries into one of the fastest growing economies in the world, leading South Asian countries in terms of life expectancy, literacy, and female labor force participation rate, performing what is popularly called the "Bay of Bengal Miracle" and becoming one of the leaders in the Global South.

Bangladesh's aim is to graduate from a least-developed country to a middle-income country by 2026, an upper-middle income country by 2031, and a developed country by 2041, realizing the goals of "Vision 2041"

and the dream of "Sonar Bangla" (Golden Bangladesh).

The sound and stable development of China-Bangladesh relations can be attributed to the guidance of the leaders of both countries. In 2016, Chinese President Xi Jinping paid a historic state visit to Bangladesh during which, the relationship between the two countries was elevated to the level of a strategic partnership of cooperation, paving the way for China-Bangladesh friendly cooperation in the new era. And during Sheikh Hasina's visit to China in 2019, the bilateral relationship was elevated to an even higher level.

China supports Bangladesh in its endeavor to safeguard its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, while opposing external interference in its internal affairs. It also supports Bangladesh in its efforts to independently choose a development path that suits its national conditions, and pursue a foreign policy based on "friendship with all, malice toward none".

Bangladesh, on its part, adheres to the one-China principle and staunchly supports China in safeguarding its sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and development interests.

Also, China and Bangladesh share

similar historical experiences, abide by similar foreign policies, values and development concepts, and have always supported each other. On the path of Bangladesh's modernization, China is a loyal companion and an active contributor.

The highlight of China-Bangladesh relations lies in high-level trade and economic cooperation. China has been Bangladesh's largest trading partner for 13 years in a row, and by the end of 2023, China had invested \$3.2 billion in Bangladesh, making it Bangladesh's second-largest source of foreign investment. It has also completed seven railway projects, 12 highways, and built 21 bridges and 31 power stations in Bangladesh.

**BRI promotes deep exchanges**

In particular, since the Belt and Road Initiative took root in the Bay of Bengal, the Chinese side has completed a series of landmark and large-scale engineering projects in Bangladesh, such as the Padma Multipurpose Bridge, the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Tunnel and the Dasher-kandi Sewage Treatment Plant, which have delivered tangible benefits to the Bangladeshi people.

The nearly 1,000 Chinese companies operating in Bangladesh today have helped create more than 550,000 job opportunities. And Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has spoken highly of the Belt and Road Initiative, asserting that it has opened a new door of development for Bangladesh and played a significant role in the economic takeoff of Bangladesh.

China-Bangladesh relations are rooted in the friendly ties between the people of the two countries. The depth of the two countries' friendship can be gauged from the fact that on International Children's Day last year, President Xi Jinping replied to a letter from a Bangladeshi child called Alifa Chin, encouraging her to study hard, pursue her dreams and carry on the traditional friendship between the people of Bangladesh and China. Chin's story epitomizes the close bond between our two nations.

Besides, nearly 20,000 Bangladeshi students are studying in China, and two Confucius Institutes and one Confucius Classroom have provided training for about 3,000 students in Bangladesh in the past year. Also, learning the Chinese language has become extremely popular across Bangladesh, and the Centre for China Studies in the University of Dhaka has provided a new, larger platform for

cooperation between the think tanks and academia of the two countries.

Furthermore, Air China and China Southern Airlines will commence direct flights between Beijing and Dhaka later this month. The total number of flights will be 80 per week with a capacity of over 15,000 passengers, increasing people-to-people exchanges and promoting business and investment between the two countries.

According to the "National Image of China in Bangladesh" survey conducted by authoritative Bangladeshi think tanks for two consecutive years, more than 90 percent of the respondents said they believed the current state of China-Bangladesh relationship is positive, and there has been a noticeable increase in Bangladeshi people's approval of China.

China and Bangladesh support each other in the global arena and uphold international fairness and justice. China has supported Bangladesh's initiative for the "Culture of Peace" Resolution at the United Nations General Assembly for 25 consecutive years, and advocates for Bangladesh being a partner country of BRICS, paving the way for its full membership of the grouping. And it appreciates Bangladesh's outstanding contributions to, and enormous sacrifices in, international peacekeeping operations.

China and Bangladesh have similar stances on issues such as promotion of democracy, protection of human rights, empowerment of women, mitigation of climate change, conservation of the environment and ecology, and pursuit of sustainable development. The two countries coordinate and cooperate with multilateral organizations and mechanisms such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and the ASEAN Regional Forum. They have also bolstered cooperation on issues such as the Palestine-Israel conflict and the Ukraine crisis, working together to maintain world peace and stability.

China sympathizes with Bangladesh for the huge cost it has borne for the Rohingya issue, which can be resolved only through repatriation. As for the situation in Rakhine state, China is sparing no effort in engaging with relevant parties in Myanmar for a political settlement to the issue, playing a facilitating role in achieving a cease-fire in Rakhine state, and striving to restart the repatriation of the Rohingya people.

"A partnership forged with the right approach defies geographical distance; it is thicker than glue and stronger than metal and stone." During Sheikh Hasina's visit to China, it is expected that both sides will reach important consensus and sign multiple cooperation documents and memorandums of understanding on infrastructure, free trade agreements, the digital economy, disaster prevention, poverty alleviation, clean energy, healthcare, education, cultural exchanges and other areas.

China stands ready to take Sheikh Hasina's visit as an opportunity to further deepen political mutual trust between the two countries, strengthen the synergy of development strategies, consolidate the traditional friendship, and work together to realize the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation and Bangladesh's "Vision 2041".

We hope Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to China is a complete success. Long live China-Bangladesh friendship.

The author is Ambassador of China to Bangladesh. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

## Efforts to conserve Sanjiangyuan ecology paying rich dividends



Kang Bing

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The former herdsmen and their families have been resettled in newly built houses in nearby towns where they either do farming or are employed in other jobs.

Ecological conservation is becoming an increasingly important issue in the agenda of local governments, with Qinghai province making it its top priority. Known as China's "water tower", Qinghai's southern part is where the country's three major rivers — the Yellow River, the Yangtze River and the Lancang River — originate. The ecology in the areas where the three rivers originate is critical to the development of not only China but also a number of other countries, as the Lancang River zigzags all the way to Southeast Asia where it's called the Mekong River.

With global warming affecting the source areas of the rivers, damaging the grasslands, shrinking the lakes and threatening some animal species with extinction, the central government decided to take urgent corrective measures. It established the Sanjiangyuan Natural Reserve in 2000 (*sanjiangyuan* means three rivers' source), and upgraded it to a State-level protection area in 2003. And in 2021, it elevated the 123,100-square-kilometer reserve — half the

size of Great Britain — to the status of a national park.

According to a senior official of the park, the government has invested 30 billion yuan (\$4.12 billion) for conserving the ecology in the Sanjiangyuan area since 2003.

President Xi Jinping has made three inspections to Qinghai since 2012, demonstrating the importance he and the central government attach to the province's development and its ecological conservation. During his most recent visit to Qinghai in June, Xi emphasized the importance of environmental protection and ecological conservation for the whole nation, especially protection of the Sanjiangyuan area proves to be the case.

The government's support and investment for ecological conservation efforts seem to be paying dividends, as the size of the lakes in the area have expanded by more than 100 sq km, and the number of wildlife species and grass and forest cover have greatly increased. A recent report even said that ecological deterioration has been finally contained. I hope this is true.

As a journalist I visited the area to do an investigative story several years ago, so I know how difficult it is to check environmental deterioration in the region. Also, I remember it took us more than six hours to cover 500 km by car from Qinghai's capital Xining to Maduo county where the Yellow River originates.

Once our car climbed above 4,000 meters, the trees vanished and the grass cover thinned on the mountain slopes. When we reached the source of the Yellow River at an altitude of 4,800 m, it was snowing and we had to brave our way up to the spot against strong gusts of wind.

Talking with local Tibetan people, I learned that grazing had largely stopped, and the former herdsmen were now working for the Sanjiangyuan National Park as conservationists. Riding motorcycles, they patrol the reserve, rescue wildlife and check for regulation offenders. Data show about 17,000 families have given up grazing sheep and cattle, with at least one member of each such family employed by the reserve for a salary of more than 20,000 yuan a year.

The former herdsmen and their families have been resettled in newly built houses in nearby towns where they either do farming or are employed in other jobs. When we visited one such family near the Maduo county headquarters, the host, a Tibetan man in his late 60s, apologized for welcoming us with milk tea made with milk powder, and not with fresh milk. But he said he was satisfied with his new life because now his family has a warm house to live in — provided for free by the government — gets to eat fresh vegetables, and his children are employed and grandchildren go to school. His only regret, he said, was that he "could not eat as much mutton and beef as before because they are expensive".

Despite the progress made in protecting the environment, I know that the ecology in Sanjiangyuan, fragile as it is, will take a long time to heal, and that more efforts are needed to ensure China's "water tower" regains its serene nature. And I hope more favorable policies are implemented to enable local people to live a happy life and get as much mutton and beef as they like to eat.

# GLOBAL VIEWS

JAFAR BEDRU GELETU

## Multiplier effect

By forging development partnerships China and the multilateral development banks can give greater impact to their engagement with Africa

China and African countries have a long-standing relationship based on mutual respect and equality. China supported African nations in their fight for independence from colonial powers, while African countries backed China's position in international forums,



leading to its reinstatement in the United Nations Security Council in 1971. China has emerged as Africa's largest trading partner, demonstrating its commitment to deepening ties with the continent. The Chinese government's dedication to this partnership is evident in its participation in the China-Africa cooperation forums. Recognizing the importance of trust in any partnership, China has aligned its initiatives with the African Union's Agenda 2063, a 50-year development plan. This alignment demonstrates China's commitment to supporting Africa's long-term goals. The China-Africa partnership serves as an exemplary model for global powers seeking to engage with Africa. China's approach prioritizes collaboration and mutual benefit, fostering a strong and sustainable relationship. Through its commitment to economic cooperation, alignment with African priorities, and emphasis on mutual respect, China has solidified its position as a true friend and partner of Africa.

China and African nations have established a solid foundation for cooperation in various fields, including economic, political, cultural, technological, educational, and other sectors. This collaboration is evident at both the bilateral and multilateral levels, with China consistently supporting developing countries in safeguarding their interests. Key initiatives such as

South-South Cooperation, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the Belt and Road Initiative facilitate partnerships and mutual benefits between China and Africa.

Africa now stands at a pivotal moment in its development journey. The continent faces significant challenges, from poverty and inequality to infrastructure deficits and climate change impacts. Yet, Africa also holds immense potential with its youthful, dynamic population, abundant natural resources and growing economic base.

To unlock this potential, Africa needs robust development partnerships, partnerships that mobilize finance, expertise and innovative approaches. Two key players in this effort are multilateral development banks and China.

Multilateral development banks, such as the World Bank, African Development Bank, and others, have long been central to Africa's development. They provide crucial financing for infrastructure, social services and private sector growth. Increasingly, they are also catalyzing private capital and supporting policy reforms. At the same time, China has emerged as a major development partner in Africa over the past two decades. Through initiatives such as the FOCAC and the BRI, Chinese investment has flowed into African countries, financing large-scale infrastructure projects, industrial parks and more. China has also provided significant volumes of development assistance, debt relief and concessional loans.

However, the evolving development landscape in Africa calls for a new era of more coordinated, transparent and sustainable development partnerships. We must find ways for multilateral development banks, China and other actors to collaborate effectively, leveraging their respective strengths and expertise. Multilateral banks, China

and African countries must work together to identify shared development goals and align their strategies and investments accordingly. This will maximize impact and avoid duplication of efforts.

All partners must commit to greater transparency around financing terms, project selection, and implementation. Robust governance frameworks, inclusive of civil society, will therefore be critical.

Leveraging the expertise of multilateral banks, we must find innovative ways to crowd-in private investment for sustainable infrastructure, enterprise development and other priority areas.

Development partnerships should prioritize building local skills, institutions and technological capabilities in African countries. This will enable greater self-reliance and resilience.

As debt levels rise, new approaches are needed to ensure debt remains sustainable, including debt restructuring mechanisms and alternative financing models.

To better coordinate their development efforts in Africa, multilateral development banks and China can pursue several key strategies:

Joint coordination mechanisms, with representation from African governments, to create dedicated coordination platforms and to facilitate regular dialogue and information sharing between MDBs and China, should be established. These mechanisms could help align development strategies, coordinate investment plans, and resolve potential disputes. Establishing joint steering committees or technical working groups could provide structured forums for collaboration.

Harmonize standards and safeguards to align the environmental, social and governance standards used by MDBs and China for their overseas investments. Develop a



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shared set of high-quality safeguards that prioritize sustainability, transparency and local community engagement. This could involve policy reforms that mandate the use of these harmonized standards for all cofinanced initiatives.

Increase transparency around project selection, financing terms and implementation progress. Introduce joint disclosure requirements that provide comprehensive information on key project details, including debt terms and procurement processes. Establish joint monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track the outcomes and impacts of development initiatives.

Leverage comparative advantages to identify and capitalize on the unique strengths and capabilities of MDBs and China. MDBs possess deep expertise in areas such as policy reform, institutional capacity building and social development programming. China's strengths lie in its ability to mobilize large-scale infrastructure financing and its growing technical capabilities. Strategically combining these complementary capabilities can deliver more

impactful, holistic development solutions.

Empower African agency and ownership to ensure that development priorities and strategies are driven by African countries themselves, reflecting their national development plans and local needs. Engage more deeply with African regional institutions, civil society and the private sector to enhance local ownership and participation. Build the capacity of African governments and communities to lead the design and implementation of development initiatives.

Mobilize diverse financing to leverage MDBs' convening power and financial expertise to catalyze private investment through innovative financing mechanisms, such as blended finance and risk-sharing facilities. Integrating China's development finance with these broader financing frameworks would enable it to achieve greater scale and impact. Explore cofinancing arrangements that pool resources and align investments toward common development goals.

By implementing these strategies, MDBs and China can forge

more effective, sustainable, and impactful development partnerships in Africa. This will be crucial to unlocking the continent's vast potential, addressing its immense development challenges, and achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It has to be recalled that the path forward will require strong political will, creative solutions and a genuine commitment to inclusive, country-led development from all parties involved. But the potential rewards are immense, both for Africa and the global community as a whole.

By addressing these priorities together, we can build a new era of global development transition partnerships in Africa, partnerships that are transparent, inclusive and focused on delivering lasting, equitable progress. Most importantly, African countries themselves must be empowered to shape these evolving partnerships according to their national development plans and local needs. Genuine country ownership and leadership will be critical.

Ethiopia's engagement with China dates back several decades and has evolved significantly over time. Recently, the China-Ethiopia relationship has transformed into an all-weather strategic partnership. Ethiopia is also an active member of the FOCAC and the BRI, which have helped to realize a number of connectivity projects and industrial parks; it has also recently joined BRICS. Reviewing the course of relations between Ethiopia and China so far, reflecting on the historical context of Ethiopia's relationship with China and the factors that have shaped it, as well as the development assistance we have enjoyed, and the growing economic cooperation between the two nations, will provide invaluable insights to help ensure utmost dividends for both nations.

Multilateral banks, China and African nations should work together to forge a new era of transition partnerships that deliver lasting, equitable progress for all. The future of Africa, and indeed, the world, depends on it.

*The author is director-general of the Ethiopian Institute of Foreign Affairs. 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.*

NATASHA AGARWAL AND PARESH BATRA

## Paradigm shift

Optimizing the economic collaboration between China and India has the potential to create a new model of international development cooperation

Globalization appears to have entered a phase where the costs emanating from geopolitical risks are beginning to overshadow the benefits of internationalization of business operations. It is evident in the difficulties both foreign and Indian businesses are experiencing



Natasha Agarwal



Paresch Batra

in scaling their businesses in India because of the Indian government's clampdown on issuing business and employment visas to Chinese passport holders. Similarly, Chinese foreign direct investment into India is also subject to greater scrutiny which could potentially derail India's global manufacturing ambitions.

The voices acknowledging that India needs to recalibrate its suboptimal economic engagement with China are few and far between, and the acknowledgment comes with a "proceed with caution" approach. In such a dynamically changing geopolitical landscape where nations find themselves interdependently integrated into the global economic system, the stature of the Indian and Chinese economies cannot be discounted. Embracing multipolarity with a vision to advance the interest of the Global South, the two countries should keep their political differences at bay and design an optimal economic engagement framework between them. This is imperative now, given

the need to join hands to address common global issues such as climate change.

How should the world's two most populous nations, approach each other so they can progress together? Can these two countries capitalize on their cultural similarities, and not allow political differences to get in the way of a competitive collaborative joint effort? This collaboration will not only fulfill bilateral needs and wants, and iron out mutual differences, but will also benefit other countries, thereby facilitating joint international development cooperation. Optimizing the economic collaboration between the two countries has the potential of proposing to the world a new multipolar development paradigm. The paradigm is characterized by the understanding that every nation desires to grow and have a voice on the global stage. It is a development paradigm that calls for care not to step on the sovereign toes of other nations and respect and for their aspirations and support their independent decisions and decision-making processes. When nations are provided with this individualistic space at the



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collective global high table, a sense of being equal partners emerges. Ideologies converge and a cooperative and conducive environment is created to conduct business among nations. This automatically opens doors for dialogue and negotiations.

Domestic demands mean countries will continuously align and realign, based on their economic interests, with those that take cognizance of their individuality and also assure them of noninterference in their domestic internal affairs —

in other words, on an equal footing and a level playing field.

Approaching nations with this multipolar developmental paradigm, the two countries can collectively combine their independent strengths, thereby changing the global discourse on economics and politics. This combined potential was evident at the BRICS 2023 forum in South Africa where the two countries independently highlighted their sectoral competitiveness in an attempt to remain appealing to global financial and human capital. Combining this sectoral competitiveness with their specific

respective skill sets, an international developmental competitive collaboration between the Asian neighbors has the potential to create an environment of mutual trust facilitating the growth and developmental processes of receiving nations. Besides, both stand to benefit directly from the resulting spillover accruing from this collaboration. This impact can also be

internalized by the people involved, both directly and indirectly.

For example, both countries have been capitalizing on their independent strengths while engaging with African countries. Yet both countries have their own strains and restraints in the engagement. An international development competitive collaboration between them would therefore help in ironing out these strains whilst continuing to capitalize on their independent strengths. For instance, India's linguistic skills and cultural affinity with African nations complement China's effective process deliverables, offering a balanced approach to engaging with Africa.

Such joint international competitive collaborations between the two nations can be employed elsewhere, be it in Southeast Asia or the Pacific Island nations. Each nation's weakness can be filled by the strength of the other. Partnership between India and China can pave the way for global development in a multipolar world.

It is time to welcome a peaceful and prosperous multipolar world where sharing and caring for global resources are truly a shared responsibility.

*Natasha Agarwal was a visiting research scholar at College of International Development and Global Agriculture at China Agricultural University. Paresch Batra is an independent concept researcher based out of Mumbai, India. The authors contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

LIFE

# Plateau's textiles have high standards

Fashion brand founder is committed to keeping cultural heritage alive for global runways, **Wang Xin** reports in Shanghai.

**W**ith a pasture turning into a natural runway, over 40 Tibetan models showcased 100-plus pieces of clothing primarily made of locally featured yak wool during a fashion show staged on June 28 in Madoi county, Golog Tibetan autonomous prefecture, Qinghai province.

Guo Xiuling, 53, founder of Shanghai-based luxury fashion brand Sandriver, is the fashion show's organizer. As a native of the Alashan Plateau, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, Guo has come a long way, staying committed to bringing the featured fabrics and unique craftsmanship from China's plateaus to the world.

The brand has been invited to Paris Fashion Week for 10 consecutive years and several times to the Maison & Objet, a renowned home decor expo in Paris.

"We are committed to pursuing excellence and high quality and strive to build the world's top Chinese brand, to speak out for China and to showcase 'quality Chinese product-making'" says Guo, who described herself as a "Shanghai craftswoman".

Guo's experiences also depict a story of pursuing excellence, aiming at the top and transcending boundaries. Actually majored in philosophy and economics in her senior education, Guo gave up her job as a teacher in 1991 and worked in a textile factory.

"I knew nothing when I entered the industry but I worked hard to stand out and succeed in the textile sector," Guo says.

After becoming a technical expert in her first factory, Guo was invited to work in Germany in 2000 where she became a world-leading technical master in the textile program with more than 200 technical patents. After returning to China for 10 years and leading a big team as a supplier for top international luxury brands, Guo founded Sandriver in 2012 in Shanghai's Jinshan district.

"The quality of Chinese manufacturing is already top-notch. However, there are few Chinese brands that showcase the spirit of Chinese craftsmanship and can compete with foreign luxury names on the world stage," Guo says.

That is the goal of her brand. Positioned as an international brand, it has been focusing on the restoration and innovation of traditional fabrics and unique craftsmanship rooted in Inner Mongolia and the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau.

"If we want to build a world-class Chinese brand, we must dig deep into traditional Chinese cultures, raw materials and crafts, especially those less-known from ethnic groups in which we have seen enormous potential to make our brands stand out on the global stage," Guo says.

The recent Madoi show demonstrated efforts, outcomes and ambition by Guo and her team.



**Clockwise from top:** Guo Xiuling, founder of Shanghai-based luxury fashion brand Sandriver, discusses yak wool with a herdsman in Madoi county, Golog Tibetan autonomous prefecture, Qinghai province. Local residents learn textile skills at a workshop in Maqen county, Golog prefecture. Tibetan models showcase clothing primarily made of yak wool during a fashion show staged on June 28 in Madoi. In Shanghai, Guo talks with craftsmen from Maqen county. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Located in the heartland of the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau, Golog Tibetan autonomous prefecture has an average altitude of 4,000 meters above sea level. The yak plays a symbolic and critical role in the residents' daily lives and production. Yak wool has long been an essen-

tial material for making yurts and clothing in Tibetan ethnic areas. During the down season, a yak produces an average of up to 300 grams of down. After cleaning and post-

processing, the output of yak wool is significantly reduced. Thus, the yak wool is of top quality and has high economic and cultural value.

Apart from the precious raw material, the craftsmanship of processing

yak wool is also worth noting.

"We have revolutionized and integrated textile techniques (when it comes to yak wool)," Guo explains. "The Inner Mongolia autonomous region is home to the

best cashmere, while the Xizang autonomous region boasts the best crafts from cashmere processing. To make the scratchy yak wool skin-friendly, we integrated our traditional craftsmanship of Inner Mongolian handmade felting and the hand-woven Tibetan *puhu* (a kind of woolen fabric) in processing the yak wool."

The rebirth of the dying traditional craft was not easy. Before the Madoi show, Guo spent about 10 years restoring Inner Mongolian handmade felting and another two years conserving and optimizing hand-woven Tibetan *puhu*.

"As society and the economy develop, declining usage scenarios in residents' daily lives have led to the demise of traditional crafts. Some intangible cultural heritages are going extinct," Guo says.

Fortunately, her efforts have reaped returns.

With the restored craft of Inner Mongolian handmade felting, the brand became the first and only Chinese brand invited to be sold at Le Bon Marche, a top department store in Paris.

With traditional crafts coming back to life and shining in fashion and art pieces, residents in remote plateau areas are expected to pass on the precious cultural heritages while gaining a better quality of life.

"In the process of development and production of Sandriver's yak wool products, local herdsmen and women are empowered to find jobs and gain income in places close to their homes, boosting local economic development," says Wang Qiyang, deputy head of Madoi county.

Guo's journey continues. Next, she will travel to Southwest China's Yunnan province and Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region for more discovery and further integration.

"We are not Hermes or some other big luxury name. As a Chinese brand, we are committed to making our voice heard and showing the world Chinese materials and production. The spirit that Sandriver embodies is the spirit of Chinese people, which is the integration of profound Chinese cultures," Guo says.

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Models in yak wool clothing display its style in the natural environment.

## Film retracing Marco Polo's journey east premieres in London

LONDON — A documentary retracing the ancient journey of Marco Polo (1254-1324), a Venetian merchant and explorer who traveled to China during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), premiered in London on Wednesday.

*In the Footsteps of Marco Polo* is a film produced by One Tribe TV star-

ring Stanley Johnson and Max Johnson.

The father and son duo followed Marco Polo's 13th-century route through China, starting from the land port on the China-Pakistan border, traversing the highlands of North China's Inner Mongolia autonomous region and ending in Beijing.

Stanley Johnson, former British politician and father of former prime minister Boris Johnson, says that he initially began the journey with his friends in 1961 from Venice, Italy, but stopped at the border between Afghanistan and China.

"We took this as an opportunity to build bridges between the East and

the West," says Stanley Johnson. "It's important nowadays because we are confronting global issues like climate change and we must work together."

Chinese Ambassador to Britain Zheng Zeguang said in his opening address that the movie is not only about pursuing dreams but also about China-Britain collaboration.

This movie will inspire more people in Britain to make similar journeys, meet the people, learn the culture, and appreciate the landscapes and accomplishments of China, says Zheng, inviting British people to visit China.

"It's exciting to follow the journey of Marco Polo," says Max Johnson,

who lived and studied in China. "And as his son, I have to follow in my father's footsteps. It's a very beautiful moment for me. Many people say things about China but they haven't even been there. It's important to go to China and see it for yourself"

XINHUA

# LIFE



**Left:** *Winter* by Huang Yongyu. **Above:** Huang drew a remake of his own design of the *Golden Monkey* stamp, issued in 1980, which attracts admirers to the National Art Museum of China exhibition *For So Long, and Colorful* in Beijing. **Left below:** Another of Huang's work, *Summer*. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY AND BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

## Creating of an eternal audience

Long life and colorful career of artist Huang Yongyu are presented as his farewell gift to the world, **Lin Qi** reports.

In an article he wrote in 1979, *Landscapes Under the Sun*, the prolific artist Huang Yongyu (1924-2023) recounted anecdotes about his uncle-once-removed, Shen Congwen (1902-88), a writer and scholar of repute, and how his attitude toward life and academic research had influenced his own.

At the end of the article, he wrote: "What a long life (Shen) lived, and (his experiences were) so rich, and colorful!"

Today, Huang is also regarded as a prominent figure in art and culture, whose life and career were, like Shen's, long and substantial. A phrase from his commentary about his uncle, *For So Long, and Colorful*, has become the title of an exhibition of his work being held at the National Art Museum of China in Beijing until Thursday.

In 2013, Huang held an exhibition at the National Museum of China to commemorate his 90th birthday. It was an all-encompassing show to display his accomplishments in painting, design and literature — the artist was also an avid writer who published dozens of novels and collections of essays and prose articles.

The current exhibition at the National Art Museum is a show of 159 ink paintings, all made after he turned 90.

It is not billed as a retrospective — the usual practice for a late, accomplished artist — but per Huang's request, as a show of his "latest work". It is one he had planned for some time.

"None of the paintings in the show will have been seen before in art and cultural circles," he once said. "I'm pretty serious about making it happen."

Huang died on June 13, 2023, at the age of 99. His farewell to the world was quiet. His family announced his death in a statement released the following day, and no memorial service was held.

In an earlier televised interview, Huang envisaged his centennial exhibition, saying, "It will show 100 paintings, to celebrate the 100 years I have lived. I will show work in which I've invested all my energy. I will be doing my best, but maybe the pieces will not be perfect as far as the audience is concerned. But hopefully, people will feel they are not bad, and that will be enough for me."

The earliest painting currently on show was finished in 2015, and the most recent was completed a few weeks before his death,

demonstrating his lifelong passion for art, and for sharing that pleasure with the public.

The paintings are vividly colored, often highly saturated, and feature recurring motifs from his work popular with his audience over the years, such as lotus flowers, immortals and animals.

They are also a reiteration of his ambition to create, which lasted until the final moments of his life. Several paintings on show are over 1 meter in length, some even over 2 meters — quite a challenge for a man of his age.

Born in Changde in Hunan province, Huang left home in his early teens to earn a living doing a variety of jobs, including stints at ceramic factories, primary schools and theater groups — and also learned to paint and to make woodcuts.

He gained the most from his wartime experiences, the social vicissitudes of the 20th century China, and from the people of different backgrounds he met along the way.

According to Shao Dazhen, critic and professor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, where Huang taught for decades, his art and writing reflects "the realities of the world, in a straightforward manner, with no pretense".

"He loved people and he loved life deeply, but he expressed this in a peaceful way. He spoke for the public, when he painted and wrote," Shao says. "His work is sincere, interesting and appealing. It is unparalleled."

Physically confined to his home in suburban Beijing in the later stages of his life, Huang was not able to travel as much as he liked. Instead, he turned his shrewd gaze on small things within his reach; the potted flowers in his study, the new plants in his courtyard, and shrimps brought by friends. He examined them at length, lost in thought and then expressed what he felt with ink and color.

Wu Hongliang, director of the Beijing Fine Art Academy, which has held several exhibitions for Huang, says that the artist saw "a miniature universe" in the small lives around him, and celebrated them in his work.

"One feels the various dimensions he used to understand the world, which were not only based on an accumulation of knowledge, observation and experience," Wu says, citing one of the paintings on display depicting a spider and a butterfly trapped in its web, a scene Huang observed one day.



**“The painter needs to deal with everything around him in the world, and needs to confront changes, all the while keeping his world of art quiet and peaceful with utmost restraint.”**

Huang Yongyu, late art master

"Literature ranks first in my life, before sculpture and woodcuts, and painting comes fourth," Huang once said.

He read and wrote extensively. "My advice to young people is do not waste time, read a lot, let books be your guide."

These preferences are also evident in the paintings on display.

Adding short poems or brief commentaries is one characteristic of classical Chinese paintings.

Huang reinforced that tradition by extending the length of the texts — his commentaries on paintings are often of hundreds of characters in length, enough for an essay.

Wu says that Huang's writing is full of the wit and humor for which he is known, melded with a down-to-earth manner and sense of calm that pleases both the eyes and minds of his readers.

"The reason that he did so many *baimiao* drawings and wrote lengthy commentaries on paintings was probably because he wanted to tell people that even at his age, he still had good control of his brushes, and retained his pursuit of detail," says Lei Zhenfang, a close friend and former art director of Rongbaozhai, the centuries-old cultural brand of Beijing.

In 1953, then a teacher at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Huang was dispatched by the school to research traditional woodblock printing at Rongbaozhai, where the technique was well preserved. Lei says that Huang studied for more than two months and learned under the guidance of artisans he also befriended.

He adds that all his life, the artist sought change and dared to confront challenges, and as a result, contributed to the revival of Chinese art.

"He never felt satisfied with himself. He often said, 'If I do one more drawing, I will do better than with this one.' His pursuit of freedom in art was motivated by his attempt to make breakthroughs."

Huang once said that those who paint are doomed to be alone.

"The painter needs to deal with everything around him in the world, and needs to confront changes, all the while keeping his world of art quiet and peaceful with utmost restraint."

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## Sri Lankan youth fascinated by introduction to Chinese culture

COLOMBO — Nineteen-year-old Sri Lankan Senuda Sapumal carefully watched his Chinese teacher demonstrate how to do calligraphy, then cautiously dipped his brush in ink, and succeeded in writing two large characters representing "friendship". Around him, dozens of students of similar ages watched attentively and were eager to have a go for themselves.

*Chinese Culture Meets Students of Sri Lanka*, an event hosted by the Chinese Embassy in Sri Lanka, was

held on June 25 at the Sri Lanka Boys' Model School in Malabe. Under the guidance of Chinese teachers, young Sri Lankans born after 2000, who are also known as Generation Z, immersed themselves in traditional Chinese culture by practicing calligraphy, learning paper-cutting, and training in martial arts.

"I've seen kung fu movies and chopsticks in restaurants, but this is my first time to experience Chinese culture myself. It is amazing," Sapu-

mal says, proudly holding up his calligraphy and posing for a photo to capture the moment.

The students here are no strangers to China. Sapumal says that his teacher told them their school uniforms were donations from China. "China, Friendship," he says.

On the other side of the classroom, a long display table is filled with Chinese crafts: Peking Opera masks, enamel vases, fan screens, and tea sets. Many students paused to look at them.

"What do the masks signify?" "During which festival do you hang lanterns?" "Which Chinese zodiac sign is mine?" The students eagerly asked questions. Upon receiving an answer, several senior students showed photos on their phones of traditional Sri Lankan masks and paper lanterns lit during the Vesak festival.

"It turns out Chinese culture is very similar to ours. It feels like China is closer to us now," one student says.

Zhang Min, a teacher at the Bandaranaike Center for International Studies, says that additional Chinese Culture Meets Students of Sri Lanka events will take place at 11 primary and secondary schools in Sri Lanka within the next six months, and that the current program is the third of its kind.

"I teach Sri Lankan students Chinese paper-cutting. When the children open their cut-out designs, their expressions of surprise are like a result of 'a magic moment'. Many

times, students tell me they hang them in their windows at home to share the joy with their families," Zhang says. "I hope that these immersive experiences will plant the seeds of Chinese culture in the hearts of students, and gradually take root and thrive."

"I am about to enter university and I'm preparing to study architecture in China. That's what I have always dreamed of," says Sapumal.

XINHUA

## LIFE

What do you expect to hear and see when you attend a concert given by an *erhu* virtuoso?

"I want those with a general idea of the *erhu* to put aside their impressions, and I hope those who have never seen an *erhu* concert will get to know the instrument with a fresh eye," says Jiang Jianhua, an *erhu* player.

In the world of traditional Chinese music, Jiang is a luminary, celebrated for her mastery of the traditional two-stringed bowed instrument, which is revered for its emotional sound and rich cultural heritage.

The *erhu* virtuoso will be in concert with *pipa* (a short-necked, four-stringed lute) player Yang Baoyuan, jazz pianist Huang Jianyi and cellist Mo Mo, on Friday at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing.

It will not be Jiang's first time playing chamber music. In 2021, she performed selections from operas, symphonies and chamber music with a string quartet at the NCPA.

"It's rare for a chamber music concert to feature an *erhu*, since it is usually played solo or in a big ensemble. I want to offer the audience a fresh take on the *erhu* and allow them to enjoy the traditional instrument as they never have before," says 63-year-old Jiang, who is a retired professor of the Central Conservatory of Music.

During the upcoming concert, she has adapted pieces including *Blooming Flowers and Full Moon* by composer and conductor Huang Yijun (1915-95), and *Carmen Fantasia* from French composer Bizet's opera, *Carmen*. She has also adapted a piece Japanese composer Ryuichi Sakamoto wrote for *The Last Emperor*, a Bernardo Bertolucci movie that won nine Academy Awards in 1988, including for its soundtrack.

For Jiang, the choice carries a deeper meaning.

"Unlike other music I have adapted for the *erhu* to demonstrate its versatility and way it can sound, I have adapted Sakamoto's piece to show my respect and express my condolences," says Jiang, referring to the composer's death last year at the age of 71.

Jiang met Sakamoto in a studio in Tokyo in 1987 when he invited her to perform on the soundtrack he had written for *The Last Emperor*.

"He was very polite and humble. He told us that he didn't know much about traditional Chinese instruments, but he needed them for the soundtrack. He had us play a few bars of the score, which he had not yet finished and showed great interest in our instruments. Then, he asked me to keep playing while he composed the score," says Jiang, adding that besides the *erhu*, the players of the *pipa* (a Chinese zither) also performed for Sakamoto.

Thanks to the movie's success, the *erhu* made a lot of fans in Japan, Jiang adds.

In 1993, she started to teach at the University of Creation Art, Music and Social Work in Takasaki city, which was one of the first universities in Japan to offer an *erhu* major.

During the upcoming NCPA concert, she will also play another of Sakamoto's compositions, *Energy Flow*.

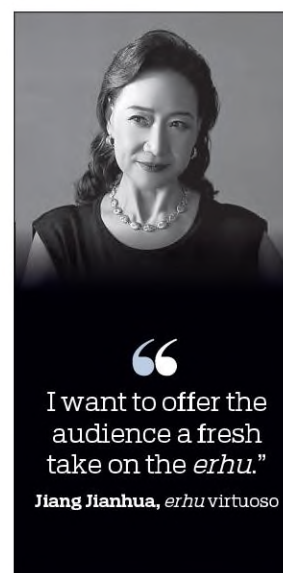
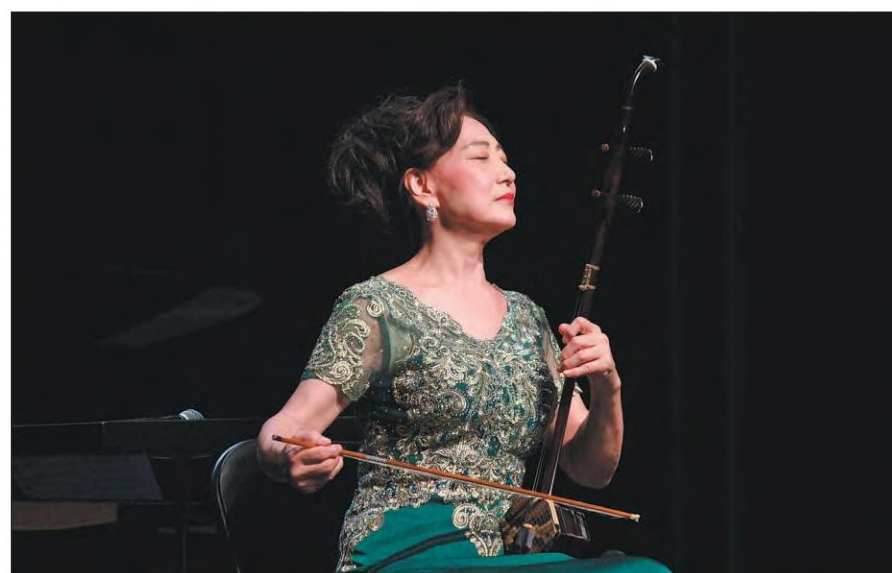
Born and raised in Shanghai, Jiang began learning the instrument with her uncle Tang Chungui, an *erhu* teacher, when she was 10. She



**Above:** Jiang Jianhua, 63, is a celebrated *erhu* (a two-stringed bowed instrument) virtuoso, who will be in concert in Beijing on Friday.  
**Below:** Jiang at a concert in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, in 2022. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Traditional with a twist

In addition to popularizing the *erhu*, Jiang Jianhua has found ways to give the classical instrument a contemporary sound, **Chen Nan** reports.



"I want to offer the audience a fresh take on the *erhu*."  
Jiang Jianhua, *erhu* virtuoso

says that her family loved music and often sang at home to *erhu* music.

"The *erhu* was like a toy when I was child. Before I formally learned to play with my uncle, I played it for fun," she says.

In 1974, Jiang went to Beijing to study at the middle school affiliated to the Central Conservatory of Music and in 1978, she was admitted to the

Central Conservatory of Music.

She experienced a life-changing moment later that year when Japanese conductor Seiji Ozawa (1935-2024) visited China. Ozawa had been officially invited by the Chinese government to work with the China National Symphony Orchestra, formerly known as the Central Philharmonic Society, for a week. During his

trip, the conductor visited the Central Conservatory of Music, where he saw Jiang performing.

She was playing *The Moon Reflected in the Second Spring* by Hua Yanjun (1893-1950), a blind musician also known as Abing. Ozawa was so touched by the piece that he cried.

"I will never forget the moment when I raised my head and saw him

crying. I was overwhelmed by his reaction. He told me that he couldn't believe that a young student could play a piece that captured the composer's life so well," recalls Jiang, who has played the classic piece, which is one of the best-known compositions for the *erhu*, many times.

In 1979, she was invited by Ozawa, who was musical director of the

Boston Symphony Orchestra in the United States from 1973 until 2002, to perform at Tanglewood in Massachusetts, the orchestra's home and site of an annual music festival, which allowed her to work with international musicians and play the traditional instrument for an international audience.

"I am very grateful to Ozawa. He offered me many opportunities and shared his love for the *erhu* with international audiences. I used to focus mostly on practicing my technique, but he taught me to think about contributing to the preservation and promotion of *erhu* music on a global scale," says Jiang, who performed *The Shadow of Wind*, a concerto written specially for her by Japanese composer Kei Anjo, with Ozawa and the New Japan Philharmonic for the opening of Tokyo's Suntory Hall in 1986.

Jiang has worked with Ozawa many times over the course of her career. For decades, she has been seeking to enchant audiences with her ability to evoke a spectrum of feelings — from melancholy to joy — through her instrument's resonant timbre. She has also worked with many composers on new pieces for the *erhu*, giving it a contemporary twist.

"These opportunities to work with international musicians not only enabled me to introduce the *erhu* to a wider audience, but they also inspired me to take a fresh approach to playing," Jiang says. "Chinese people are familiar with the *erhu*, which is often seen as old-fashioned. Even I considered it old-fashioned and not as appealing as Western instruments like the violin and the piano when I was a young student."

"However, playing at concerts abroad and seeing the warm response of the audience made me rethink the instrument," she adds.

In 2007, Jiang returned to teach at the Central Conservatory of Music after working in Japan for nearly 40 years. Although she has now retired, she continues to play every day, a practice she describes as being as natural as eating and breathing.

"At the heart of her artistic philosophy lies a profound reverence for the *erhu*'s cultural heritage and her commitment to promoting Chinese musical traditions to global audiences," says *pipa* player Yang, who was Jiang's classmate at the Central Conservatory of Music. The pair have been performing together since 1987 when they both recorded tracks for *The Last Emperor*.

Despite being trained classically as a child, Mo Mo, who will be accompanying Jiang on the cello at the upcoming concert, has always had an interest in traditional Chinese music.

"Since both the *erhu* and the cello are stringed instruments, they have lots of things in common in terms of playing," he says. "The pieces Jiang has chosen for the concert also cover a range of Western music, which proves her dedication to preserving and innovating the playing of the *erhu*."

Huang, who will be accompanying Jiang on piano, is also looking forward to the event. "When she picks up her *erhu*, she totally immerses herself in the music. The concert will be an unforgettable experience."

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## Literary forum unites writers across the Taiwan Strait

By FANG AIQING  
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The families of Taiwan writers Yu Guangzhong (1928-2017) and Sanmao (1943-91), born as Chen Maoping and also known to the English-speaking world as Echo Chan, recently donated a selection of their manuscripts and other literary documents to the National Museum of Modern Chinese Literature in Beijing.

They made the donation when they attended a forum on June 29 to enhance literary ties across the Taiwan Strait in Xiamen, Fujian province, which was held as part of the Straits Forum, the largest grassroots cross-Strait exchange event.

It was the first literary event at the Straits Forum, which attracted 140 renowned writers from both sides, including Shu Ting, Zhang Xiaofeng and A Yi, as well as youth representatives from various universities.

Sanmao's younger brother Chen Chieh said that in his sister's short life, she wrote many books beloved by readers on both sides of the Strait. "Sanmao loved traveling and writing; she cherished Chinese culture and left deep footprints on the Chinese mainland. This grand event is a



**Left:** University students and young musicians recite classical and modern Chinese literary works and sing songs at Xiamen University in Fujian province on June 29. **Right:** Over 140 writers and youth representatives from both sides of the Taiwan Strait attend a literary forum in Xiamen, Fujian, on June 29. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

rare opportunity to take her legacy home," Chen Chieh said of his sister, who was born and spent the first three years of her life in Chongqing until the family relocated to Taiwan in 1948.

Yu's daughter Yu Pei-san talked about her late father's great love for books. "Ever since I was a child, I would see him carefully wiping his books, again and again, using his

clothes. He didn't care much about clothes, but books were especially precious.

"My father used to say that if we compare Chinese culture to concentric circles, the core would be Chinese culture while the radius would be the Chinese language. Wherever the Chinese language reaches, that's how far the circles extend. As long as

the language survives, its spirit and culture will advance together, promoting one another."

Taiwan writer Chen Hsiu-Mei, whose pen name is Chen Ruoxi, recalls how she embarked on her literary journey and the profound influence a teacher from the Chinese mainland had on her. She says that she hopes her life story will help the younger genera-

tions open their minds and create their own literary connections.

According to Huang Wentao, deputy head of the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits, the literary forum included a series of associated events, among which were discussions about writing novels and poetry, lectures and recitations of classical works.

From July 1 to Wednesday, writers and youth representatives from the Chinese mainland and Taiwan visited Nanjing, the provincial capital of Jiangsu province, to go to the museums and experience the city's natural and cultural landscapes.

Hu Bangsheng, Party group member of the China Writers Association, one of the organizers of the literary event, says that writers from both sides of the Strait share a profound literary tradition and have been enhancing exchange and mutual understanding of late.

He says that in hosting the event, the organizers were seeking to deepen the friendship between literary circles on both sides through the medium of Chinese culture to build an exchange platform and nurture young writers.

He adds that over the years, the China Writers Association has organized seminars and exchanged visits to promote literary connections between both sides of the Strait, and that the National Museum of Modern Chinese Literature has manuscripts and other literary documents belonging to 30 Taiwan writers. It has also carried out research and preservation in this regard.