

Dazzled by display

Lunar soil samples generate much interest in Bangkok

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Offshore oil, gas output expected to rise this year

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Keepers of the past

Admirers of qilou buildings preserve memories of architectural tradition

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CHINA DAILY

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China House opens its doors in Paris



Dancers perform at the opening of China House in Paris, France, on Wednesday. Located at the Rothschild Mansion in the French capital, China House is a comprehensive service facility established and operated by the Chinese Olympic Committee for the 2024 Paris Olympic Games, which will witness the participation of Chinese sportspeople. The international multisport event begins on Friday. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

DRIVING REFORM

New economic model drives nation's growth

Experts highlight smooth transition in people-centered policies amid challenges

By ZHOU LANXU and OUYANG SHIJIA

China will likely pursue a new economic model to drive a smooth transition in growth engines, potentially providing an alternative solution to the global challenge of low productivity growth, according to leading economists and executives.

They said this approach features a greater play of market forces in resource allocation and technological innovation, but differs from the Western free market paradigm, as it upholds a people-centered policy orientation and underlines top-level government design.

By implementing the model, China could achieve around 5 percent annual economic growth over the coming five years, they said, with first-half growth results having shown that the country is positioned to navigate the property market correction and increased external uncertainties as new growth drivers flourish.

"I think this is really very unique, what I will call the China model or China economic model," said Zhu Min, former deputy managing director of the International Monetary Fund and former deputy governor of the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank.

In an exclusive interview with China Daily, Zhu said that China has made it clear that it would build a future model for the nation's economic development by vowing to establish a high-standard socialist market system with Chinese characteristics.

The resolution adopted at the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China has set the goal that by 2035, China will have finished building a high-standard socialist market economy in all respects.

Based on the resolution, China's economic model will feature market forces playing the pivotal and most important role, while reforms pushing technological advances,

strengthening local government finances and improving people's incomes and welfare will also serve as critical pillars, Zhu said.

"I think those are very important messages and policies for China today and for China moving into the future," said the renowned economist, as these messages respond to worldwide discussions about what defines the economic development model that underpins China's growth miracle.

Zhu said that the model features two pivotal changes: giving more authority and space to companies as the base units at the forefront of driving technological innovation, and increasing local governments' revenue, equipping them with many more resources and responsibilities.

By granting more authority and freedom to enterprises and local authorities, rather than concentrating the power at the central level, the changes will bring more economic activity and strength, reflecting a market-based reform approach, Zhu said.

Zhu added that further opening-up will remain a crucial growth engine for China, citing the importance of welcoming more foreign capital into China and encouraging Chinese companies to make overseas investments and transfer advanced technologies across the border.

Liu Qiao, dean and a professor of finance at Peking University's Guanghua School of Management, said the plenum mapped out China's unique path to achieve modernization and can provide a new solution to the global challenge of low productivity growth.

Liu said that China's modernization approach combines the role of bottom-up market forces with the government's top-level design to effectively mobilize resources to confront the most critical problems the nation faces in development, which makes it different from the free market paradigm prevalent in Western economies.

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Tragic accident



Rescue personnel work on Wednesday at the site of an air crash in Kathmandu, Nepal. A Saurya Airlines plane headed for Pokhara and carrying 19 people crashed during takeoff from the Nepalese capital's Tribhuvan International Airport earlier in the morning. The sole survivor was the pilot. PRAKASH MATHEMA / AFP See story, page 5

WORLD WATCH

By Daryl Guppy

The objective is common prosperity

Some foreign observers think the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China offered little in the way of changed economic policies.

They are wrong. The plenum consolidated on the significant changes brought about by policies implemented earlier that were designed to achieve the goal of common prosperity.

The plenum confirmed the direction and continuation of the most significant changes in the Chinese economy since 2008. It endorsed the shift to a digital economy. It continued to build defenses to counter the subversive intent of chip sanctions and trade tariffs. The plenum also reaffirmed unwavering support for the WTO free trade environment.

The plenum provided support for the ongoing efforts being made toward reform and opening-up, which is necessary for common prosperity. The decisions reflect the need to protect the fruits of those reforms and to ensure that the progress made is not stunted or restrained in the future by attempts to hamper China's growth.

Achieving a high-level socialist market economy and socialist modernization ensures that nobody is left behind by economic development. The first objective, lifting people out of absolute poverty has been achieved. The new objective is common and moderate prosperity and the plenum policy announcements should be viewed in this context.

These policy objectives have practical meaning whereas in Western electoral campaigns, similar policy objectives are often carelessly promoted and then just as carelessly discarded. It is this binding policy commitment and implementation that makes plenum decisions so significant.

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World hails success of historic Palestinian unity declaration

By JAN YUMUL and MIKE GU in Hong Kong

The signing of a declaration in Beijing by representatives of Palestinian factions has been broadly hailed as an "exceptional success" in China's diplomatic efforts to create conditions for ending the protracted conflict in the Gaza Strip and promoting regional peace.

The declaration on ending division and strengthening unity was signed on Tuesday after three days of reconciliation talks among 14 Palestinian factions, including rivals Hamas and Fatah.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres "very much welcomes" the signing of the declaration by Palestinian factions, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in New York on Tuesday.

"The secretary-general encourages all factions to overcome their differences through dialogue and urges them to follow up on the commitments that were made in Beijing and the declaration they signed on to," Dujarric said.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas "voiced profound appreciation of China's historical positions in support of the rights of the Palestinian people", according to a statement published by Palestine's Wafa News Agency.

Sven Koopmans, the European Union's special representative for the Middle East peace process, said that China has "an important role in reconciliation based on the two-state solution and a halt to violence".

Once again, the olive branch for peace in the MENA region comes from China.

Jasim Husain, a Gulf analyst and former member of Bahrain's parliament

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim wrote on social media platform X that the declaration signed in Beijing "represents a promising step toward achieving Palestinian solidarity, so crucial for realizing the rights of the Palestinian people".

He commended "the government of the People's Republic of China for facilitating talks" among Hamas, Fatah and 12 other Palestinian factions.

Anwar said that international backing is essential for creating conditions for lasting peace in Gaza, and urged nations that have not yet voiced their support to recognize an independent State of Palestine and encourage such unity efforts.

"Malaysia stands ready to promote actively all measures toward that end," he added.

Pakistani Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif wrote on X that he applauded China "for securing this important diplomatic success".

The world "must stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people and urge Israel to end its brazen violence", which has destroyed Gaza and killed around 40,000 innocent

Palestinians in the past 10 months, Sharif said.

"Pakistan reaffirms its unwavering support for the Palestinian cause and reiterates its call for a two-state solution that creates an independent State of Palestine with pre-1967 borders," he added.

The Foreign Ministry of Türkiye welcomed in a statement the gathering of Palestinian factions in Beijing and "their acceptance of a declaration aimed at achieving national unity", according to Türkiye's Anadolu Agency.

While welcoming the declaration, the Sultanate of Oman said this "highly needed goal" should be achieved by adhering to "relevant resolutions of international legitimacy", according to the Oman News Agency.

Dina Yulianti Sulaeman, director of the Indonesia Center for Middle East Studies, told China Daily that the success of 14 Palestinian factions, including Hamas and Fatah, in reaching an agreement "is due to China's impartial efforts", which "provide space for the Palestinian people to formulate what is best for them".

Jasim Husain, a Gulf analyst and former member of Bahrain's parliament, told China Daily that the latest development is an "exceptional success for Chinese diplomacy".

"Once again, the olive branch for peace in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region comes from China," he added.

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US FIRM'S AI TECH BAN SET TO INSPIRE HOMEGROWN INNOVATION

Experts say move to backfire as well-placed Chinese companies ready to accept challenge

By FAN FEIFEI and CHENG YU

US-based research company OpenAI's recent move to block access in China and other countries to the technology used to build artificial intelligence products is likely to backfire and boost development of the domestic industry, experts said.

The ban will motivate Chinese



large language model companies to enhance their own innovation capacities and encourage more AI startups to opt for homegrown LLMs to avoid potential geopolitical risks, they said.

"The suspension of OpenAI's services in China will accelerate the development of the domestic LLM industry," said Zhou Hongyi, founder of the cybersecurity company 360 Security Group. "It might not be a bad thing after all," he said in a video posted on social media platform Sina Weibo.

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Industry insiders also encouraged Chinese LLM companies to invest more in improving computing power and algorithms, and accumulate more high-quality training data to gain an edge in the global AI race and narrow the gap with the United States on the latest tech frontier.

LLMs are AI models fed with huge amounts of text data for use in a variety of tasks, ranging from natural language processing to machine translation. It is the key technology underpinning OpenAI's ChatGPT, which has taken the world by storm since late 2022.

Last month, the US company announced the restrictions on its application programming interface, or API, effective from July 9. API is a set of rules or protocols, that enables software applications to communicate with each other to exchange data, features and functionality. It allows third-party developers to integrate AI models into their applications.

Although ChatGPT is not available on the Chinese mainland, some Chinese startups have been able to access OpenAI's API platform and use it to build their own applications.

The San Francisco-headquartered firm's decision also came on the heels of a draft rule released by the US Department of the Treasury on June 22 that would restrict and monitor US companies' and individuals' investments in China for AI, chips and quantum computing.

Luring new users

In response to OpenAI's announcement, a slew of Chinese technology companies are scrambling to lure OpenAI users to their platforms by offering migration options and free tokens, the smallest unit text data can be broken down into for an AI model to process.

Among them is tech heavyweight Baidu Inc, which has rolled out an inclusive program for users to have a smooth and free transition to its LLM Ernie platform.

The company is also providing free AI model fine-tuning and expert guidance on its flagship Ernie model, along with 50 million free tokens, which developers can use to query the AI-powered chatbot.

Alibaba Cloud, the cloud computing unit of Alibaba Group, is offering 22 million free tokens and migration services for OpenAI's API users through its own AI platform.

The company's Qwen-plus model is priced significantly lower than GPT-4, it said. Tongyi Qianwen 2.5, the latest version of its LLM, has caught up with the GPT-4 model in multiple capacities, including text understanding and generation, knowledge quizzes, dialogues and life advice, in the context of the Chinese language.

Other companies offering incentives to migrate include startup SenseTime and Baichuan Intelligent Technology, which is backed by Alibaba and Tencent Holdings.

Zhipu AI, a Beijing-based startup and one of the four new "AI tigers" of China, has announced a special migration program that includes training and consulting services, and 150 million free tokens. Unicorn company 01.AI, founded by renowned AI expert Kai-Fu Lee, also announced in late June a half-price replacement plan for users to migrate to the company's Yi series large models.

Ending dependency

Zhou, from the 360 Security Group, said OpenAI's move to restrict access to its API services in China will force domestic developers and AI companies to choose local AI model builders who have been vying for a bigger slice of the market. He added that the gap between domestic LLMs and ChatGPT has gradually narrowed.

Wu Hequan, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said that the number of large models in China ranks high globally, and there isn't a "significant difference" in the performance between these large models and their foreign counterparts.

"While OpenAI's large models are no longer available in China, many Chinese large models are open-source and their prices have dropped considerably to be attractive to users," he said.

In addition, many Chinese companies enable developers to migrate more easily without making any "extra" modifications.

AI startup MiniMax, for instance, launched what it called a "zero-cost nanny-style" migration solution, where users can migrate through just one click and free use of its MOE architecture large model.

Many of the LLMs developed by Chinese companies have been able to rival GPT-4, said Liu Qingfeng, chairman of Chinese AI company iFlytek, while emphasizing the significance of building LLMs that are independently developed and controlled by China.

Only an independent and prosperous ecosystem can ensure a bright future for China's AI industry, he said. "We should scientifically and rationally understand the overall gap between China and the US in large models while having the confidence to catch up quickly," Liu said.

The company recently unveiled its latest LLM SparkDesk V4.0, which outperforms GPT-4 Turbo in the fields of text generation, language understanding, knowledge questioning and answering, logical reasoning, and mathematics, Liu said.

Zhang Xiaorong, head of the research institute at manufacturing company Deep Innovation based in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, said OpenAI's ban will have an impact on some local enterprises and developers that rely on its technology as they will have to make adjustments and switch to domestic AI platforms.

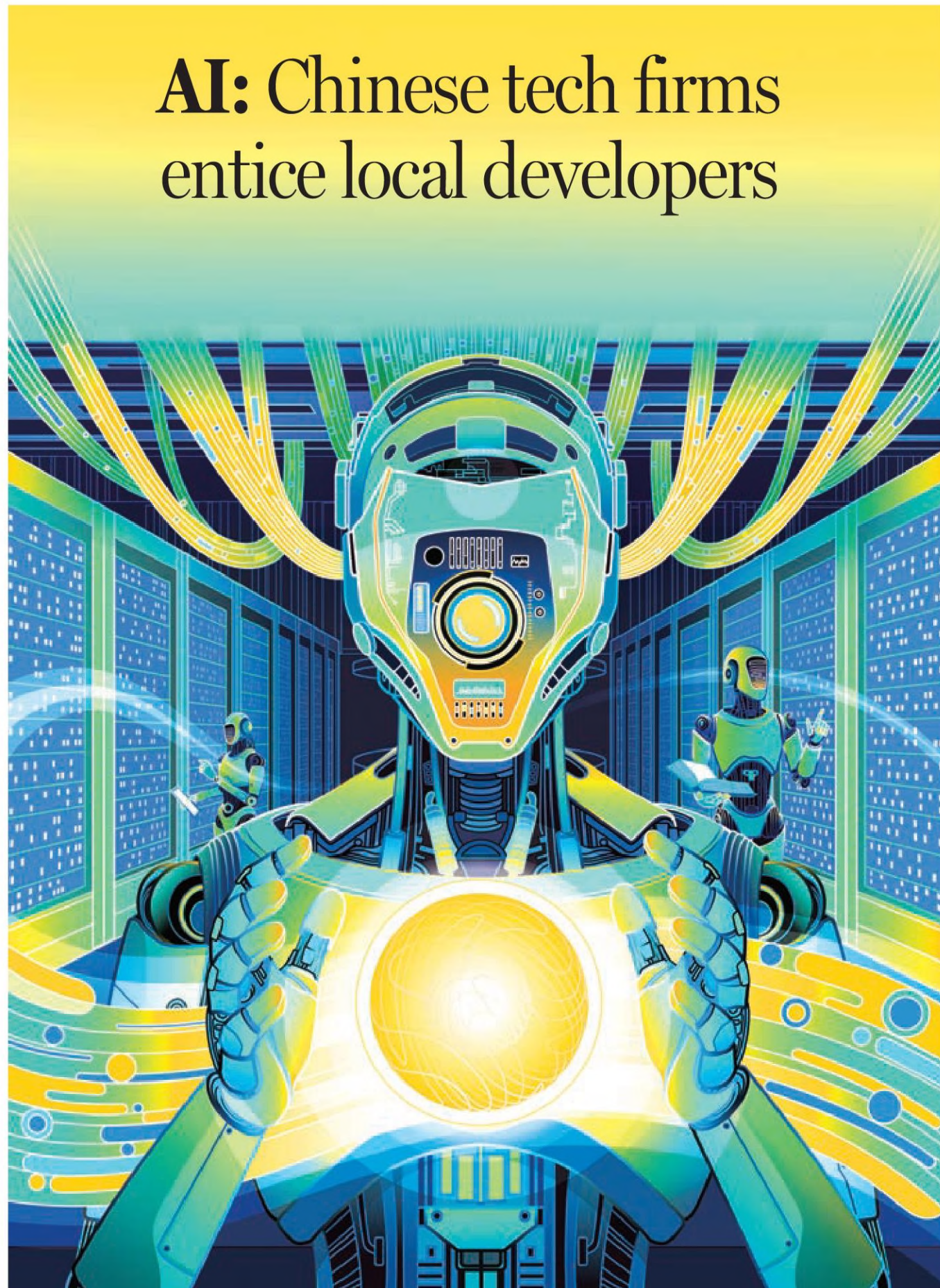
However, the ban will also drive Chinese companies to take their own LLM development path, step up innovation, and contribute to the growth of the domestic AI sector, Zhang said.

"Domestic AI companies should increase capital input in research and development, optimize algorithms, and improve data-processing capabilities, as well as strengthen cooperation with research institutions to catch up with their US rivals," he added.

Liu Xingliang, director of the research institute of consultancy Data Center of China Internet, said while the ban may have a short-term impact on some Chinese companies, it also provides an opportunity for domestic LLM companies to test themselves. "It is expected to propel domestic enterprises to increase their investment in independent R&D, and promote independent innovation and development of AI technology in China," he said.

Amid rising geopolitical tensions and the United

AI: Chinese tech firms entice local developers



ART BY SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

“Domestic AI companies should increase capital input in research and development, optimize algorithms, and improve data-processing capabilities, as well as strengthen cooperation with research institutions to catch up with their US rivals.”

Zhang Xiaorong,
head of the research institute at manufacturing company Deep Innovation

States' attempts to suppress China's chip and other high-tech areas, Liu said more Chinese companies will choose domestic large models to avoid potential disruption and risks.

He expects the government to introduce more policy incentives to support the development and promotion of domestic large models, and encourage LLM startups to independently advance their own core technologies.

Guo Tao, deputy head of the China Electronic Commerce Expert Service Center and an expert on the AI sector, said the ban will drive technological advances in homegrown LLMs and enhance Chinese companies' global competitiveness.

"In the long run, the move might be conducive to creating a more diverse and balanced global AI ecosystem," Guo added.

Major advantages

China has made significant progress in developing AI technology. It is now home to more than one-third of the world's LLMs, according to a white paper released by the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology earlier this month.

The number of LLMs worldwide has reached 1,328, with 36 percent from China, the second-largest after the US, which accounts for 44 percent of the total.

By the first quarter of this year, there were nearly 30,000 AI companies worldwide, with the US making up 34 percent, and China 15 percent, the white paper said.

The revenue of China's AI industry is estimated to reach 1.73 trillion yuan (\$237.9 billion) by 2035, accounting for 30.6 percent of the world's total, according to market research firm CCID Consulting.

Wang Peng, a researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, said, "China's major advantages in developing AI lie in abundant data resources and diversified industrial application scenarios, while the US has taken the lead in basic AI research, chips, algorithms and other crucial technologies, as well as a sound innovation ecosystem."

Price reductions

To accelerate the commercial use and popularization of AI technology, a string of major Chinese tech companies have recently announced significant price reductions on major LLM products.

Alibaba Cloud, for instance, slashed the price of its Qwen-Long LLM by a staggering 97 percent. In terms of performance, the LLM is claimed to be in the same league as OpenAI's GPT-4.

Baidu said its LLMs, including Ernie Speed and Ernie Lite, both launched earlier this year, are available free of charge for all enterprise users.

The lite version of Tencent's Hunyuan LLM is now free of charge, while prices of the standard versions have been slashed by 50 to 87.5 percent.

"When LLMs can become very cheap and available at any time for people to use, and without worrying about investment output, they will become akin to infrastructure, just like water and electricity. Under such circumstances, Chinese LLM companies will also have greater room for development," said Zhang Peng, CEO of Zhipu AI.

The technological strengths, application scenarios and training costs of AI models vary among different LLM companies, which leads to differences in pricing tactics, said Zou Debao, deputy general manager of AI and big data research at market research firm CCID Consulting.

Zou said the price war will likely squeeze profit margins of some LLM startups, while large Chinese LLM developers will further consolidate their dominant positions, expand market share, and grab more clients amid increasingly fierce competition.

Zhao Gang, head of CIO Manage, a Beijing-based digital economy market consultancy, said the AI model price cuts will boost the rapid growth of the LLM sector, and motivate companies to beef up independent innovation to roll out more large models for commercial applications.

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TOP NEWS

Nation firm on settlement of Ukraine crisis

Foreign ministers call for addressing conflict through talks, enhancing bilateral relations

By WANG QINGYUN
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China and Ukraine on Wednesday expressed their hopes to address the Ukraine crisis through talks, while pledging to further consolidate mutual trust and pragmatic cooperation, as their foreign ministers met in Guangzhou, Guangdong province.

The meeting was held on the second day of Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba's four-day visit to China, which is also his first visit to China since he took office in 2020.

China is always firmly committed to a political settlement of the Ukraine crisis, which has entered its third year and still risks escalation and spillover, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said.

Noting that both Ukraine and Russia have shown willingness for negotiations, Wang said that though the conditions and timing are not yet mature, China supports all efforts conducive to peace, and hopes to continue to play a constructive role in promoting a cease-fire and resuming peace talks.

Kuleba said Ukraine highly appreciates China's active and constructive role in promoting peace and maintaining the international order.

Ukraine values China's opinions, and has carefully studied the six common understandings jointly proposed by China and Brazil.

Ukraine is willing and ready to have talks with Russia, Kuleba said, adding that the talks should be rational, substantive and aimed at achieving a just and lasting peace.

China has always held a position for a peaceful resolution of the Ukraine crisis, saying that a political settlement is the only way out.

In May, China and Brazil issued six common understandings on the political settlement of the crisis, which has garnered a positive response from over 100 countries.

In the document, they called for avoiding the expansion and escalation of the crisis, as well as provocation by any party, and urged all

parties to create conditions for resuming a direct dialogue.

Chen Yurong, a researcher of Eurasian studies at the China Institute of International Studies, said Kuleba's trip to China shows Ukraine's recognition of China's fair and just position, as well as its consistent efforts to address the Ukraine crisis.

Since last year, China has sent its special representative on Eurasian affairs to conduct three rounds of shuttle diplomacy in an effort to resolve the crisis.

As a major country, China has been working for global and regional peace, which was demonstrated by its recent facilitation of reconciliation talks between 14 Palestinian factions, Chen said, adding that Ukraine values the instrumental role China plays in efforts to resolve the Ukraine crisis.

During Wednesday's talks, Wang and Kuleba also called for the further enhancement of bilateral ties.

China and Ukraine, which established a strategic partnership in 2011, are friendly to each other, respect and treat each other equally, and have kept promoting mutually beneficial cooperation, Wang said.

Both countries should maintain communications and exchanges and carry on their traditional friendship, Wang said, adding that China will continue to expand food imports from Ukraine, and work with it to maintain smooth logistics corridors and international food security.

Kuleba said Ukraine supports China's position over the Taiwan question, and will continue to adhere to the one-China policy. Ukraine hopes to stimulate cooperation with China in various fields, including trade and agriculture, Kuleba added.

China is the largest trade partner of Ukraine, which was among the first countries to have supported and participated in Belt and Road cooperation.

In the first half of this year, bilateral trade increased by 17.4 percent to about \$4.5 billion, statistics from the General Administration of Customs showed.



Game is on

Displaced Palestinians play soccer on Tuesday in the courtyard of a school run by the United Nations that now houses refugees in Jabalia, in the northern Gaza Strip. Spectators pulled out chairs and leaned over from balconies to cheer for the two teams. The compound was badly affected by an Israeli airstrike in May. OMAR AL-QATTAA / AFP

Experts hail emphasis on improved quality of life

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels and SU QIANG in Beijing

The third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China has unveiled a strategic road map to deepen reform and advance modernization, which will further boost China's socioeconomic development and improve its people's lives, overseas analysts said.

The third plenum concluded last Thursday, with a communique issued to announce the adoption of a resolution on further deepening reform comprehensively to advance Chinese modernization.

Michael Dunford, emeritus professor at the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom, said the key meeting was "striking in its extraordinary comprehensiveness and scope of the reform agenda, affecting every aspect of Chinese society".

New quality productive forces have the potential to transform many aspects of life, contribute to China's economic, political, cultural, social and ecological advancements, and drive the growth in productivity, Dunford said, adding that these are "key to improved living standards and an improved quality of life".

Anthony Moretti, department head and an associate professor in the Department of Communication and Organizational Leadership at Robert Morris University in Pennsylvania, the United States, noted that the communique has vowed to "purposefully give more prominence to reform and further deepen reform comprehensively with a view to advancing Chinese modernization in order to better deal with the complex developments both at home and abroad, adapt to the new round of scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation, and live up to the new expectations of our people".

"Chinese people will be the beneficiaries of the work that begins now," he said.

He added that this call to "enable people to live better lives" comes at a particularly important time. The country alleviated absolute poverty a couple of years ago, and the communique affirmed the need to "pursue greater urban-rural integration in planning, development and governance, and promote equal exchanges and two-way flows of production factors between the cities and the countryside, so as to narrow the disparities between the two and promote their common

prosperity and development".

The commitment to high-quality development will assist domestic and international audiences. Such development means that China will continue to move toward establishing itself as the location for better products, he added.

"The electric vehicle industry is merely one example. Consider that China was not prepared to produce such cars just a few years ago. Now, it is the global leader in exporting EVs," he said.

Jasna Plevnik, president of the Croatian think tank Geoeconomic Forum, said the third plenum has set the stage for China to enter an era of high-quality development faster, with the support of new and long-term comprehensive economic reforms.

The communique sends a clear, firm and encouraging message that the country is continuing with peaceful Chinese modernization, a socialist market economic system and economic globalization, she said.

According to Linda Tjia Yin Nor, an associate professor in the Department of Public and International Affairs at City University of Hong Kong, the promotion of new quality productive forces by the plenum resolution is not only

about developing high-end technology, but also about strengthening innovation.

Innovation doesn't necessarily mean using state-of-the-art technology, but could also mean the smart application of existing technologies, Tjia said, noting that China is focusing on how technology can be used to benefit a greater number of people.

Shakeel Ahmad Ramay, CEO of the Asian Institute of Eco-civilization Research and Development in Pakistan, said the plenum resolution shows that China is launching a comprehensive governance modernization program.

China has made great efforts to strengthen and advance whole-process people's democracy, he said, adding that Chinese democracy ensures inclusiveness, continuity of interaction among the Party, the government and the people, and rules-based governance.

Zheng Wanyin in London, Xu Weiwei and Prime Sarmiento in Hong Kong and Shao Xinying in Beijing contributed to this story.

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Foreign Minister Wang Yi (right) shakes hands with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba during their meeting on Wednesday in Guangzhou, Guangdong province. LU HANXIN / XINHUA

African countries express confidence in China's reforms

By MO JINGXI in Changsha
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As China rolled out a series of new measures to further deepen reform and advance Chinese modernization, political party leaders and officials from African countries said they are confident that the country will fulfill its goals and bring benefits not only to itself, but also the rest of the world.

They made the remarks on Wednesday after being briefed about the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in Changsha, the capital of Hunan province.

"Many foreign friends asked us to provide information on the session at the earliest so that they will know more about the major measures that China will take for Chinese modernization," said Lu Kang, vice-minister of the International Department of the CPC Central Committee.

Noting that it was the first such

briefing for foreign guests shortly after the session concluded last week and adopted a landmark resolution covering over 300 reform measures in various fields and aspects, Lu said that it shows the great attention that China pays to sharing experiences of governance with African countries.

Obert Mpofo, secretary-general of the ruling ZANU-PF party of Zimbabwe, said he is paying attention to almost every aspect of the resolution because "they taught us about how China's reforms are conducted".

Mpofo said he has witnessed, through visits to different cities over the past three days, how China has achieved rapid development by adopting various reform measures and policies, especially under the strong leadership of the CPC.

"Once the resolution is adopted, it will serve as the road map for implementing reform decisions. So, we are really learning a lot from China," he said.

Marvin Nolan Fanny, vice-presi-

dent of the United Seychelles political party, said he was happy to know that some of the reform measures as outlined in the resolution are about the environment and ecosystem.

As Seychelles has embarked on a strategy for sustainable development called "Blue Economy", Fanny said that "China can also get involved with us to help us in achieving this endeavor and to pioneer the blue economy".

The young leader also said China's commitment to promoting unilateral opening-up to the world's least developed countries will certainly benefit African countries through cooperation with China in terms of infrastructure, industrial capacity, training and education, among others.

Khalid Boudali, presiding officer of the African Union Economic Social and Cultural Council, said that China has been committed to opening-up.

"As we land here in China, we have seen that the Chinese cities are very well developed, very secure, with spectacular infrastructure," he said.

He believes that the goals set in the resolution will surely be accomplished. "I think this is not a challenge for China because Chinese people have the will, the leadership and the political stability and also the good governance (for realizing them)," Boudali added.

Maged Refaat Aboulmagd, an ambassador member of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs, said he was quite astonished when he read about the resolution during his flight to China.

"When China talks about the intention (to make reforms), it gets really serious in the fields of high-tech technology and high-quality innovation," he said, noting that the main purpose of the reforms is about creating better lives and meeting aspirations of the people.

"I think most of the world will be watching really how China is trying to reinvent itself and to reinvent how it is perceived in the world ... because determined people make change," he said.

Policy: Determined move toward advanced digital economy

From page 1

The development of new and high quality productive forces is one of the key phrases to emerge from the plenum. It projects the Chinese economy as becoming a leading light in the technology innovation space as it builds an advanced digital economy.

The new productive forces include further support for and development of clean technologies and is a key reference in the context of future economic growth. The government aims to expand new foreign trade relations in this area, partly in response to recent US and European Union tariffs on green technology.

The plenum recognized that China must "adapt to the new round of scientific and technolog-

ical revolution and industrial transformation". The ultimate goal is to make China a champion of innovation by generating disruptive technology and scaling up into high-end manufacturing. This is consistent with the gradual change in economic focus where economic growth and continued prosperity come from the digital economy.

It also reflects a determination to achieve technological self-reliance in order to help China withstand the United States' strategic technological containment. It is a prudent policy given the possibility of a new Trump administration and its stated intention to further hamper China's growth.

The desire to further deepen reform comprehensively consolidates the benefits of economic

reform so that a high-standard socialist market economy can continue to provide the foundation for Chinese modernization. The key features include leveraging the role of the market to foster a fairer market environment to make resource allocation as efficient and productive as possible.

Although these objectives of opening-up are desired by Western businesses, they have a slightly different meaning in the Chinese context. A fairer market environment does not open the door to unfettered rapaciousness. A fair market environment delivers economic benefits more equitably. So too with resource allocation.

The emphasis is on responsibility and obligations toward improving society. In the West, these are

part of environmental, social and governance responsibilities. From the Chinese perspective, it is focus on the social responsibility of business to add to common prosperity rather than provide advantages to elite groups.

This suggests a continuation of moves to curb the power and influence of large business groups. The regulatory changes in relation to expensive after-school tutoring services were designed to ensure equality of access to education so that success was not dependent upon wealth.

Common moderate prosperity is not an empty phrase. The third plenum remains committed to endorsing the social responsibility of business to enhance common prosperity in all fields, including the living environment.

Ecological civilization is now cast as a key feature of China's modernization with aims to promote the reduction of carbon and pollution. China is installing renewables so rapidly that it will meet its 2030 target by the end of this month — or six and a half years early.

China is installing around 10 gigawatts of wind and solar generation capacity every fortnight. The climate agenda supporting green growth and tackling climate change offers new collaborative opportunities for foreign investment.

Opening-up is a defining feature of Chinese modernization and it brings benefits for foreign companies and the global economy. Essential to success is strong support for free trade in the face of pressure for protectionist tariffs.

It is often assumed that opening-up is an exclusive invitation to Western investment in China. The

Global Development Initiative and Global Civilization Initiative all suggest that the opening-up invitation is increasingly being extended to the Global South. The mature markets of the EU and the US remain important, but the Global South is the area of future global economic growth.

The third plenum did not signal a change in economic priorities. It confirmed that China is committed to changing its growth paradigm, from chasing a nominal growth rate to building a resilient economy driven by digital and technological innovation that thrives despite protracted geopolitical repercussions.

The author is an international financial technical analysis expert and a former national board member of the Australia-China Business Council. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Opportunities shared across Taiwan Strait

Summit promotes youth engagement, economic and cultural exchanges

By ZHANG YI in Suzhou, Jiangsu
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The Chinese mainland is willing to share opportunities during its modernization process with Taiwan compatriots, a senior official said while meeting with Taiwan entrepreneurs and young people at a summit in Jiangsu province.

Song Tao, who is head of the Taiwan Work Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, said that the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the CPC, which concluded last week, proposed over 300 reform measures that will provide strong impetus for the country's modernization and create better conditions for Taiwan compatriots and businesses to thrive on the mainland.

The meeting also said that the mainland will improve institutions and policies to promote economic and cultural exchanges and cooperation across the Taiwan Strait and advance integrated cross-Strait development.

Song told the Taiwan representatives to firmly uphold the stance

that both sides belong to one China, resolutely oppose "Taiwan independence", and encourage more young people from Taiwan to engage in the construction of the mainland.

His remarks were made during a cross-Strait young entrepreneurs summit attended by over 350 guests. It is being held in Kunshan, which has a relatively high concentration of Taiwan-funded enterprises.

The five-day event, which started on Sunday, includes seminars for young people to share views on jobs and businesses, and trips to various cities to learn about the latest technologies such as the metaverse and AI, as well as local cultures.

Liu Chao-shiuan, chairman of the Taiwan-based council of the summit for entrepreneurs across the Taiwan Strait, said while visiting Jiangsu that the CPC meeting has attracted worldwide attention, and the information released is inspiring.

The vast majority of Taiwan compatriots have been participants, witnesses and beneficiaries of the achievements made in the past decades, he said, adding that the further reform and expansion of opening-up on the mainland will provide Taiwan



A Taiwan compatriot interacts with a performer dressed as Monkey King in front of a booth introducing Jiangsu's Lianyungang city during a cross-Strait young entrepreneurs summit in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, on Tuesday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

businesses and enterprises with more opportunities.

Pao Yi-je, who is studying business management at Tunghai University in Taiwan, secured an internship opportunity at a company in Suzhou through channels provided at a summit this summer, as she wants to understand the mainland workplace and is considering seeking employment here after graduation.

In her spare time, she enjoys using the mainland social media platform Xiaohongshu to explore posts about travel, food, beauty and other aspects of mainland culture.

She has also read about the famous Zhouzhuang water town in Suzhou on the platform.

"Zhouzhuang's scenery is just as it is described in Chinese textbooks, small bridges, flowing water and quaint houses," she said, "I'm looking forward to going there to take some nice photos."

Su Heng, chairwoman of the island-based Economic and Trade Exchange Association across the Tai-

wan Strait, is leading a group of young Taiwan visitors on a tour of Suzhou.

She said the itinerary was planned by members of the post-2000 generation in the group after searching on mainland social media platforms.

Such social media platforms have broken the boundaries of the Taiwan Strait, leading to an increasing curiosity about the mainland among young people, Su said, adding that "this has made the Democratic Progressive Party authorities fearful that their lies about the mainland will be exposed."

She criticized the island's DPP authorities for disregarding the desire of people on both sides of the Strait for exchanges and even creating confrontations, including recently warning about travel to the mainland.

"In times of difficulty, cross-Strait exchanges are even more precious because young people are more willing to believe in the truth they see for themselves," she said.

Island a pawn the US will ultimately abandon

By ZHANG YI

Taiwan is a pawn of the United States and will ultimately be abandoned, a Chinese mainland spokeswoman and pro-reunification groups in Taiwan said after US Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump demanded that Taiwan pay more for its "defense".

Taiwan should pay the US for its "defense" as it does not give his country anything, Trump told Bloomberg Businessweek in a recent interview.

The Trump team has recently discussed the Taiwan question multiple times. There are also members of his team reportedly talking about demanding that Taiwan increase its defense spending to 5 percent of its GDP.

The topic aroused heated discussions on the island. Taiwan's pro-reunification political parties and groups said in a joint statement recently that US elections should not interfere in the question of China's reunification, which is China's internal affair.

Trump's remarks are actually naked hegemonic interference and extortion, they said.

"Clearly, the US military-industrial complex and political groups are calculating for their next four-year term in the arms business," they said. "This is completely contrary to the people's demands for improving their livelihoods and increasing social welfare, and harms the common homeland of the Chinese people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait."

Zhu Fenglian, a spokeswoman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, said on Wednesday

“The Democratic Progressive Party authorities have no principles, no bottom line...”

Zhu Fenglian, spokeswoman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council

in Beijing that the people in Taiwan see very clearly that the US always prioritizes so-called US interests and Taiwan will not be an exception.

Zhu said that the DPP authorities on the island willingly act as a "pawn" and stubbornly "rely on the US to seek independence". And the "pawn" will ultimately become a "discarded piece".

"The Democratic Progressive Party authorities have no principles, no bottom line and cater to external forces, walking on a treacherous path of selling out and harming Taiwan, pushing Taiwan into a dangerous situation and bringing great harm to the people of Taiwan," she said.

It has been reported by Taiwan media that many temples in Taiwan have been asked to sign agreements to store ammunition, causing panic and questioning.

Zhu responded that more Taiwan people strongly oppose and are dissatisfied with the DPP authorities for hyping up the "mainland threat" and squandering Taiwan people's hard-earned money to buy weapons from the US.

University combines AI with educational tech

By ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan
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Shandong University of Finance and Economics has introduced the country's first specialized artificial intelligence model for higher education and teaching in the social sciences, marking an advance in educational technology, the university said.

The model uses AI technology to tackle long-standing challenges, such as the disconnect between theoretical learning and practical application.

"It facilitates the generation, accumulation and sharing of knowledge data across a spectrum of disciplines including economics, management, literature, law, science, engineering, education and arts," said Jia Haiyan, dean of the School of Public Administration and Policy at the university.

For example, its training module works with government bodies, organizations and enterprises to tailor scenario-based workshops for practical training within professional domains, and the system furnishes real-time guidance for students engaged in remote internships and training activities.

Moreover, teachers can leverage the model to gain insights into students' progress and tailor personalized development plans accordingly.

"Students pursuing degrees in public affairs management, who previously had to physically visit government offices to grasp insurance procedures, can now gain comprehensive insights into the intricacies of insurance operations through the virtual environment facilitated by the AI model," she said, adding students have also enhanced their understanding and proficiency in various subjects through interactive engagements with the model.

Jia said several universities and colleges have expressed interest in utilizing and developing the AI model.

"Widespread adoption of the AI model will continuously enrich the model, enabling it to provide increasingly accurate responses to user prompts," Jia said.

The AI model is a collaborative research and development effort between the university and enterprises.

In the upcoming fall semester, the school will offer the general course Introduction to Artificial Intelligence to all freshmen. The initiative aims to enhance students' proficiency in leveraging artificial intelligence to address challenges within their respective fields and foster adaptability and creativity in intelligent environments, said Hong Junjie, president of the university.



Patients receive traction treatment at Shanghai Sixth People's Hospital on Tuesday. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

When smartphone use becomes a pain in the neck

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai
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500 patients

receive traction treatment each week at the hospital's rehabilitation medicine department

Photos showing young people sitting on a row of benches in a hospital in Shanghai, with their necks hung in traction devices, have become an online hit.

The photos, in which their necks are illuminated by red light, led to the tag "Young people rush to hospitals to hang their necks" becoming one of the most searched topics on the Sina Weibo micro blog platform and other Chinese social media apps.

Doctors from Shanghai Sixth People's Hospital said that the people in the pictures were patients suffering from pain in their cervical and lumbar vertebrae who were receiving traction treatment at the hospital's rehabilitation medicine department.

Traction treatment is not new, they said, but the ubiquitous use of digital products, and even the overuse of them, by people of all ages has made acute attacks of cervical spondylosis — wear and tear of the spinal disks — more frequent.

"Also, patients are becoming younger," said Shen Xiaoyan, a doctor from the department,

"Nowadays, the largest patient community resorting to traction treatment is those between age 30 and 50, whereas it was those age 50 or above a decade ago, when electronic products were not so popular.

"I've received two patients as young as 7 lately. X-rays showed straightening of their cervical spine curvature."

She said muscles of the neck and shoulders will become quite tense if someone hunches over a smartphone for around 40 minutes.

Wang Yin, a rehabilitation therapist at the department, which receives around 500 patients for traction treatment each week, said the pain in the lumbar vertebrae is, in most cases, caused by the straining of lumbar muscles, and is closely related to the habit of sitting for a long time without walking around or stretching muscles.

Traction treatment at hospital,

which lasts 20 minutes each time and requires seven treatments for a course, can help stretch and relax the muscles, Wang said.

"If the muscles are stiff, they will compress the cervical spine," she said. "And over time, it will compress the nerves of the cervical spine."

Some people may even experience displacement of the cervical spine if one side of the neck muscle is stiff and the other side is not, she added.

Wang said the red light in the photos is infrared radiation for treatment, which promotes local blood circulation and relieves muscle tension. Traction treatment and infrared radiation work better when combined.

Lo Wai-wun, from Hong Kong, was one of the patients receiving the treatment on Tuesday. The 26-year-old, who works in the internet industry in Shanghai, said she often has to sit in front of a laptop for hours while working. That aggravates the pain in her neck she has experienced since senior middle school as a result of studying very hard.

"Neck pain has become a trouble for me since around 22, as it would spread to my shoulders and trigger

a headache sometimes," Lo said. "Physical examinations showed that I suffered from changes in cervical spine curvature."

"Traction treatment works for me as it's helping me recover the correct curvature. Also, I wear a collar at home to keep me from looking down."

Doctors suggested people use a phone holder to put smartphones on a desk, and recommended against using a phone while lying down.

Zhu Yi, a doctor from the hospital's department of acupuncture, moxibustion and *tui na* (a form of Chinese therapeutic massage), which are all traditional Chinese medicine treatments, said the use of air conditioning in summer is another important factor in the development of neck and shoulder ailments.

"TCM treatment discharges *hanqi* from our bodies' meridian pathways through cupping, acupuncture and moxibustion, so that the inside of meridians will be smooth, and the pain in muscles will be relieved," he said. *Hanqi* refers to a type of cold pathogenic factor that is believed to invade the body and cause various health problems.

Briefly

China issues year's first red alert for typhoon

China's National Meteorological Center issued a red alert, the highest level, for Typhoon Gaemi at 10 am on Wednesday. It was the first red alert for a typhoon issued this year. Typhoon Gaemi, the third typhoon of the year, is expected to make landfall along the coast of central and northern Taiwan Island on Wednesday night. After crossing the island, it is projected to make a second landfall between Thursday afternoon and night along the coast between Fujian and Jiangxi in East China's Fujian province, the center said. The typhoon will further affect eastern parts of China, bringing rain-storms, the center said. Meteorological experts warned ships in the areas to return to ports and people to suspend outdoor activities.

3 dead, 3 injured in Hebei house explosion

Three people were killed and three others injured following an explosion at a house in Handan in North China's Hebei province on Wednesday morning, according to local authorities. The explosion happened at around 6:05 am at a house in Yecheng township in Linzhang county, the Handan emergency management bureau said. According to the county's emergency management authorities, the explosion severely damaged the house and nearby vehicles, and shattered the windows of nearby houses. The injured are receiving treatment at hospital and do not have life-threatening injuries. An investigation into the cause of the incident is underway.

XINHUA

WORLD

Budget lays road map to reshape India

Modi govt increases spending for job creation, but experts call it lopsided

By APARAJIT CHAKRABORTY in New Delhi and XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong

As the first major economic document of Narendra Modi's new government, the midyear budget presented to parliament on Tuesday aims to lay out the road map for transforming the country into "Viksit Bharat" (developed India) by 2047, while some said it is a lopsided one.

Prime Minister Modi, now in his third consecutive term, proposed in the budget to significantly increase spending for job creation, rural development and infrastructure, and launch reforms for foreign investment and trade.

In her budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the government is focused on boosting productivity and resilience in agriculture, promoting employment and skills development, supporting manufacturing and services sectors, advancing urban development, strengthening energy security and investing in infrastructure.

Modi said on Tuesday that Budget 2024 empowers the neo-middle class, the poor, villagers and farmers.

The proposed budget includes a \$24 billion package to create jobs over the next five years and increase lending to small and medium-sized businesses. It allocates \$18 billion to support agriculture and agricultural technology, such as climate-resilient seeds.

According to the budget, the rules and regulations for foreign direct investment and overseas investments will be simplified to facilitate such investments.

To attract foreign capital for India's development needs, corporate tax rate on foreign companies will be reduced from 40 to 35 percent, Sitharaman said.

Swaran Singh, a professor of diplomacy and disarmament at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, said: "It's reassuring as this post-election budget of the coalition government still reflects continuity in most of the ongoing

policies and projects." Managing persistent fiscal deficit by expanding the tax base and compliance, expanding allocations for building climate-conscious and disaster-resilient infrastructure will be major challenges ahead, Singh said. Some of these could be tackled by offering incentives such as tax reliefs to enhance domestic and global investors' confidence in India being a land of opportunities for them.

'Not enough'

However, economist Abhirup Sarkar said this is a very lopsided budget and in any case it is not a good budget. The scheme for job creation is not enough to arrest the growing unemployment rate, adding it is an attempt to please its coalition partners to stay in power.

The budget will cut taxes on big companies and allocate more money to two states, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, whose regional parties are the biggest coalition partners of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party. Proposals have been made to build new airports, medical colleges, and sports and tourism facilities in the eastern state of Bihar, which is ruled by the Janata Dal (United) party.

The government should find out long-term measures to arrest the growing unemployment and it should boost domestic manufacturing sectors for job creation, suggested Biswajit Dhar, a former professor at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Nuclear energy forms a significant part of the energy mix for "Viksit Bharat" in the budget. The government will partner with the private sector to set up Bharat Small Reactors, research and development of Bharat Small Modular Reactors, and research and development of newer technologies for nuclear energy.

Aparajit Chakraborty is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

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People watch the Union Budget 2024-25 being presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament on the screens at a TV showroom in New Delhi, India, on Tuesday. SONU MEHTA / NEWS.COM



Visitors take pictures of the lunar soil samples retrieved by China's Chang'e 5 mission on display at Sci Power for Future Thailand Fair in Bangkok, Thailand, Tuesday. YANG WANLI / CHINA DAILY

Lunar soil samples land in Bangkok

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok yangwanli@chinadaily.com

Lunar soil samples collected by Chinese spacecraft Chang'e 5 have generated much interest among visitors to a fair in Bangkok — the first overseas destination of the lunar soil samples.

The National Astronomical Research Institute of Thailand collaborated with the China National Space Administration, or CNSA, to bring the samples to the Thai capital.

The moon soil samples, weighing 75 milligrams, are placed in a crystal ball that can be rotated for a 360-degree viewing, and equipped with magnifying lenses to help viewers see the samples better.

The display, titled "The Moon Shines Bright On My Return", is 17 centimeters in width, and represents the culmination of China's 17-year effort to land on the moon and collect soil and rock samples.

The samples, a highlight of Sci Power for Future Thailand Fair, will be on display at the Queen Sirikit National Convention Center until July 28. The exhibition invites the public to discover the technological and innovative achievements resulting from cutting-edge astronomical challenges.

"My students and I are all very

excited to see the lunar soil. It is the first time that we are so close to the moon," said Tippawan Boonkaew, a high school teacher who led dozens of students from Bangkok's neighboring province of Nonthaburi to see the exhibition on Tuesday.

She said the lunar soil samples were much smaller than they had expected, but were still very impressive. "Also, we are very happy and proud that China chose Thailand to be the first destination to exhibit the lunar soil," she added.

Chang'e 5 mission

China's most sophisticated and challenging space adventure — the Chang'e 5 robotic lunar mission — ended successfully in late 2020. The historic 23-day expedition took lunar samples back to Earth, making China the third country to achieve this feat after the United States and the former Soviet Union.

"Thailand became the first destination for the samples' overseas exhibition, which proves the friendship between Thailand and China. Many Thai people have a space dream, including me, and the chance to have a close look at lunar soil is precious," Supawat Zhou, a volunteer for the exhibition, said.

Thailand has joined the Interna-

tional Lunar Research Station program, initiated by China, on cooperation in the exploration and peaceful use of outer space, according to a memorandum signed by both countries in April.

Last year, as part of China's endeavor to boost international lunar research cooperation, Chinese scientists working for the CNSA selected a scientific instrument developed by their Thai peers to study space weather and cosmic rays to be part of the Chang'e 7 lunar mission.

"China has made lots of impressive technological breakthroughs over the past years. There are great opportunities for Thailand to realize our own development with the support of China's leading technologies," Arm Tungnirun, director of the Chinese Studies Center at the Institute of Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University, said. "The cooperation on space study is a great example. If we cannot realize our space dream on our own, we can still achieve the aim by collaborating with China."



Online See more by scanning the code.

Plane crashes in Nepal with 18 dead

KATHMANDU, NEPAL — A domestic plane crashed on Wednesday just after taking off at the Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu, killing 18 people and injuring a pilot who was the lone survivor.

Police official Basanta Rajauri said authorities have pulled out all 18 bodies. The pilot has injuries to his eyes but his life is not in any danger, said a doctor at Kathmandu Medical College Hospital, where the pilot is being treated.

A press statement issued by the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal said the Saurya Airlines domestic plane, which was scheduled to head to the resort town of Pokhara, took off at 11:11 am from Kathmandu airport and turned right but crashed moments later in the eastern section of the airport.

Subash Jha, the airport spokesman, said that the plane was going to Pokhara for maintenance checks.

It is monsoon rain season in Kathmandu but was not raining at the time of the crash. Visibility was low across the capital, however.

The airport has been closed as emergency crew and investigators began their work.

The bodies have been taken to the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu for autopsy. The airline manifest showed there were two pilots and 17 passengers on board, among them there was only one female. The crew and 16 passengers were Nepali nationals and one passenger was identified as a Yemeni national.

Cabinet meeting

Nepali Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli called a cabinet meeting over the plane crash, media reports said.

The Tribhuvan International Airport, the main airport in Nepal

for international and domestic flights, is located inside a valley surrounded by mountains on most sides. It is considered a challenging airport for pilots and bigger planes have to come through an opening on the mountain to land. It is right next to the city, surrounded by houses and neighborhoods.

In 2019, a Bangladeshi airliner crashed at Tribhuvan airport, killing 51 people while 20 on board survived. An investigation confirmed the plane was misaligned with the runway and its pilot was disoriented and tried to land in "sheer desperation" when the plane crashed.

In 2015, a Turkish Airlines jet landing in dense fog skidded off a slippery runway at the airport. The plane was carrying 238 people but there were no serious injuries.

AGENCIES — XINHUA

Integration at the core of Africa's development

By OTIATO OPALI in Nairobi, Kenya otiatoo@chinadaily.com

African countries have resolved to strengthen their collaboration in the implementation of the African integration agenda, underscoring the role of member states in the allocation of adequate financial resources to ensure effective implementation of continental integration.

Moussa Faki Mahamat, chairman of the African Union Commission, said African countries can maximize the potential of integration avenues, like the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, by making it an engine of growth and diversification of the economies to increase trade within the continent.

Mahamat highlighted the need for member countries to present a united front in upcoming engagements with international partners. He also emphasized the importance of speaking with one voice at major global forums, including the G20, where the African Union now holds membership. He made the remarks on Sunday while speaking during the AU's sixth midyear coordination meeting in Ghana's capital Accra.

Ghana's President Nana Akufo-Addo said the urgency to consolidate the fragmented financial instruments to accelerate Africa's development agenda must be met if Africa is to achieve full integration.

"By consolidating our development funding instruments, we can create a more cohesive and effective financial framework that ensures resources are allocated where they are most needed. This consolidation will not only streamline our efforts, but will also improve our capacity to mobilize domestic and external resources efficiently," Akufo-Addo said.

Facilitating trade

Mohamed Ould Cheikh Ghazouani, Mauritania's president and current chair of the AU, said cooperation and integration would strengthen strategic planning and operationalization of critical continental infrastructure, such as regional power pools, digital and transport infrastructure. He urged member states to redouble efforts in trade facilitation through the simplification, standardization and harmonization of related procedures and information flows to boost intra-African trade.

Kidi Mwaga, a Kenyan law and governance expert, said Africa has no choice but to fast-track its integration process by overcoming political and historical hurdles that have stood in the way of its unification. In his view, opening up intra-Africa trade is the first critical step toward economic integration in Africa.

"Currently, when, for instance, Kenya wants to trade with Uganda, they first have to transact through the US in terms of buying dollars. We therefore must create a payment system that ensures that trade within Africa must first remain in Africa. In so doing, we will be able to alleviate poverty and suffering and give people a fair shot at upward social mobility," Mwaga said.

Despite the challenges facing Africa, Mwaga believes that the elusive idea of African integration is the silver bullet for Africans to find their way out of poverty, insecurity and violence as well as the way out of manipulation of Africa by the West.

Chinese envoy urges all parties to resolve Yemen crisis

UNITED NATIONS — Fu Cong, China's permanent representative to the United Nations, on Tuesday called on all parties concerned to stay on the course of political solution to the Yemen crisis, emphasizing that "the settlement of the Yemeni question requires political and diplomatic means".

In remarks at the Security Council briefing on Yemen, Fu said China hopes that all parties concerned will stay on the course of political solution, build consensus, meet each other halfway, jointly promote a Yemeni-led and Yemeni-owned comprehensive political process and resolve tensions and differences

through dialogue and negotiation. "The international community should provide assistance and play a constructive role in this regard," he pointed out.

With the ongoing tensions in the Red Sea unsettling, the Chinese side once again urged the Houthis to respect the right of navigation of commercial vessels under international law in the Red Sea, cease attacks and maintain safe navigation in the Red Sea, said Fu.

He also called on other relevant parties to maintain restraint and halt any actions that may exacerbate tensions. Addressing the humanitarian

situation in Yemen, which "remains grim", the ambassador said the international community should scale up humanitarian and development assistance to Yemen, support and help the government and people of Yemen to develop the economy and improve living conditions.

He noted that China expresses its serious concerns over the detention of UN personnel in Yemen and calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all UN personnel.

Stressing that the tensions in the Red Sea are a prominent manifestation of the spillover of the Gaza conflict, Fu called for the full and

effective implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions and the promotion of an immediate cease-fire in Gaza.

"We call on all parties to exercise restraint, avoid further escalations, and prevent plunging the entire region into an even greater catastrophe," he said, adding that China stays committed to working with the international community and making unremitting efforts for the political settlement of the Yemeni question and the maintenance of peace and stability in the Middle East.

XINHUA

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WORLD



Washington Metropolitan Police clear demonstrators from blocking traffic on Wednesday in Washington ahead of a scheduled address by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the US Capitol. Thousands of protesters against the war in Gaza converged on Washington to condemn Netanyahu's visit, chanting "Free, free Palestine" as they marched toward the Capitol before police deployed pepper spray on some in the crowd. MIKE STEWART / AP

Protests rage in DC as Netanyahu speaks

By HENG WEILI in New York
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Pro-Palestine protests turned violent in Washington DC on Wednesday as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu delivered remarks to Congress.

The protesters called for the United States to stop military aid to Israel. They hoisted Palestinian flags and burned American ones outside Washington's Union Station in demonstrations.

Less than a mile away, police used pepper spray on some of the thousands of protesters who gathered outside the US Capitol while Netanyahu spoke.

Before Netanyahu's speech, some protesters tried to block his route to the Capitol but were removed from the street by police. After being turned away by officers near the Capitol, protesters wound through the Capitol Hill neighborhood for several blocks before gathering in front of the nearby rail station.

Various videos posted to X.com showed police and protesters clashing, along with images of monuments covered in red paint and slogans in favor of Palestine and against Israel.

Netanyahu was scheduled to meet President Joe Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris on Thursday and former president Donald Trump on Friday.

Shortly before Netanyahu began speaking, Capitol Police said protesters in a march tried crossing a blockade and did not retreat when asked.

"The crowd failed to obey our order to move back from our police line. We are deploying pepper spray towards anyone trying to break the law and cross that line," police said in a statement.

"We were no threat (to police)," said Sarah Bowles, a pharmacy technician from Delaware who attended the protest and assisted injured protesters. One of the protesting groups said police attacked demonstrators as they marched.

Nine people were arrested across Washington, including four on charges of assaulting a police officer outside Union Station.

Capitol Police said in a post on X that six people who disrupted Netanyahu's address were removed from the House gallery and arrested.

"Disrupting the Congress and demonstrating in the congressional buildings is against the law," police said.

Outside of Union Station, protesters shouted, "Let them go!" at officers who formed a circle around several people who were arrested. One person grabbed at a police officer's riot shield and then raised his fists in a fighting stance.

An officer was seen grabbing a Palestinian flag from a woman and tossing it aside. At least one protester

appeared to be overcome by pepper spray.

Cheers rang out as a fire burned what appeared to be a papier-mache effigy of Netanyahu. Protesters spray-painted graffiti on a monument to Christopher Columbus, including the words, "Hamas is coming" in large red letters. "Free Gaza" was scrawled in green.

Pro-Palestinian groups and university students have for months protested in the US against Israel's offensive in Gaza, where health authorities say nearly 40,000 Palestinians have been killed.

Israel's military assault followed an Oct 7 attack by Hamas, whose militants surged into Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking around 250 hostages, according to Israeli figures.

A stage at the protest site near the Capitol was decked out with banners, including one that declared the Israeli leader a "Wanted War Criminal" in reference to an arrest warrant sought by International Criminal Court prosecutors. Netanyahu denies war crimes allegations.

"Bibi, Bibi, We're not done! The intifada has just begun!" protesters shouted, referring to Netanyahu by his nickname. "Netanyahu, you can't hide. You're committing genocide," other protesters shouted.

Among the protesters was a group of artists from Baltimore displaying a massive papier-mache sculpture

meant to depict Biden with blood on his hands and devil horns.

Dozens of Democratic lawmakers skipped Netanyahu's speech to Congress in protest over the deaths and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where nearly all of its 2.3 million people have been displaced.

US Representative Rashida Tlaib, a Michigan Democrat, held up signs that said "WAR CRIMINAL" and "GUILTY OF GENOCIDE" during Netanyahu's speech.

Dozens of protesters rallied outside Netanyahu's hotel Monday evening after his arrival in Washington. Video posted to X showed a swarm of bugs, including maggots and crickets crawling around the hotel.

The Palestinian Youth Movement, in a post on Instagram, claimed the insects were let loose to protest Israel's war against Hamas, CBS News reported.

On Tuesday afternoon, hundreds of demonstrators staged a flash mob-style protest in the Cannon building, which houses offices of House members.

The Capitol Police said about 200 people were arrested Tuesday on charges stemming from the sit-in at the Cannon building. Jewish Voice for Peace, which organized the protest, said many more than that were arrested, rabbis among them.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Call for China, California link on clean energy

To meet goals for grid, US state looks to wind power, where expert says China is excelling

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
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In the face of the recent record-setting heat wave that tested California's power grid, experts attributed the state's success to its commitment to renewable energy and called for collaboration with China to accelerate the path to a fully clean electricity grid.

California has set aggressive targets for renewable energy adoption, with state law requiring 90 percent of all retail electricity sales to come from renewable sources by 2035 and 100 percent by 2045. To meet those ambitious goals, the state is turning its attention to offshore wind power.

"In California, we have zero offshore wind today ... right now, China is far ahead of the US on the offshore wind industry," Daniel Kammen, a professor of energy at the University of California, Berkeley, and director of the university's Renewable and Appropriate Energy Laboratory, told China Daily.

California has designated two zones for offshore wind farms: one in Humboldt Bay in the north, and another in central California. "Offshore wind is exciting because it can be permitted more quickly and serves as a 'battery' for the grid," said Kammen.

Offshore wind can complement the production cycles of solar and on-land wind energy. That characteristic is particularly valuable, as solar production quickly diminishes when the sun sets, requiring system operators to replace those megawatts with other sources in real time to maintain grid stability.

It also offers flexibility in energy production, capable of generating electricity during peak demand and producing hydrogen or methanol during periods of low electricity prices. That flexibility presents huge opportunities to decarbonize sectors that have traditionally been difficult to transition to clean energy, he said.

Kammen said that the state can directly apply some of China's practices. "The best way to apply it is not just to read about it but to actually get partners from China," he said.

California has already taken such steps by inviting engineering groups from Norway. The state is also exploring opportunities in fuel cells, hydrogen production and other offshore

renewable energy sources, such as tidal and wave power. Those areas promise rich opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaboration with Chinese partners, who have wide experience in the fields, Kammen added.

California and China have a history of partnership in developing clean energy technologies.

Kammen, however, stressed the need to accelerate the collaborations. He highlighted his own partnerships with research colleagues at Tsinghua University and North China Electric Power University as well as with Chinese companies like Geely. "We want to build more of those teams so that we can move quickly when the politics let it happen," Kammen said.

Despite tensions at the national level, subnational cooperation between California and China has gained momentum recently.

"I think the conference may give you the best example," said Richard Dasher, director of the US-Asia Technology Management Center at Stanford University, referring to the 2024 Global Green Development Summit at his university on the weekend.

The summit, held by the Global Green Development Alliance, brought together climate and energy experts as well as business leaders from both countries to discuss "energy transition and innovation for carbon neutrality."

Companies must provide solutions that are both economically viable and attractive to consumers, he said. "People can't afford to spend all their money just to be green," Dasher explained. "So the business has to provide things within economic constraints. And they have to provide solutions that are attractive that people want to use."

Kammen emphasized the need for a combination of Silicon Valley's innovative mentality and the large-scale industrial capacity of entities like China's State Grid Corp or the State Grid Electric Vehicle Service Co.

He pointed to the productivity of new companies and university offshoots as evidence of the potential for collaborative innovation. "What we need is flexible ways that researchers on both sides of the Pacific can work together. Sometimes that results in companies in China, sometimes in the US," he said.

Summit celebrates sister-city relations

By LINDA DENG in Tacoma, Washington
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It was an occasion to celebrate the personal experiences of the sister-city relationships over the years.

Alix Nathan, president of the Portland-Suzhou Sister City Association in Oregon, said at the sixth US-China Sister Cities Summit on Friday in Tacoma, Washington state, that one of the most crucial aspects of the exchanges and relationship with sister city Suzhou, in East China's Jiangsu province, is in education.

"For more than 20 years, Portland has been using and working with schools in the US and Suzhou to facilitate reciprocal school-to-school bilateral group programming for students," Nathan told China Daily.

His association has assisted in the effort by spending a minimum of one

week visiting each other's classrooms, city attractions, parks and museums, as well as spending time with host families.

"Obviously, during the pandemic, many of these programs were shut down," he said. "However, now we're very excited to rekindle this relationship, as we have many schools restarting their activities to promote American students from Portland going to China, with more than 12 schools now enlisted in activities to foster exchanges in the coming year."

During the summit, a delegation of 13 students from the Affiliated High School of Fuzhou Institute of Education in Fuzhou, capital of Fujian province, arrived in Tacoma for an 11-day educational exchange program.

"Besides the beautiful country and the delicious food we had, making friends and talking to people was the best part," Izabell Saldana, a 12th

grader at Lincoln High School in Tacoma, said of her multicity trip to China last month. "I do believe that this is absolutely a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

Celeste Nunez Salcido, director of international business resources for the New Mexico Trade Alliance, was the US fellow during the 2023 Gansu International Fellowship Program organized by the Gansu provincial government.

The fellowship convenes professional candidates from around the world to learn about Gansu's and China's economic development efforts, cultural heritage, language and history to promote mutual understanding and peaceful cooperation.

Salcido's participation in the program marked the first exchange opportunity between Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Lanzhou, Gansu province, since the pandemic.

"Here, every one of you is a citizen diplomat," she said in her speech at the end of the summit. "Every one of you has the ability and power to strengthen these friendships that lead to cooperation."

She said cooperation is important for the shared challenges of the future.

"The US and China are the top two global economies. This is not going to change in the near future. And that means that we need people to understand each other," she said.

Yang Wanning, president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, told China Daily it will launch a youth exchange program next year, inviting and organizing trips for 1,000 US high school and university students aged 16 to 22 to China.

"Through a seven-to-10-day visit, students will experience a real, multi-dimensional and comprehensive China. They will become young ambassadors for promoting Sino-American relations," Yang said.

Protesting corruption



Ugandan police officers detain protesters at a rally against alleged corruption and human rights abuses by lawmakers, in the capital Kampala on Tuesday. At least 42 protesters were charged and remanded, authorities said on Wednesday. ABUBAKER LUBOWA / REUTERS

Survivors sue Illinois over decades of sexual abuse at youth detention center

CHICAGO — Temarkus Washington says the sexual abuse he experienced as a teenager at a troubled Chicago youth detention center still gives him nightmares.

The 35-year-old spoke publicly about his experiences on Tuesday, a day after joining two lawsuits collecting dozens of abuse allegations at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, one of the largest centers of its kind nationwide. The lawsuits, filed on Monday on behalf of 193 men and women, detail unset-

tling accusations of rape, unlawful strip searches and other sexual abuse by adult employees of the detention center from 1995 until 2022.

"It's actually not something that I like to talk about or even think about. I did what I had to do to survive in there," Washington said at a Chicago news conference alongside other survivors. "I am here because I want to feel confident in myself again. For so long I doubted myself and felt so scared."

The allegations are the latest in

Illinois, where two similar lawsuits were filed recently in the Illinois Court of Claims. In total, the accounts of nearly 400 survivors have been documented in court. Attorneys say they expect to file more lawsuits in the coming months.

"This has happened over and over again," said attorney Todd Mathews, who has helped bring the Illinois cases. "This is still going on. It has to stop and this is the way it is going to stop."

The Illinois lawsuits allege that

sexual abuse at the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center was pervasive. The victims were between 9 and 17 years old.

"As a result of chronic mismanagement, patronage, overcrowding and inadequate supervision, JTDC has been an environment of violence, fear and sexual abuse for decades," one of the lawsuits stated.

The allegations, spanning more than 500 pages between the two lawsuits, are hauntingly similar.

The children were often isolated

in their rooms or bathrooms when the abuse took place, according to the lawsuits. Many plaintiffs said their abusers threatened them with violence or additional time at the facility if they reported the abuse. Others were given extra food and other rewards if they kept silent.

"The State of Illinois has caused and permitted a culture of sexual abuse to flourish unabated at JTDC," one of the lawsuits said.

The lawsuits seek damages of roughly \$2 million per plaintiff,

the most allowed under law.

Phillip Goodwin, 24, also spoke out on Tuesday, saying he hopes that coming forward about the abuse he experienced will help others. The Chicago man said the abuse happened about 10 years ago and that until recently he had been embarrassed by it.

"Talking about my abuse feels like a weight lifted off my shoulders," he said. "I could finally get that anger that I carried."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

ACROSS ASIA

Editor's note:

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

Perhaps it is the *canang sari* incense that perpetually hovers in the Balinese air, or the detoxifying heat of the tropical sun, Michelle Anindya, a freelance journalist based in Bali, Indonesia, wrote in her story for The Jakarta Post.

Whatever it is, it seems that more and more urbanites are getting intoxicated with the so-called Bali high after spending time on the island: a euphoric bliss that can lead you to start making plans to leave the city life you have always known and chase the idyllic dream of laid-back island living.

Between going back to a stressful rat race through traffic-choked streets and the idea of an island life that seems to offer a degree of freedom from the punishing daily grind, the choice seems alluringly, deceptively simple.

But if there is one thing Anindya has learned since her one-way ticket to Bali eight years ago, it is that living here — or perhaps on any island — requires a constant renegotiation between our desires and the realities on the ground.

Anindya wrote that she probably had it better than most. Coming to Bali with the gullibility of a fresh-out-of-college girl, she had nothing to lose.

But for many who make the move, they see the island dream as a second chance — a way to divorce themselves from a toxic environment, to reconnect with their once free-spirited selves, or to finally truly enjoy life, even if only during their golden years.

The latter was what Sukma Mentari wanted: a retirement home in Bali. She is no stranger to the island, having been in and out of it since she was a young girl. But after she bought a piece of land in 2014 to begin working on this dream, her life changed dramatically in ways she had not anticipated.

Not wanting to leave the land idle, she decided to build a guesthouse on it as a business.

"Back then it was something that I thought I could monitor from Jakarta," Sukma said. But the problematic construction process, which included workers disappearing on her, took such a toll that she said it was a "miracle" they could complete the guesthouse.

"This is one of the most difficult things I've ever done," said Sukma, who had to relocate to Bali in 2016, earlier than planned. "People think it's so fun to live in Bali. They have no idea how stressed we were about construction workers not showing up!"

Even when the guesthouse was finally up and running, Sukma still had to closely supervise her staff and manage bookings herself, finally admitting that "there was no way I couldn't be there full time."

Like Sukma, many who relocate to Bali soon realize that island living comes with its own set of challenges and complexities.

To start with, there is nothing pragmatic about it. It surely cannot be for the money. Building a business, especially in Bali, requires extensive local knowledge. Wages might be lower than in Jakarta, but the cost of living is not necessarily cheaper. And job opportunities are rather limited to hospitality.

Considering a peaceful retirement island? Prepare for all kinds of distractions. Children? Private schools are limited and expensive.



ISLAND DREAMS

Reality can bite for urbanites chasing idyllic Bali lifestyle



Top: A surfer carries his board as the sun sets behind waves, at the Kerobokan district in Bali, Indonesia, on Dec 19. DAVID GANNON / AFP
Left: Tourists talk with a souvenir vendor at Kuta Beach, Bali, on March 22, 2022. FIRDIA LISNAWATI / AP



Right: A rice farmer works in a paddy field in the Kerobokan district, Bali, on Jan 2. DAVID GANNON / AFP

The same goes for medical care in case of emergencies.

The dream of a work-life balance, typically involving picturesque walks along the shore during sunset, is evaporating as the traffic in Bali is almost comparable to big cities. Tourists can temporarily suspend their grasp on reality, attributing two-hour traffic jams to bad luck during peak season. But residents have no such luxury.

"The island we once knew is now gone," we say to ourselves with apathy.

What is left? Perhaps not much for some people. This sobering reality can throw others into an existential crisis. Buying a one-way ticket home might then seem like the quickest and least painful way out.

Connecting locally

A number of long-term Bali residents Anindya spoke with, many of whom have lived here for nearly 20 years, could still vividly recall their early years on the island, fueled by a new lust for life.



Once I decided that I wanted to contribute to Bali, many doors opened. ... I wholeheartedly believe that people don't choose Bali, but Bali chooses you."

Christina Arum Handayani, a Bali islander

"This island opened up a whole new world to me," said Puji Siswanti, who moved to Bali from Bandung in 2005.

But Puji hit rock bottom in 2014, losing both her family and her business. "I was buried under the ashes of years spent building a successful jewelry business and a family in Bali," she said.

What was once the island of her dreams had turned into a gaping void. She continued working numerous gigs to survive on the island, including being a driver, where she met "visitors who later became my

best friends," Puji said. This marked a turning point in her life.

"I had been on the island for a decade. I built a jewelry business here, worked with many local artisans, breathed its air, drank its water, but I don't think I had a spiritual connection with the island. We're not bound by spirits," Puji said. "It felt like a contract. Transactional."

"I thought to myself, you want to live in Bali, right? You don't want to go back to Bandung, right? So how can you connect more with the island?" Puji said.

"It took me years to fully accept

Bali as it is, including the way people work here."

This fighting spirit seems to be common among those committed to island life, and not just in Bali. It is a fire they continue to fan, which is almost ironic, considering that the island dream is portrayed as an easy, breezy lifestyle.

But perhaps to truly make the island your home, there is no escaping these questions: Why are you here? Why this place? What does the island mean to you? How can you contribute to it?

When an island fills you with a natural high, that kind of selfless rumination often comes last. And rarely do we ever need to put a place — or an island — so central in our existence that thinking about our relationship to that place becomes a natural, if not necessary, question.

Sometimes, this contribution can be more practical, as simple as spotting what is missing in a city and turning that into a business opportunity.

"I had to think: what are some of

the biggest commodities coming out of Flores?" said Krisman Lyberty, a geographer who moved to Labuan Bajo in 2017 and stayed through the pandemic.

Like many other islands, Labuan Bajo's burgeoning industry is hospitality and Krisman fashioned himself a tour guide after moving to the islands. But when the pandemic struck, he had to quickly pivot to other occupations, including trading coffee and even farming pigs. "I didn't want to move back to Jakarta."

It did not bother him much, considering he has mastered the art of building a social network across islands.

"I have known many coffee farmers in Flores since 2018. A year later, a friend of mine came from Malang, and we decided to open a roastery there," he recounted.

It turned out to be a saving grace during the pandemic. "During those two years, I just traded coffee across Flores and sent it to our roastery in Malang."

The fishing town itself is relatively small, with less than 10,000 residents. Life is quiet in the town, but it does not matter. Now working again as a tour guide, Krisman is away traveling most of the month and occasionally sails on a local phinisi-style boat across East Nusa Tenggara in Indonesia. That easily beats sitting in gridlock for hours.

Making choices

It seems there is no point in forming a concrete plan when we want to chase the island dream. After all, it is more like an adventure than a settlement. An island can change so much within five years that our love for it can turn sour, if we do not remain nimble and open to unexpected events.

"I found myself here," said Christina Arum Handayani, a Bali islander, explaining how the island was like a "giant canvas" for her to learn about everything from history to the environment.

Much of that can perhaps be credited to the less bureaucratic working environment, creating a fertile ground for creative experiments.

"There's little judgment here," she said, which means, "I can be more honest with myself."

"Once I decided that I wanted to contribute to Bali, many doors opened. This is where I try new skills," said Christina, who has juggled multiple jobs ranging from managing festivals to running tours. "And I'm doing fine financially."

"I wholeheartedly believe that people don't choose Bali, but Bali chooses you," said Christina, a statement echoed by Sukma.

Though Sukma contemplates buying land elsewhere for her retirement home, it is undeniable that Bali has made a significant influence on her life. How could it not? "I can stare at the three mountains from my backyard," Sukma said. "You gain a new perspective on wealth once you arrive in Bali."

Acknowledging that island life is not for everyone, Puji said: "You have to be creative if you want to live here. You have to really want it."

And then perhaps, as those who have woven their lives into the fabric of the island found, you will discover dreams that are different, yet more profound, than the ones you first had.

THE JAKARTA POST

Railway drives China-Laos tourism boom

The number of regional visitors to Laos and Southwest China's Yunnan province has seen a sharp increase since last year's introduction of passenger services on the Laos-China railway.

The passenger train, from the Lao capital of Vientiane to Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province, was introduced on April 13 last year.

From the date of the launch until the beginning of April this year, 172,023 passengers used the service, according to Lao Deputy Minister of Tourism Darany Phommavongsa, who met a group of ASEAN journalists touring the railway at the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism in June.

One year to the day after the initial launch, an additional pair of passenger services were added between Luang Prabang, Laos and Xishuangbanna, China.

During the June news conference, Darany noted that the railway had transformed Laos from a landlocked to a connected country, "making the dreams and aspirations of the Lao people come true."

She said the success is due to the joint implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, which both

countries must continue to pay attention to, in order to achieve high-quality development and to continuously upgrade cooperation.

She explained that the Lao government aimed to develop the Laos-China railway into an economic corridor that generates major income for the nation. The corridor will contribute to improving the country's economic situation through the transportation of passengers, including international tourists, as well as carrying goods between Laos and China.

The railway also made a significant contribution to the "Visit Laos 2024" campaign, which aims to promote Lao tourism and attract more international guests, creating jobs, bringing in foreign currency and supporting the conservation and protection of the country's art, culture and traditions, while sharing its long history.

"The opening of the Laos-China railway has made a great contribution to the Visit Laos 2024 campaign, by facilitating the travel of both domestic



A tourist disembarks the China-Laos Railway in Boten, Laos, on April 9. LAUREN DEICCA / GETTY IMAGES

172,023 passengers

used the railway service from the date of its launch in last April until the beginning of April this year

and international tourists, allowing them to enjoy a fun, high-quality travel experience," Darany said.

In line with the increased number of arrivals, the deputy minister added that the Lao government has constructed several new infrastructure projects, while focusing on the

preservation and protection of cultural heritage sites and traditional activities, especially along the railway line.

"The information ministry is working with provincial authorities and tourism stakeholders along the route of the railway to ensure that all tourism attractions meet the highest international standards," she said.

"They have installed multilingual signage along the transit region. Clear road signs in Lao, English and Chinese point the way to major attractions," she said.

With Laos announcing a visa-free policy for Chinese visitors in early July, the number of Chinese arrivals is expected to jump. According to Darany, the policy is mainly focused on travelers who are accompanied by guides on packaged group tours.

She said the policy may also be applied to other international visitors from the region, and may include multiple entry visas, as well as the possibility of extending a stay from 30 to 60 days.

A tour guide identified as Mana told The Phnom Penh Post that the number of visitors had definitely increased, especially to Luang Prabang, thanks to the railway.

He explained that before the railway was launched there were far fewer visitors to the northern city, as travel from Vientiane took up to eight hours.

Thanks to the train, the distance can now be covered in two hours.

The latest visitors to the former capital are not just coming from China, but from within Laos itself. Large crowds could be seen at the Royal Palace Museum and other cultural attractions in Luang Prabang.

China's Yunnan province has also seen a spike in guests to its many cultural villages and parks. The surge consists of large numbers of tourists from within China, as well as the neighboring countries of Laos and Myanmar.

According to sources at some of the cultural villages, the number of arrivals sees a particular jump during public holidays such as the traditional Chinese Spring Festival.

THE PHNOM PENH POST

一城 CITY TALES 一街

Editor's note: An array of Chinese cities have maintained their cultural memories in the form of historical neighborhoods that have only added to their multilayered charm and vigor with the passage of time. China Daily is taking readers on a journey to some of these timeless areas, where President Xi Jinping has left his footsteps and remarked on the preservation and vitalization of heritage. In this installment, we walk through the Small Park historical area of Shantou, Guangdong province, to see how rows of qilou (arcade buildings) overlay an exotic charm on traditional architectural roots.



Historical town's charm reveals port's resilience

By FANG AIQING in Shantou, Guangdong and LI WENFANG in Guangzhou

Strolling through the old town of Shantou, an area known as the Small Park historical area, one can almost hear history speaking.

The neighborhood's radiating layout, which preserves its original 1930s appearance, was a people-oriented, modern concept of urban planning at the time, and the rows of qilou (arcade buildings) lining its streets, with their blend of Chinese and Western architectural styles, are declarations of their initial owners' wealth.

"The Small Park area was pivotal to the city of Shantou, as from its heyday until its current revival, it has witnessed every stage of the city's development," says Zheng Yiwei, owner of a 59-year-old snack restaurant called Piaoxiang.

Having recognized the urgency of preserving this carrier of urban memory, local government and citizens have been working for over a decade to record stories, restore historical structures and revitalize the neighborhood, in the hope of attracting more people to experience its story.

"The Small Park area would not have been developed without the participation of overseas Chinese," says Zhang Yaohui, deputy director of the culture, radio, television, tourism and sports bureau of Jinpinging district, where the old town is located.

A century ago, Shantou's pain at being forced to open as a treaty port for foreign trade in 1860 was interwoven with its commercial and trading success.

Millions of people set sail from the port to take their chances in Southeast Asia. Their gambles paid off as they and their descendants brought back fortunes and investment, supporting their families and contributing to local development.



The Huilian Library, also a venue for displaying the heritage of Shantou, was once the site of a newspaper and printing press. LIN FENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

KEEPERS OF THE CENTURY PAST

Admirers of qilou buildings determined to prevent memories of old city's cosmopolitan architectural traditions from fading, Fang Aiqing reports in Shantou, Guangdong.

Nostalgia matters. A century ago in the city of Shantou, Guangdong province, nostalgia drove successful overseas Chinese business owners to return, invest and contribute to the development of its thriving downtown area.

The newly planned old town they helped create, with its row upon row of exquisite qilou (arcade buildings), is known today as the Small Park historical area and bears witness to the city's stories past.

After the city, also known as Swatow, became a treaty port for foreign trade in 1860, Small Park was a commercial center known for its modern lifestyle. Following the founding of New China in 1949, it became a bustling, harmonious neighborhood, and since 1978, commerce began to revive as a result of reform and opening-up.

With the passage of time, the old town's prosperity faded as Shantou extended eastward, but many of those who grew up there and have cherished memories of the area don't want to leave it behind.

Instead, they strive to keep its memory alive — some using pens, some their lens — to guarantee that its former glory is told to both the city's younger generation, and to the growing number of visitors.

"The creation of the Small Park area is a reflection of the city's historical development," says Zhang Yaohui, deputy director of the culture, radio, television, tourism and sports bureau of Jinpinging district, where the qilou neighborhood is located.

Shantou's natural harbor, which faces onto the South China Sea, saw it become one of the cities forced to grant foreign countries access to trade under the unequal Treaties of Tianjin, which were signed following imperial China's defeat in the Second Opium War (1856-60).

As a result, foreign diplomats, merchants, sailors and missionaries, overseas Chinese, and business owners from other parts of China flooded into the commercial port.

As a trading hub, it was connected to Southeast Asia, as well as to coastal cities including Shanghai, Tianjin, and Qingdao in today's Shandong province. Overland trade from the port reached other parts of present-day Guangdong, Fujian, Jiangxi and Hunan provinces.

Meanwhile, customs records suggest that between 1864 and 1911 alone, nearly three million people from the Chaoshan region — the Guangdong cities of Chaozhou, Shantou and Jieyang — sailed south from Shantou to earn a living in Southeast Asia.

The Tianhou Temple in Shantou old town, which is dedicated to the sea goddess Mazu, and neighboring Guandi Temple, which celebrates the famous late Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) general Guan Yu, who is known for his courage and faith, were their last stops before setting sail. There, they would pray for safety and fortune and take a handful of incense ash with them. The temples would be the first sight of home upon their return, Zhang says.

The intricate decor of both temples, which were originally built in the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and recon-



Top: The Tianhou Temple and Guandi Temple at Shantou's Small Park historical area exhibit a traditional architectural charm. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY. Above: Rows of qilou (arcade buildings) line the area's streets. CAI HAIQING / FOR CHINA DAILY

structed in the early 1990s, indicates the place they occupy in people's hearts.

The roofs are decorated with qianci, brightly colored porcelain shards assembled into the shape of auspicious figures such as the dragon and the phoenix, martial figures from local Teochew Opera, and flowers. The figures carry iron weapons in their hands, which also serve as lightning rods, Zhang explains.

Apart from stone carvings on the facades, there are wood carvings covered in lacquer and gold leaf on the beams. Many depict scenes from Teochew Opera, such as stories adapted from the classical novel Romance of the Three Kingdoms, which contributed to making General Guan a household name.

In the past, on festival days and when successful overseas Chinese returned, Teochew Opera performances would be held in the open space between the two temples to express gratitude to the deities, Zhang says.

The area was used as a marketplace the rest of the year. The old town originated there and gradually expanded. Finally, after the local government began an integrated urban planning and road construction program in the 1920s, a business district with a small circular park at its core and roads radiating outward was built. It remains intact until this day.

This was a period when a great number of overseas Chinese returned to invest in business and real estate. For example, right across from the park is the landmark Nansheng Department Store, which originally belonged to Li Bohuan, a Hakka businessman who made his fortune in Indonesia, and his business partners.

The grand seven-story building was completed in 1932, and included a department store, local and Western restaurants, and a hotel. It was lit with electric lamps every night, had flowers on each floor, and was home to the city's first elevator, which remained in use for 60 years.

In the two years following its completion, Li worked with neighboring business owners to fund and build a pavilion in the small park in memory of revolutionary leader Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), which has since become the symbol of the old town area.

Numerous qilou were built at the time, using imported materials like cement and iron bars. Today, a walk through the historical neighborhood with arcade buildings lining its streets still reminds visitors of an era marked by the pursuit of wealth and utility, aesthetics and creativity, as well as the mix of modern and traditional.

Shantou is a rainy city with a subtropical climate. The ground floor colonnades separate pedestrians from traffic, provide shelter from the sun, wind and rain, and make retail more appealing, says photographer and architectural expert Cai Haisong, who has been photographing the historical architecture of the Chaoshan region for more than three decades.

He says that the height of the three or four-story arcade buildings is almost the same as the width of the road, which is ideal for lighting and ventilation.



Clockwise from top: The Small Park historical area of Shantou, Guangdong province, with a radiating layout, has a pavilion memorial to revolutionary leader Sun Yat-sen at its center; Yingge dance performances brighten up Spring Festival in February; a night view of the Small Park neighborhood; people flood into the neighborhood to get a taste of history. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Underground drainage ditches discharged rainwater and sewage into the sea, and were covered with flagstones to permit the passage of pedestrians and vehicles. The ditches were so spacious that it was possible for people to walk through them while bent over.

The qilou facades are inspired by Western and South-East Asian architectural styles. The classical Greek columns on the ground floor are strong and elegant. Some buildings have stained-glass windows. There are verandas and terraces on higher floors.

Decorations and reliefs on the capitals, pediments, eaves and window frames are a testament to imagination and delicate workmanship, and range from traditional auspicious motifs, angels and badges, to anything people might see in life such as swallows, bitter gourds or even trains.

However, the traditional Chinese interiors are a sharp contrast. Inside, the buildings usually have a rectangular, circular or octagonal tianjing (patio) enclosed by wooden balustrades.

This layout not only improved lighting, but also made it easier to deliver messages and move goods, given that while the ground floor was usually given over to shops, the upper floors often served as warehouses and residences.

As one of those who grew up in the neighborhood, 69-year-old Cai says the design and craftsmanship of these historical buildings reflect local open-mindedness and diligence, pragmatic commercial acumen, emphasis on traditional culture and moral values, and maybe, a penchant for the elaborate display of wealth.

He adds that for both Shantou emigrants and those who have spent part of their life in the old town, the Small Park area evokes nostalgia.

Eighty-year-old Shen Wei, who lived in the area for more than four decades, keeps revisiting with camera in hand, to wander about and enjoy local snacks.

When he encounters overseas Chinese, either on their own or in groups, who have come to reminisce about the past, he is more than willing to accompany them. He still remembers helping one elderly woman from Malaysia find the textiles center where her father had once worked.

For years Shen has been studying the city's history with a group of elderly volunteers, and is writing a personal memoir of his beloved home, in which vivid old town scenes are indispensable — including mentions of the antique bookstore, games of hide-and-seek in the spider web-like neighborhood, and the colors that the sunrise and sunset project on the buildings.

Although his eyesight is getting worse, he still feels a responsibility to keep writing. "It's not the number of days you live, but the number of days you remember that matters," reads the intro on the cover of his handwritten memoir.

Yang Luorong and Wang Zhengxing contributed to this story.

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This care for family and homeland is highlighted at a branch museum of the Shantou Archives dedicated to the city's qiaopi culture — a combination of family letters and remittance certificates from overseas Chinese — which thrived in the 19th and 20th centuries. It was included in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2013.

President Xi Jinping visited the museum during his inspection tour to the old town of Shantou in October 2020, when he pointed out that qiaopi record the strenuous efforts of the older generation of overseas Chinese and their profound love for their hometown and motherland, and embody the credibility and integrity of the Chinese nation.

He emphasized the importance of preserving these documents and strengthening the study of them.

According to Lin Qingqi, the museum's honorary director, it is now home to more than 86,000 physical qiaopi — around 30,000 of which have been recently restored — and more than 150,000 digitalized documents.

Many thanks go to the inner straggle of not being able to be with family, and it seems there was no lack of scholars who lived on remittances while at school.

Lin says that around 200 qiaopi agencies, which offered both postal and financial services, were successively established in the old town from the first half of the 19th century until the founding of New China in 1949.

The foreign exchange qiaopi generated played an important role in keeping the local economy prosperous and stable, he adds.

Across from the museum is the Shantou Opening Port Culture Exhibition Hall, where the historical context of the city's opening as a port, its initial modernization and trade development, as well as its transformation as a special economic zone since reform and opening-up began in 1978, is explained.

Housed in a century-old building, the hall received donations from local companies toward restoration and preparation before its founding in 2010. According to Zhang Ruqiang, director of the hall, it received around 280,000 visits in first half of the year.

While the building is one of the first historical structures to be put back in use after restoration, it is by no means the last. More than 350 qilou have been renovated and their facades restored since 2017, local media say. Among them is the Hu Wen Bao Building, site of a former newspaper and printing press. It is now the Huilian Library, which has an exhibition of local media history, along with books about the past and present of the Small Park area.

While conserving and revitalizing the old town, we received many old photos from residents. It is through their support and participation that we have been able to experience the area's charm and learn the stories behind these historical buildings," Zhang Yaohui says.

Yang Luorong and Wang Zhengxing contributed to this story.

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LIFE

US students display their chops

The MTSU Chinese Music Ensemble's first trip to China opens eyes on both sides, **Xing Wen** reports.

Jake Capistrant absolutely crushed it. The 19-year-old American with blond hair rocked the crowd at a recent concert in Beijing, stunning everyone by singing the powerful and uplifting classic song *Haohan Ge* (Hero Song), followed by an effortless rendition on the *suona*, a traditional Chinese wind instrument.

"The *Hero Song* was fun to learn. Last semester, we only played it on our instruments, but then I learned the words the best I could. I love the melody. It's so expressive and triumphant," says Capistrant.

He was part of a concert by the Middle Tennessee State University Chinese Music Ensemble and a group of teenage players of traditional Chinese instruments from the Beijing-based Soong Ching Ling Peace Angel Art Troupe on July 17.

The MTSU Chinese Music Ensemble, directed by Han Mei, an ethnomusicologist and established *guzheng* (Chinese zither) performer, is a credit course at the university's school of music that is open to the entire student body.

The ensemble aims to broaden cultural horizons, offering students hands-on practice that enriches their musical vocabulary, enhances their international understanding, and extends and strengthens their music theory and history studies.

"I played a couple of Chinese instruments before I joined the ensemble, but I didn't know anything about the beauty of Chinese music," says Capistrant.

A vocal performance major, he has gradually found that studying Chinese music has opened his mind to thinking about music differently, including singing.

"I've learned that the culture is just as important as the music when learning a new musical tradition. It's important to have an open mind," he adds.

During the concert that night, Capistrant's bandmate Emory Gaskill also had a shining moment. It happened as he seamlessly switched from playing the cello to performing on the jaw harp. The audience was amazed by the smooth transition from the rich tones of the cello to the vibrant, metallic twang of the harp. Gaskill earned a bachelor's degree in music performance with a specialty in the cello at MTSU two years ago. While at university, he joined the ensemble to learn the *sanxian*, a three-stringed plucked instrument.

"My first impression of traditional Chinese music is that it's deeply emotional and connected to the musicians," says Gaskill. "There's a meaning behind every movement and sound and it all connects to the surrounding space."

Earlier this month, the ensemble traveled to Fujian province where they participated in a weeklong China-US youth exchange camp. The program took them to Xiamen, Quanzhou and Zhangzhou, where they were able to immerse themselves in the local culture, experience traditional art forms such as *nanyin* music (an old folk music style that is popular in Fujian) and Liyuan Opera, and interact with students from Huaqiao University. They also displayed their



talent during concerts.

Reflecting on a memorable moment from the trip, Gaskill recalls the fun of discovering the *pipa* (a four-stringed Chinese lute) and banjo, both plucked string instruments. The *pipa* may have originated in West and Central Asia but is best known as a popular instrument in China, while the banjo, which was based on West African instruments like the *ngoni* and the *axalam*, was originally an instrument devised and played by African slaves in the US before later gaining wider appeal.

"One day in Xiamen, I was sitting among the students playing the banjo. I wear picks on my fingers, similar to the nails that *pipa* players use. The *pipa* is played with an outward motion, whereas the banjo is played inward," he says.

"That became the topic of discussion. When the students finally had the chance to play my banjo, they commented on how strange it was that the technique was the opposite of what they were used to."

He also tried playing the *pipa* for the first time.

Although Gaskill had already graduated, he was still offered the chance by Han to be part of the Chinese tour.



Top: Members of the Middle Tennessee State University Chinese Music Ensemble from the United States perform at a recent concert in Beijing. **Above:** Ensemble members Jake Capistrant (left) and Emory Gaskill (middle) on their first visit to China.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

I've learned that the culture is just as important as the music when learning a new musical tradition. It's important to have an open mind."

Jake Capistrant, a member of the Middle Tennessee State University Chinese Music Ensemble



Teenage players of traditional Chinese instruments from Beijing-based Soong Ching Ling Peace Angel Art Troupe perform during the event in Beijing on July 17.

Chinese teachers and students would see the passion of American university students for music and their uninhibited expression onstage.

"Our band members each play several instruments and all enjoy themselves during performances. This is also worth considering for Chinese music educators: Should we shape children from a young age into performers through music education or should we focus on cultivating their love of music?" she asks.

Han has been studying the similarities between the music cultures of China and the US for quite some time.

"We recommend students choose Chinese instruments based on their proficiency with their original instruments, which are mostly Western. For example, if a student is skilled in woodwind instruments, they may enjoy playing the *sheng* (an ancient Chinese wind instrument) or the *suona*."

Furthermore, she believes that it is crucial for students to experience the essence of Chinese music, such as *yun* (moving tones) in traditional Chinese music.

William Sprayberry, a 20-year-old junior studying video and film production at MTSU and a member of the ensemble, has come to notice what is unique about Chinese music. He recently started learning the *guzheng*. "It's an instrument that I'm slowly getting more respect for, which I know is a weird way to say it. But the more I play and the more I get to interact with it, the more I really understand it," he says, adding that exploring aspects like posture, technique and resting positions has revealed a wealth of details that collectively transform the experience into something almost meditative.

"Yes, it's a performance. You know you are playing for people and that's a big part of it. But there's definitely an element where you're playing for yourself and to better yourself."

His trip to China has ignited a desire to learn the language and he uses words like "gorgeous" to describe Chinese.

"I hope when I come back (to China), I will be able to read and communicate more on my own and really experience the culture firsthand."

This journey has prompted him to reconsider his future career.

Initially, he had doubts regarding the practicality of pursuing a professional music career, particularly in terms of being able to make a living.

"But I come here and I get to meet so many phenomenal musicians and experience so much beauty.

"Seeing all of that and knowing that, if nothing else, I have a wide range of instruments I can play, I can fit well into ensembles of different levels and styles. So, there's something to be said for the world of music in the future," he says.

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Online
Watch the video
by scanning
the code.

Book takes literary voyage around world

By **ZHANG KUN** in Shanghai
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David Damrosch embarked on a virtual voyage around the world during the pandemic and now the fruit of his project, *Around the World in 80 Books*, has been published in the United States and China. It will be one of the highlights at the upcoming Shanghai Book Fair in August.

The professor of comparative literature at Harvard University is director of Harvard's Institute for World Literature. In 2020, when the world came to a halt because of the COVID-19 pandemic, he decided to start a new blogging project. "With a whole series of travel plans canceled, I decided in the summer of 2020 to follow the lead of Jules Verne's globe-trotting hero Phileas Fogg.

In my case, I went voyaging around the world not in person but through 80 books."

One of Damrosch's former students, Chinese American Professor Song Mingwei of Wellesley College, immediately followed up and put together a team of translators to translate the blog into Chinese. Damrosch posted essays every week from May to August in 2020, completing the project in 16 weeks. The Chinese translation was serialized almost simultaneously in the weekly literary journal the Shanghai Book Review from May 21 to Sept 12.

"This writing project demonstrates resilience in a period of crisis. During the pandemic, there was someone reading and writing, spreading a message of hope," Song said earlier this year, during the book tour for

the Chinese edition.

Around the World in 80 Books was published by Penguin Books in the US and by Pelican Books in the United Kingdom in 2022. The Chinese edition was published by the Shanghai Translation Publishing House in April.

Last month, Song gave a lecture on the book at the International School of Tongji University in Shanghai, presenting an overview of the 16 chapters, each of which covered five books associated with a specific location.

"Professor Damrosch tried to avoid books that are either famous or popular with contemporary readers to present a collection of stories from all over the world."

Starting with Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*, Damrosch took readers to London,

listing books such as Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and Arnold Bennett's *Riceyman Steps*, then to destinations like Krakow in Poland and Kolkata in India, as well as Beijing and Shanghai, where he covered novels old and new, from Wu Cheng'en's *Journey to the West* to Nobel laureate Mo Yan's *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*.

At the launch of the Chinese edition of *Around the World in 80 Books* on April 23, which was World Book Day, Professor Yan Feng of Fudan University said that Damrosch had drawn a nautical map for readers voyaging across the ocean of literature. "It encourages everyone to embark on their own literary adventure. Today, in a world full of strife, isolation and barriers, literature, which seems virtual and intangible, offers an initiative to rebuild



Left: Professor Song Mingwei talks about his translation of David Damrosch's book *Around the World in 80 Books*, which was published in Chinese earlier this year. **Right:** Cover of the Chinese edition of the book. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

connections between people."

According to Song, the Chinese edition has sold more than 20,000 copies since it came out in April. Next month, it will be a highlight of



the 20th Shanghai Book Fair. The Shanghai Translation Publishing House plans to host a pavilion featuring a selection of 80 new titles from all over the world.

COMMENT

Editorials

With former stance a potential liability, Tokyo adopts damage limitation policy

Over the past more than three years, the Fumio Kishida government of Japan has strained ties with Beijing with its willingness to act as a proxy for Washington in the Asia-Pacific. Be it in the East and South China seas and the Taiwan Strait or the US "chip war" targeting China, Tokyo seemed confident that the US' anti-China stance would remain unchanged for the foreseeable future.

But US President Joe Biden calling time on his reelection bid on Sunday has made Tokyo perceptibly jittery, in the fear that, if Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump is reelected, his "America first" policy will unavoidably leave Japan stranded high and dry. That's why the Kishida government is quietly adjusting its former one-sided pro-US policy, adopting a more balanced approach toward the United States and China.

In fact, Tokyo has been hedging its bet on the outcome of the US presidential election for a while. Long before Trump defeated his Republican rivals, the Kishida government was among the first to start contacting the Trump team in preparation for his possible reelection in November. But despite this, Tokyo fears its past enthusiastic participation in the Biden administration's power play in Asia will come back to haunt it if a new Trump administration takes a more jaundiced view of the value of the cliques that Biden has built.

Thus Tokyo hosted the 16th China-Japan strategic dialogue on Monday, which had been put on hold for four and a half years. The meeting between Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa and Vice-Foreign Minister of Japan Okano Masataka with visiting Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu earlier this week reportedly prepared the ground for a possible meeting between Kamikawa and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of a series of ASEAN-hosted meetings in Vientiane, Laos, starting on Thursday. That in turn may reportedly set the stage for a meeting between the top leaders of the two neighbors.

Such intensive diplomatic interactions between Beijing and Tokyo have been rare over the past few years, indicating the two sides' common and strong desire to repair their ties.

This adjustment of their China policy in preparation for the possible change of White House occupier is also observable among some other US regional allies, including the Philippines, which has just reached a temporary deal with China on their maritime disputes in the South China Sea.

Yet the Biden administration apparently does not want to see the alliance network in the Asia-Pacific that it has tried so hard to build over the past years dissolve so quickly, even before the presidential election result is known. That explains US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's back-to-back 11-day visits to Vietnam, Laos, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore and Mongolia starting from Wednesday, which marks the 18th Asia-Pacific visit of Blinken, and US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's visit to Japan and the Philippines starting from Friday.

It is the Biden administration's anxiety about the US losing one of its largest regional alliance networks in the world — a diplomatic and strategic asset Biden has bragged — that has prompted the hasty arrangement of the visits of its top diplomat and defense chief to the region.

The overlapping of Blinken and Austin's itineraries in Tokyo and Manila reflects the special roles the latter two have assumed in the Biden administration's strategy to contain China. How Tokyo and Manila will respond to the two US guests will be viewed carefully by Beijing as not only a test of their sincerity to mend ties with China, but also their confidence in their future ties with the US.

China's appeal belies business exodus

Given the rising geopolitical tensions between China and the United States, and the "de-risking" strategy being pushed ahead by some Western countries to reduce dependence on China in terms of technologies and trade, it is not surprising that reports about foreign businesses cutting investment or shifting production out of China should have emerged. Or that such news is often cited by those who are hostile to China as evidence for what they believe is the country's diminishing economic potential and gloomy future.

Yet it is the foreign business communities in China, which feel the pulse of China's economic dynamics firsthand, and they are the most qualified to offer insights into the country's economic prospects. The visit to Beijing by a delegation of the US-China Business Council earlier this week reflects the business communities' confidence in the Chinese market and the readiness of foreign companies to continue deepening their cooperation with China.

As a private, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization of more than 270 US companies that do business in China, the council has, over the past more than 50 years, played a major role in supporting China-US economic and trade cooperation, which has brought tangible benefits to people in both countries. The visit was arranged as part of an agreement the two countries' top leaders reached during their San Francisco summit last November to expand bilateral exchanges.

It is noteworthy that the trip came shortly after the conclusion of the third plenum of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, which charted China's course of reform in the years ahead.

That's why Foreign Minister Wang Yi, during his meeting with the delegation on Monday, told the group, the first foreign business delegation that China received after the event, that they came to Beijing "at the right time" because they could feel the "new vibe" of China as it pushes ahead with comprehensive reforms.

The plenum, which concluded on July 18, has set a timetable for a new round of economic reforms that include those aimed at promoting alignment with high-standard international economic and trade rules, and harmonizing rules, regulations, management and standards relating to property rights protection, industrial subsidies, environmental standards, labor protection, government procurement, e-commerce and other areas, in an effort to create an institutional environment that is transparent, stable, and predictable, thus making the Chinese market even more attractive to foreign investors ready to benefit from China's process of modernization.

That FedEx CEO Raj Subramaniam, who led the delegation, said that the US business sector would continue to explore the Chinese market with confidence, and hoped to contribute more to the bilateral trade and investment relationship, underscores the enormous opportunities for Sino-US economic cooperation that are there to be explored despite Washington's restrictive and even repressive policies targeting China.

US business people's confidence is rooted in the resilience and vibrancy of the Chinese economy. The International Monetary Fund has recently upgraded its forecast for China's economy, saying that the world's second-largest economy will likely expand at a 5 percent annual rate this year, a 0.4 percentage point increase from its earlier estimate. Investment bank Barclays has also revised its 2024 GDP growth forecast for China from 4.4 percent to 5 percent, primarily supported by China's stronger-than-expected first-quarter economic data.

China's modernization will provide more opportunities for businesses from the US and all other countries. Hopefully the US business community will continue to play its role as a stabilizing force for Sino-US relations, and contribute more to both economies and global stability.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Macroeconomic governance system key to boosting high-quality growth

The central authorities have recently vowed to improve the systems of macroeconomic governance, advance reforms in fiscal, taxation, financial and other key areas in a coordinated manner, and enhance the consistency of macro-policy orientation.

China should improve the national strategic planning system and policy coordination mechanism. To this end, it should build a mechanism for the formulation and implementation of national strategies, strengthen the deep integration of major national strategies, and enhance macro guidance and overall coordination of these strategies.

Over a period of time, China's economic operation has been affected by unstable expectations and lack of confidence of some market players, which has affected the effectiveness of relevant policies to expand domestic demand.

The country needs to improve the expectation management mechanism and the system of experts' participation

in public decision-making, to achieve mutual information communication between the government and market in the decision-making process and let decision-making fully reflect the professional opinions. This will help reach policy consensus, stabilize expectations and enhance confidence.

In the past, China's macro-regulation was mainly manifested as countercyclical regulation, mainly through the coordination of monetary and fiscal policies. However, over time, monetary and fiscal policies have become tools to stimulate economic growth. Therefore, at a time when China is promoting the organic combination of cross-cycle and countercyclical policies to achieve economic balance and structural optimization, there is greater necessity to reform its fiscal, tax and financial systems.

The country needs to improve the budget system, strengthen fiscal resources and budget coordination, and bring all revenue derived from administrative pow-

er, government credit, and State-owned resources and assets into government budget management. It should also set up a tax system conducive to high-quality development, social fairness, and market unification, optimize the structure of the tax system, improve the direct tax system, and improve the comprehensive and classified personal income tax system.

The focus of the reform of fiscal and tax systems is to establish a fiscal relationship between central and local governments. It should help increase local governments' fiscal resources and expand local tax sources while increasing the proportion of central fiscal expenditure, as taxation and finance are the two most important areas of macroeconomic governance, and it is urgent for China to establish a modern fiscal and taxation system and a more market-efficient financial system based on the rule of law in order to promote high-quality development.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

Water moves moon closer as home away from home

Chinese scientists' discovery of a hydrated mineral containing approximately 41 percent water in terms of weight in lunar soil samples returned by Chang'e 5 mission marks a giant step in mankind's understanding of the moon while signifying a bright future for mankind's march toward the Earth's only natural satellite.

While it has long been believed that there was no water on the moon's surface, because it easily evaporates and escapes from the moon's surface given the moon's lack of an atmosphere and lower gravitational pull, whether water

exists in nonliquid form is of key academic interest. Scientists had found no water in the lunar soil samples collected by the United States' Apollo series of spaceships from 1969 to 1972, but in 2009, remote sensing from an impactor aboard the Indian mission Chandrayaan 1 that deliberately crashed on the moon's polar region found evidence raising the possibility of the existence of ice there.

In 2020, NASA announced that it had detected water molecules in the Clavius crater on the sunlit surface of the moon, but now Chang'e 5 has seen them in lunar soil samples. If more evidence of

water in lunar soil is found in the future, scientists will gain a deeper understanding of how the moon once had an atmosphere and how it lost it, an essential chapter in the moon's history.

It will also raise the possibility of mankind residing on the moon in the future, because the existence of water resources makes it possible for humans to set up base there in due course, without the need to carry this essential resource all the way, about 380,000 kilometers. However, all that hinges on more research being carried out in the future.

— ZHANG ZHOUIXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Eyes on Beijing in the hope it can promote peace process

The attention the world is paying to the top Ukrainian diplomat's ongoing visit to China from Tuesday to Friday shows the great hopes that are being pinned on Beijing being able to broker an end to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Some in the West have gone to great lengths to smear China as an "enabler" of Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine, implying that only those joining the West's sanctions on Russia are on the right side. But as China has repeatedly said it is friend of both Russia and Ukraine and it holds a neutral stance.

China and Ukraine established their comprehensive strategic partnership as early as 2011, and Ukraine was one of the first batch of countries to join the Belt and Road Initiative.

China has been Ukraine's largest trading partner for years and the largest market

of Ukraine's agricultural produce, and there exists great potential and space to expand bilateral cooperation. As Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said when meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, on Wednesday, it is "friendship" and "cooperation" that characterize China-Ukraine relations.

Kuleba is the first high-ranking Ukrainian official to visit China since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in February 2022, and deepening the two countries' cooperation is also on the agenda for his trip.

That Beijing has stable and healthy ties with Russia and Ukraine should be regarded as a positive asset for finding a political settlement to the conflict between the two sides. Only those that want to prolong the crisis or take advantage of it to meet their own narrow ends will try to splash dirty water on China's pro-peace efforts.

As Kuleba said, the Ukrainian side highly appreciates China's positive and

constructive role in promoting peace and maintaining international order.

That the Ukrainian foreign minister said in Guangzhou that Ukraine is willing and ready to engage in dialogue and negotiation with Russia — as long as the negotiations are rational and meaningful, and aimed at achieving a just and lasting peace — should be taken as a positive sign for the rest of his visit to China, during which Kyiv and Beijing can explore ways to remove the obstacles that have been hindering the peace process.

China believes that the resolution of all disputes must always be achieved through political means. Recently, both Ukraine and Russia have signaled to varying degrees their willingness to negotiate. Although the conditions and timing may not yet be ripe, Beijing will support all efforts that contribute to peace and is willing to continue to play a constructive role in promoting a cease-fire and meaningful peace talks.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Donald Ramotar

China a key peaceful player in Global South

Since the global financial crisis in 2007/2008 when its economic strength became obvious due to the role it played in helping other countries to deal with the negative impact of that crisis, China has become the target of Western propaganda.

It is a public opinion offensive that seeks to depict China and the US (more generally the global West) as being in confrontation with each other. To give credence to that proposition, they interpret China's relations with the rest of the world as a devious plot to end the United States' dominant position in global affairs and eventually rule the world.

In order to scare developing countries, the strategists of the US are using the historical experiences of the former colonies. After the colonial system collapsed, the imperialist countries (US, Canada and the former colonial powers) established a neo-colonial policy which allowed them to keep control of the developing countries' economies. One of the ways they did this was by establishing institutions to trap the developing world in debt.

Capitalizing on the negative experiences that developing countries have had with the IMF and World Bank, the US strategists falsely describe China's relations with the Global South as being akin to imperialism's actual exploitative strategy.

The reality is that the People's Republic of China does not aspire to dominate the world or control other countries. It has no interest in replacing the West with imperialist intent.

Philosophically, China has been opposed to imperialism and hegemonism since the victorious Chinese revolution of 1949. It is that philosophical underpinning that enabled the Chinese leadership to propose the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which continue to be the foundation of the foreign policy of China. This opposition to imperialism and hegemonism is a constant thread running through China's foreign policy since the Five Principles were expounded 70 years ago by then Chinese premier Comrade Zhou Enlai.

China's priority is to struggle for development, and it seeks a peaceful environment in which to do so. It has made great efforts to promote an end to the conflict in Ukraine and to stop Israel's onslaught against the Palestinian people.

It has tried to help ease tensions in the Middle East. Its approach was on display recently when it became known that it had played a key role in getting Iran and Saudi Arabia to restore diplomatic relations, as well as a meeting from July 21 to 23 in Beijing where the Palestinian factions signed a declaration emphasizing unity and the cessation of internal division.

Over the years, China's leaders have been able to build on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. President Xi Jinping has continued this legacy by proposing three global initiatives aimed at addressing the development, security and trust deficits that have become prominent in today's world.

These initiatives have the potential to greatly advance the building of a community with a shared future that he has proposed as a way to reduce and address common risks and challenges.

The Belt and Road Initiative has also been transforming the world since President Xi proposed its two components in 2013. For the first time, developing countries, in partnership with China, are beginning to build infrastructure that will facilitate real economic development and growth. These include such vital facilities as seaports, railways, airports, roads, cutting edge information technologies, and vital social infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, stadiums, etc. China has also made available thousands of scholarships to students of the Global South, making a great contribution to developing the human capital of poor countries.



These efforts are indispensable for countries to realize social and economic progress. The projects generate hope and optimism that the problems of abject poverty and laggardly development can be overcome.

China recognizes that there is a dialectical link between peace and socio-economic development, which constantly interact and reinforce each other. It understands that its own development is dependent on the prosperity of other countries. Thus China is helping to enhance trade and economic progress. This is the win-win and mutually beneficial relations that China often refers to.

As early as the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping, the architect of modern China, stated that developed countries must recognize that their economic advancement is unattainable without the growth of Third World economies.

What is important to note here is that China

does not seek to develop at the expense of the Global South but in cooperation with it. It does not want to dominate any country, instead it constantly seeks to build partnerships to the benefit of all concerned.

This approach to international relations is changing the world and bringing peoples of various cultures closer to each other.

The win-win approach is really creating a world of shared values with equality and friendship at the core of that policy. For that we have to recognize the enlightened and progressive leadership of China in today's world.

The author is former president of Guyana. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

Li Daokui

Broad govt spending needed to boost long-term growth

The third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, held from July 15 to July 18, has garnered significant interest in China's economic development. The resolution on further deepening reform, adopted at the plenum, has proposed expanding the scope of fund utilization from the sale of local government special-purpose bonds. This includes allowing a larger portion of these funds to be used as capital across various sectors and on a broader scale.

From a macroeconomic point of view, the Chinese economy has been operating below its potential GDP growth rate for more than two years, because of overall sluggish and declining prices, low investor confidence and underemployment.

The Chinese economy has been in the grip of a "minor cold" for the past more than two years. Given China's current economic scale, curing the economy's "minor cold" is not a big problem. However, if the "minor cold" is not promptly treated, it could evolve into a more severe "heart and lung disease", impairing future economic performance. In economics, unresolved short-term issues could impact long-term GDP growth.

Therefore, China should take measures to eliminate potential risks, and prevent short-term, cyclical factors from becoming long-term trends due to delayed policy responses. Also, government departments must adopt a more proactive approach to prevent and eliminate systemic risks, and establish a systemic risk emergency management team.

The core issue is the reduction in government spending, which incidentally caused the "minor cold". Over the past four years, government spending, an essential lever for macroeconomic regulation, has decreased by 3.8 percent to

just over 26 percent. This change has significantly impacted the market economy. Reduced government spending decreased total market demand and could further suppress economic activity, affecting key economic areas such as business investment and consumer spending, leading to poor growth momentum and even contraction.

We believe that current government spending should not be reduced; instead, broad government spending should be increased.

In the short term, it is necessary to first reassess the nature of government bonds. Judging by the experiences of other economies, the issuance of government bonds in China has been insufficient. Therefore, the government should issue more bonds and use the funds to pay off local debts, thereby revitalizing local governments' economic activity. This reform should be implemented immediately, as it would significantly boost total demand in the short term.

In the second half of the year, timely short-term policies must be implemented. For instance, during the National Day Golden Week holiday, the central government could consider using several million yuan or an even larger amount to directly distribute consumption vouchers among the people, incentivizing and subsidizing consumer spending. The immediate effect of such a move would be the quick activation of the consumer market, which will in turn vitalize the Chinese economy.

Preliminary estimates show such a move would not deplete existing central financial reserves. In fact, it could leverage the multiplier effect of the consumption vouchers which, based on local government experiments, could generate about four times the additional consumption for every yuan distributed. With the increase in consumption turnover tax, the central

fund would ultimately return to the government as tax revenue, boosting consumer confidence and market vitality at nearly zero cost.

In the long run, the government should shift from the project-oriented approach to a service-oriented approach, for which the government has to focus more on public welfare, and prioritize improving people's income and consumption levels.

By optimizing public services, strengthening social security and developing sectors directly related to people's lives such as education and healthcare, the government can effectively improve people's quality of life and consumption capacity, thereby stimulating market-driven growth and forming a virtuous cycle of consumption-led economic growth, and helping increase people's disposable income.

Government bonds are not just financial instruments used to cover fiscal deficits; they are important tools for increasing national wealth and symbolize government capacity. As a matter of fact, government bonds are foundational financial assets and the base of the capital market pyramid, which ensure essential services are provided, leading to the healthy development of capital markets. Government bonds should be recognized for their irreplaceable role and issued even when the economy is healthy.

Government bonds are also crucial for promoting the internationalization of the renminbi. For international investors, holding Chinese government bonds is the safest and simplest form of investment in China, with 12 percent of Chinese government bonds currently held by foreign investors.

Analyzing the nature of government bonds prompts us to advocate for frequent issuance of government bonds as a key tool for economic development. Consumer spending is unlikely to

recover quickly in the short term due to the "scar effect". Also, it is difficult to revitalize the real estate market and boost private enterprises' confidence in the short term. Therefore, the government should use government bonds to steer the economy back on a normal trajectory.

However, China's government bond market is still a work in progress, as it lacks variety and the financial market has limited depth and breadth. The US government bond market is known for its large scale and liquidity, and offering annualized interest rates in the 4-5 percent range on long-term bonds (20 years, 30 years or even longer). China's bond market, though rapidly developing, is still in its early stages of development, especially for long-term bonds, with the recent first issuance of 20-year bonds indicating gradual development.

Government bonds are not only safe, carry low risks, but also the cornerstone of financial markets. Their liquidity, safety and degree of internationalization are crucial for attracting foreign investors. Improving the government bond market, particularly the long-term bond market, will enhance the financial market's depth and breadth, providing stable, long-term funding sources for the economy.

After an in-depth analysis, we are confident of China's economic prospects. Economic development requires innovative and effective policies, collective efforts and sustained investments from all sectors to ensure long-term stable economic prosperity. We believe that comprehensive reforms will enable the Chinese economy to overcome the challenges.

The author is director of the Academic Center for Chinese Economic Practice and Thinking at Tsinghua University. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Aksornsri Phanisharn

ASEAN+3 can unleash true potential for regional good

Under ASEAN+3 cooperation, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations has been collaborating with the three major Asian economies — China, Japan and the Republic of Korea — since 1997. The ASEAN+3 partnership has huge potential to facilitate the further growth of the East Asian region.

Recent developments, especially the high-level China-Japan-ROK trilateral summit in May, point toward increasingly close cooperation between ASEAN and China, Japan and the ROK. The trilateral summit in Seoul reflected the willingness of the three major partners of ASEAN to deepen their ongoing cooperation and trade relations with the Southeast Asian bloc, with the leaders from China, Japan and the ROK expressing mutual support in priority areas such as trade, disaster relief and cultural exchanges.

Although the Seoul summit focused on broad issues, achieving limited success in addressing specific challenges, for ASEAN, it unveiled the potential for progress while raising hopes of addressing future challenges.

Beijing, Tokyo and Seoul are major trading partners of ASEAN and members of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which marked another significant step toward economic integration in the region.

The three economies have made massive investments in the region and view ASEAN as a key area for expanding their production networks, which can improve the connectivity among the regional trade and supply chains. With its geographical proximity, abundant resources expanding markets and vibrant economies, ASEAN has become an important trade and economic partner of the three countries. On the other hand, strengthening cooperation with ASEAN is essential for the three countries to achieve their economic and strategic goals within and beyond the region.

Thus, it seems to be a good sign that ASEAN and China, Japan and the ROK are trying to find new grounds for deepening collaboration to address challenges such as aging populations, climate change, health security, economic recovery and growth in the post-COVID-19 pandemic world.

To unleash the full potential of ASEAN+3 cooperation, emphasis should be placed on economic integration, modern infrastructure development and facilitation of trade through streamlined regulations. To be more specific, ASEAN+3 collaboration to maintain financial stability should be strengthened as stronger financial cooperation through initiatives such as the multilateralization of the Chiang Mai Initiative can create safety nets during economic crises.

The ASEAN+3 partnership also extends to non-economic areas, including people-to-people exchanges, especially student exchanges, disaster-risk reduction and strengthening regional security. These efforts are aimed at improving mutual understanding and fostering a more stable and peaceful East Asia. More importantly, increasing awareness about regional common challenges such as climate change, food security, energy security, and environmental protection requires joint platforms for problem-solving and efficient cooperation in the region.

However, translating a grand vision and broad agreements into concrete actions remains challenging due to the need for strong political will, efficient governance mechanisms and effective monitoring to ensure commitments are fulfilled. In addition, limited public awareness and misunderstanding of ASEAN+3 cooperation may affect social support and discourage active participation from local citizens.

Despite the promising trends of ASEAN+3 cooperation, there remain obstacles and challenges that must be overcome to realize the full potential of the ASEAN+3 partnership. The challenges include tensions over maritime claims of some ASEAN+3 countries in the South China Sea and political disagreements. These issues create differences and disputes and hinder cooperation, making policy decisions challenging. Therefore, addressing these sensitive issues through diplomacy based on mutual respect and resolving the disputes are crucial for maintaining peace.

Furthermore, economic disparities between some ASEAN member states and the more advanced economies of China, Japan and the ROK need to be addressed as it could lead to unequal benefits and capacity gaps. Efforts to achieve inclusive development within the ASEAN+3 framework aim to address development gaps within the group, focusing on enhancing different countries' capabilities through targeted investments, technology transfer and institutional strengthening with clearer operational frameworks and improved communication channels.

Additionally, external influences and geopolitical issues have impacted the dynamics of ASEAN+3, making it difficult to pursue common interests in the region. Hence, it is necessary to strengthen regional economic and security cooperation through multilateral mechanisms and offset external influences in a way that prioritizes the needs and interests of the region.

In summary, the positive signs of closer ASEAN+3 cooperation indicate a promising future for the region, although intensified efforts are needed to promote inclusive development, build stronger institutional frameworks, streamline bureaucratic processes and foster effective communication channels, in order to overcome initial obstacles. By addressing these challenges and fostering a spirit of cooperation, ASEAN+3 can unleash its true potential, build a more thriving and integrated East Asia, and become a key player in the global economic and political arena.

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These efforts are aimed at improving mutual understanding and fostering a more stable and peaceful East Asia.

GLOBAL VIEWS



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

XU XIUJUN

For just and equitable global governance

BRICS should fully leverage the resources and markets of its member countries, laying a new foundation for stable and long-term development of greater cooperation

The world is seeing a worsening global governance deficit as some developed countries prioritize their own interests and run away from their due international responsibilities. In contrast, emerging markets and developing countries have



shown increasing willingness and capabilities to shoulder international obligations, more actively making their voices heard on major international and regional issues.

Riding on this trend, the BRICS group initiated a new round of expansion to enhance the global influence of these countries. Starting Jan 1, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were admitted as official members of the BRICS grouping, marking the beginning of a new era of greater BRICS cooperation.

Built on the economic foundation of emerging markets and developing countries, the BRICS mechanism has a mission to raise their voice on the world stage.

The BRICS mechanism will be committed to deepening South-South cooperation and advancing global governance. Serving as the hub for South-South cooperation, the expanded mechanism will aim for high-quality development of the Global South, broader cooperation and improved governance.

BRICS members come from different continents including Asia, Europe, the Americas and Africa. Naturally, they vary in resource endowments, political systems, economic and social development levels and models, religions, cultures, as well as historical traditions.

Currently, each member has set its own unique growth strategies and policy priorities based on their national conditions. When it comes to major economic and strategic issues, some members hold different views and lack political trust in each other. After the expansion of BRICS, these differences and divergences will continue to exist, if not widen, leading some to believe that there is no effective adhesive to bring the group together and that cooperation among members will face greater challenges.

All of the BRICS members are emerging markets and developing countries with ambitious goals to enhance regional and international influence through economic growth and social progress. In certain fields, competition may arise as they vie for resources and markets that are crucial for economic growth. As economic strength and interactions grow, the BRICS countries may see sharper differences and potentially more intense competition.

Some argue that the BRICS mechanism is a platform for emerging powers to compete for global influence, with inevitable economic and political competition among its members. The expanded BRICS will also need to consider how new and old members should take up their share in the group's voice.

Some developed countries such as the United States have adopted policies to divide the BRICS. For instance, some countries support India, Brazil and South Africa in leading Global South affairs while attempting to exclude China and Russia from the community. They label the other BRICS members as subordinate, so as to create divisions and opposition within the group.

Moreover, as more and more countries seek to join the BRICS group, establishing admission criteria should be urgently addressed.

The expansion of BRICS from five to 10 members is a significant milestone in the group's history. To ensure stable and long-term development, it is important to step up the efforts to explore the potential of greater cooperation, shape the driving force for BRICS countries, and highlight the positive role the expanded BRICS cooperation plays in advancing and leading global development and South-South cooperation.

Greater BRICS cooperation should build on past experiences to enhance collaboration in key and emerging fields. Cooperation in eight focus areas — trade and investment, manufacturing and mineral processing, energy, agricultural cooperation, science and innovation, finance, connectivity, and information and communication technology — lays a solid foundation for collaboration among BRICS members.

In addition, the BRICS countries share similar positions in areas such as implementing the

United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, addressing climate change, promoting green development, and developing the digital economy, which promise vast potential for policy dialogue and pragmatic cooperation. Greater BRICS cooperation should focus on both existing key sectors and promising emerging areas to achieve tangible results.

Furthermore, greater BRICS cooperation should stay open to enhance the group's transparency and admit new members when appropriate. The "BRICS+" model should be further developed and consolidated, attracting economically vibrant and promising countries to join the mechanism, generating synergy on a broader scale, and injecting new vitality into the group.

In the long run, only by scaling up can the BRICS countries make their voice better heard in the international community and provide more options for cooperation.

In October, the 16th BRICS Summit will be held in Kazan, Russia. Themed "Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security", this will be the first summit after the mechanism's expansion.

As the rotating chair, Russia will work with other members to build BRICS into a new type of multilateral cooperation mechanism that is made up by emerging markets and developing countries, open to the world, and inclusive of all — something which will play a key role in advancing more just and equitable global governance.

BRICS should fully leverage the resources and markets of its member countries to deepen pragmatic cooperation in finance and trade, energy and food, science and technology innovation. It is also imperative to further strengthen dialogue and mutual learning, expand cultural exchanges, and lay a new foundation for stable and long-term development of the group's cooperation.

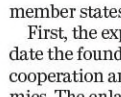
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WANG YOUXIN

Stepping up

Enlarged BRICS mechanism has created more space for cooperation beyond the trade in natural resources

As a prime example of cooperation among emerging economies, the BRICS group has consistently acted on the spirit of openness, inclusiveness, and win-win cooperation, playing a positive role in global industry chain cooperation. The expansion of the BRICS with the five new members of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab States, Iran and Ethiopia will have a profound influence on industry cooperation among the



member states. First, the expansion will consolidate the foundation for industry cooperation among emerging economies. The enlarged BRICS mechanism will cover a larger population and more resources, creating a wider market and more space for industry cooperation.

Currently, most emerging economies are on the periphery of the global division of labor system, and are engaged in the manufacturing and processing of products with low technology or low added value. Thus, many emerging economies have fallen into the "middle-income trap" after reaching a certain level of development.

After expansion of the BRICS, the share of its population in the global total has risen from 40.7 percent to 44.9 percent, the share of economic output has risen from 24.7 percent to 27.1 percent, and the proportion of exports of goods has risen from 20.2 percent to 24.8 percent, which allows the expanded BRICS countries to mobilize more resources and create a bigger platform for countries to cooperate. The expansion will also further the economic integration within the group, and help build a more competitive and fair division of labor system among them, with the complementarity of resource endowment among member states enhanced.

The new members of BRICS are rich in energy, mineral and agricultural resources. Saudi Arabia is one of the world's largest oil producers; Egypt has abundant mineral and natural resources, and an advanced planting industry; the UAE is one of the leading liquefied natural gas exporters in the world; Iran is also a major oil producer, while Ethiopia is an agricultural powerhouse. They will provide more raw materials for industry cooperation among the BRICS countries and help optimize the allocation of global resources, promoting the sharing of resources among the members.

The new BRICS countries also have their respective advantages in different technological fields, which is conducive to deepening innovation cooperation.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have advanced petrochemical and aerospace industries. Egypt has made progress in transforming its tradi-

tional industries, such as textile and steel. Iran's R&D capacity in the nuclear energy and petrochemical sectors is remarkable. Ethiopia is a major manufacturing powerhouse in Africa, and is developing industries such as communications and IT. These tech advantages and resources will give the BRICS countries more space for deepening their tech cooperation and boost their technological capacity.

There are three areas in particular in which the expanded BRICS grouping can strengthen their cooperation. First, the BRICS countries include both major energy exporters and importers. The energy importers can participate in the exploitation and operation of mines and oil fields in energy exporting countries through acquisitions and mergers, or form joint ventures with enterprises in exporting countries by providing capital and technologies to take part in the development and use of new energy. They can also help host countries to build ports, roads, railways and grids to improve the transportation and trade efficiency.

Second, the BRICS countries are at the different development stages, creating conditions for them to transfer industries and expand markets within the group. Member states can integrate their resources, markets and technologies into a unified global division of labor system by jointly establishing industrial parks, thus promoting the development and upgrading of traditional industries.

Third, the BRICS countries can cooperate to produce high-tech innovations. The world is on the eve of a new technological revolution, characterized by the rapid development of technologies such as artificial intelligence, 5G, new energy and aerospace, which provides a precious opportunity for the developing countries to overtake the developed countries.

The BRICS countries can jointly build research centers and technology parks to pool resources and promote tech transfer and incubation, which will reduce the costs of R&D and boost its efficiency and promote the integrated development of emerging industries in the grouping.

There are four main strategies and methods for the BRICS countries to promote industry cooperation through financing.

First, they can create a sound monetary and financial environment for industry cooperation through currency cooperation. The BRICS countries should establish currency swap schemes to reduce the impacts of exchange rate fluctuations and boost trade and investment facilitation. It is important to expand the foreign exchange reserves of the BRICS countries and attract funding from the new members to boost the group's capacity to weather international financial crises and liquidity crunches. The BRICS countries should jointly build local currency bond markets, encourage governments, financial

institutions and multinationals to issue local currency bonds, and enhance support for infrastructure building and corporate financing. In this way, there will be more reliable investment options within the group and the problem of currency mismatch will be eased.

Second, they should enhance financial support for key industries and projects. The original BRICS members — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — can draw new members such as Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia into the New Development Bank to enlarge the bank's capital base and boost its capacity to mobilize resources and raise funds. The enlarged grouping should expand investment and financing using local currencies to reduce the costs of financing and the risks involved in foreign exchange fluctuations. The group should integrate the resources of commercial banks in member states, and support flagship projects through joint loans and syndicated loans. It needs to work out differentiated financing strategies to support different industries and cater to the need for capital of outstanding enterprises and projects.

Third, the BRICS countries can enhance support for high-tech and frontier industries. The members of the grouping should enhance their financing support for digital economy industrial parks, incubation bases, and tech transfer centers to facilitate cooperation among member states in tech innovation and transfer. Governments of member countries, multinationals and industrial leading enterprises can jointly establish emerging industries incubation funds, seed funds and venture capital funds, particularly taking advantage of the influence of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in the financial market of the Middle East and draw their sovereign wealth funds to invest in promising start-ups to promote tech breakthroughs.

Fourth, the enlarged group should deepen their cooperation in payment and settlement system. The BRICS countries should explore building a unified local currency payment and settlement system and promote connectivity between different payment systems. The group needs to enhance digital currency and mobile payment cooperation among the member states, and encourage more central banks and financial institutions of emerging economies to participate in the mBridge project, which explores multilateral cooperation regarding international payments using central bank digital currencies, and use distributed ledger technologies to facilitate cross-border payments.

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BUSINESS

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State-owned companies high on reform agenda

By ZHONG NAN
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Fueled by China's tailor-made market-oriented reforms and industrial upgrades, both the profit and export value of the country's State-owned enterprises are expected to grow stably in the second half, analysts said on Wednesday.

They said China's new round of reforms will enhance the core competitiveness of SOEs. The reforms will advance key initiatives in areas such as strengthening technological innovation, building a modern industrial system, playing a role in ensuring national security, and deepening institutional and mechanism reforms.

The third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, which concluded last week, placed great emphasis on refining the layout of the State-owned sector and adjusting its structure.

China will improve the growth strength of major industries and key fields seen as vital to national security and serving as the lifeblood of the national economy, including public services and strategic emerging industries, said the resolution adopted by the meeting.

As SOE reforms deepen, the previous evaluation system is becoming inadequate for fostering high-quality development. The government has introduced a "one policy for one enterprise" assessment approach to address this issue, said Zhou Lisha, a researcher at the Institute for State-owned Enterprises at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

This tailored evaluation considers the unique functional positioning and industry characteristics of each SOE. It includes specific indicators that measure value creation capabilities, encompassing aspects like financial performance, market competitiveness, innovation capacity and social responsibility, said Zhou.

In response to increasing protectionism and global economic uncertainties, China has been allocating more resources to develop strategic emerging industries, with the goal of strengthening self-reliance in high-end technologies and fortifying the backbone of the national economy, said Xiao Shuguang, a professor specializing in SOE reform at the Guangdong Univer-

sity of Finance and Economics. Strategic emerging industries in China include energy-saving and environmental protection, next-generation information technology, biotechnology, high-end equipment manufacturing, new energy, advanced materials and electric vehicles.

For instance, telecom operator China United Network Communications Ltd announced last week in Shanghai that it will build the next-generation internet — namely an intelligent computing network — to support the development of artificial intelligence in the country.

Centrally administered SOEs saw their profits grow by 1.9 percent year-on-year to 1.4 trillion yuan (\$192.44 billion) in the first half, said the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council.

The export value of China's central and locally administered SOEs rose 1.9 percent to 931.28 billion yuan during the January-June period, said the General Administration of Customs.

With SOEs bolstering their presence in emerging industries and hastening the upgrade of traditional advantageous industries, companies like Hubei province-based Dongfeng Motor Corp exported 112,000 vehicles between January and June, up 9.1 percent year-on-year.

Meanwhile, the value of Beijing-based China State Construction Engineering Corp's newly signed contracts reached 2.48 trillion yuan, surging 10 percent on a yearly basis, according to its financial report.

Speaking at a seminar for executives of central SOEs held in Beijing from Monday to Tuesday, Zhang Yuzhuo, chairman of SASAC, called for efforts to improve the mechanism regulating the reasonable flow of State capital, promote the revitalization of existing assets and the disposal of inefficient assets, and free up more resources for core technological breakthroughs in key fields and forward-looking strategic industries.

"It is necessary to build a professional platform for State capital to invest, restructure and circulate," said Zhang, adding that the government will take measures to increase the ratio of revenue generated from strategic emerging industries by State capital and central SOEs.



An employee works on the production line of a State-owned textile company in Pingdingshan, Henan province. LI JIANAN / XINHUA

Briefly

China home to 3.92m 5G base stations

The number of 5G base stations in China had risen to nearly 3.92 million by the end of June, said the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. The figure represents a net increase of 540,000 5G base stations over the end of last year, and accounts for 33 percent of the total number of mobile base stations nationwide.

Leading firms backed in borrowing debt

China is set to support prominent, creditworthy companies that pro-

vide high-quality development within the real economy by allowing them to borrow medium to long-term foreign debt. The National Development and Reform Commission announced this initiative as part of the country's strategy to further open up and enhance cross-border financing facilitation. According to a circular released by the NDRC, companies must meet several criteria to qualify, including compliance with national policies. Their business operations must align with national macroeconomic regulation and industrial policies.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY



Robots operate on an auto production line in Liuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. JIN HAOYUAN / XINHUA

Expert: Pursuit of new tech should be sensible

Economist stresses focus on local strengths in race for development

By LIU ZHIHUA and FAN FEIFEI

While fostering new quality productive forces, China's different regions should try to leverage their own endowments and comparative advantages rather than rushing to invent new technologies in frontier areas, without factoring in their local conditions, a senior economist told China Daily in an exclusive interview.

Justin Yifu Lin, dean of Peking University's Institute of New Structural Economics, said applying new technologies in traditional sectors should be treated as part of the drive to harness new quality productive forces.

Regions with development gaps should measure their progress compared to their own past rather than shifting their focus to pursuit of success in frontier activities, which could result in haphazard or uneven development.

There are two different types of new quality productive forces: one that invents new technologies and one that applies them, said Lin.

"Regions with gaps in development should use new technologies to improve productivity. It's essential to follow the principle of seeking truth from facts and develop according to competitive advantages."

His comments came after the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China adopted a resolution on further deepening reform comprehensively to advance Chinese modernization.

The resolution, unveiled on Sun-



Justin Yifu Lin

day, detailed a set of meticulously crafted reform plans, and called for improving existing institutions and mechanisms to foster new quality productive forces in line with local conditions.

Lin said different regions have different competitive advantages, and they need to be realistic about their respective development stage, to better foster new quality productive forces.

"As long as you use new technologies to improve your productivity, it's also a new type of productive force for you. You need to compare yourself with your past performance instead of comparing yourself with (others') frontier activities."

Lin said that the plenum demonstrated important commitment of the Chinese leadership to "using reform and opening-up as a way to overcome the challenges and capture opportunities", thereby promoting high-quality development to boost Chinese modernization.

China must better leverage the role of the market and tap the opportunity of technological innovation to enhance productivity, especially as it stands at the same starting line with other countries for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, an opportunity China "cannot afford to miss", he said.

He highlighted that China has several advantages to tap the poten-

tial of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and foster new quality productive forces, the most comprehensive manufacturing ecosystem and a positive role played by the government.

On promoting the deep integration between the real economy and the digital economy, he said China's strengths include having one of the best digital infrastructure in the world and a large economy generating vast amounts of data in production and consumption.

However, he stressed the need to improve the definition of the property rights of data to further utilize data as a new production factor.

Lin further said China needs to reform its financial system to better mobilize financial resources for supporting innovations, while implementing fiscal reforms to better balance spending responsibilities between local and central governments. Encouraging the development of venture capital and patient capital will be important improvements, he said.

Li Dongsheng, founder and chairman of Chinese consumer electronics maker TCL Technology Group Corp, said, "China's new growth drivers come from industrial transformation and upgrading, and technological innovation."

The country can accelerate the formation of sound systems and mechanisms for fostering new quality productive forces by giving play to the leading role of enterprises in sci-tech innovation and stimulating their innovation vitality, he said.

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Offshore oil, gas output set to rise

By ZHENG XIN
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The production of offshore oil and gas in China is expected to increase this year, as the country's top offshore oil and gas driller China National Offshore Oil Corp has discovered a high-yield well in the Beibu Gulf that produces over 1,000 cubic meters of oil equivalent daily, industry experts said.

CNOOC Ltd said on Tuesday that the Wushi 16-5 structure, located in Wushi Sag, Beibu Gulf at an average water depth of 25 meters, was tested to produce over 1,000 cubic meters of oil equivalent per day, the first well of such productivity in Wushi Sag.

The discovery is expected to become a medium-sized oilfield. By far, the total proved oil in-place of Wushi oilfields has exceeded 100 million cubic meters, it said.

The appraisal well WS16-5-4 was drilled and completed at a depth of 4,185 meters, encountering a total of 65 meters oil pay zones, it said in a statement.

China's offshore oil and gas production is expected to rise further this year, said Li Ziyue, an analyst with BloombergNEF.

Investment in offshore oil and gas exploration is expected to increase further, with more than half of this year's domestic oil increment likely to come from offshore sources, she said, adding that the country's ongoing investment and focus on upstream production will be crucial for ensuring its energy security.

The nation increased investment in offshore oil production last year, with major development projects and offshore oil and gas production hitting records, said Wang Zhen, head of the CNOOC Energy Economics Institute.

The government has been stepping up efforts to ensure sufficient energy supply in the country. It set up the Innovation Consortium for Deep and Ultra-deep Oil and Gas Exploration and Development in July to gather insights and build strength to jointly boost new quality productive forces and contribute to the country's energy security.

All these efforts are expected to lead to an upward trajectory in the overall supply of petroleum in the near future, said Chen Lin, a senior analyst who covers upstream research at global consultancy Rystad Energy.

While the development of onshore conventional oil and gas in China has faced multiple challenges such as insufficient resource replacement and rapid production decline, replacement resources in new areas are crucial for ensuring future oil and gas supply, said Chen.

Stock indexes seek to attract long-term capital

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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The indexes recently introduced at the Shanghai Stock Exchange mark another step forward for China in indexing investment, and address the central regulator's call to nurture long-term investment, said experts and market mavens.

On Tuesday, the SSE launched the China Ocean Economy Stock Price Index, the first of its kind in the country, aiming to make it a timely reflector of the development of China's ocean economy from the capital market's perspective and direct more financial resources to ocean-related sectors.

The new index covers 213 ocean-related companies listed on the stock exchanges in Shanghai, Shenzhen, Beijing and Hong Kong. With the base date set at Dec 31, 2012, the annualized return of the index is estimated at around 7.5 percent as of Monday, according to the SSE.

On July 15, the SSE and China Securities Index Co Ltd announced they will launch the SSE Composite Total Return Index on Monday. All the stocks and Chinese Depository

Receipts issued by red-chip companies listed on the SSE will be constituents of the new index.

It should be noted that companies' dividend payments have been included in the composition of the SSE Composite Total Return Index to give a broader picture of the companies' actual operation, said SSE officials.

According to the SSE, indexing investment has been embracing "strategic opportunities" thanks to supportive policies and investors' rising interest.

The nine-part guideline aiming to promote high-quality development of the Chinese capital market, which was rolled out by the State Council, China's Cabinet, in April, said that indexing investment should be promoted as part of the efforts to attract more long-term capital to the market and expand the group of long-term investors.

The size of SSE and CSI index fund products has reached a record high of 2.4 trillion yuan (\$329 billion) by the end of May. While there were only 10 index fund products in 2005, the number had surged to over 2,000 by the end of 2023. Up to 570 billion yuan flowed into index fund products last

year, according to SSE data.

The upward momentum continued this year. As of the end of May, the total size of Chinese onshore index fund products reached 3.4 trillion yuan, up more than 17 percent from the level at the end of 2023. Over 360 billion yuan has flown into these index fund products over the first five months of this year.

The returns of index-based products have been eye-catching over the past few years when market volatility was more drastic globally due to various complexities and uncertainties.

In 2023, the excess returns of the CSI Passive Equity Fund Index reached 3.7 percent. But active funds, which choose specific stocks, reported an average loss of 11.83 percent last year, according to market tracker Wind Info.

The size of passive funds, which track indexes, continues to expand in China. While passive funds held about 1.99 trillion yuan worth of A shares by the end of March, the figure topped 2 trillion yuan in the second quarter, according to Industrial Securities.

Wu Xinkun, chief strategist of Haitong Securities, explained that passive funds accounted for more

than one-third of all the stock-focused mutual fund products in China by the end of 2023, hitting a record high. This is a clear signal that China's equity funds are undergoing the transition toward passive management, he said.

A reference point is the market trend in the United States where passive funds accounted for only 20 percent of all the US mutual funds in 2012, but the figure rose to 50 percent at the end of 2022, said Wu.

Capital started to flow out of active funds into passive funds in 2008 when the US stock market plunged as the latter offered better returns and lower fees. Meanwhile, most US active funds showed neither advantages in creating excess returns over the past decade nor better defensive functions during the previous rounds of market slump. Investors' preference for them has thus declined, he said.

Amid the improving effectiveness of the Chinese market and the continued inflow of more long-term capital, including social security capital and insurance capital, indexing investment will be more widely accepted by Chinese investors, said market experts.

BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

Power firms go beyond call of duty

Stable electricity, additional services help farmers face weather vagaries

By LIU ZIZHENG
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With summer on, many parts of China have been experiencing extremely high temperatures and even drought in recent months, hindering normal agricultural production and posing severe challenges to farmers.

To safeguard food security, the power supplier in Laiwu district of Jinan, East China's Shandong province, has ensured stable power supply for farm irrigation.

State Grid's Laiwu Power Supply Co said it has assembled 18 special teams and dispatched them to inspect electrical irrigation facilities across the district. Electrical load and temperature readings are taken twice daily to compile and analyze data so as to enhance operational efficiency.

Volunteers from the power supplier also regularly visit local farmlands to resolve sudden electrical hazards and guide the farmers to utilize electricity more safely.

The company said currently all the local power supply stations have staff members working in shifts to provide round-the-clock services, so as to respond promptly to farmers' requests.

"The traditional methods of irrigation are very tiring. Now we all utilize electrical irrigation facilities, which have made the job much simpler and greatly reduced our burden," said Gao Hongbo, a local villager.

"No matter what problem we encounter, we just call the power supplier and they will send someone over right away, even late at night," said Gao.

The company said it has opened "green channels" for irrigation system expansion projects, so as to accelerate the construction speed. The project operators can now obtain utility poles and transmission lines more conveniently.

Online communication channels such as WeChat groups have also

been set up involving power supply stations and project operators to increase work efficiency.

According to the company, 14 new transformers and 9 kilometers of new 10-kilovolt transmission lines have been constructed so far across the district, giving sound support to farm irrigation.

The local government said agriculture is a major industry in Laiwu and the company's recent moves are expected to help secure a bumper harvest this year.

Similarly, to make sure the summer planting proceeds smoothly, Shangqiu in Central China's Henan province has advanced farm irrigation in all respects.

Workers from State Grid's Shangqiu Power Supply Co regularly carry out surveys across the city and identify potential hazards at key electrical facilities like well pumps.

Based on the needs of farmers, the workers concerned have installed a series of new utility poles, transformers and transmission lines, the company said.

"The weather is so hot, but the workers barely take a break even at noon. They solved a lot of severe problems that we had with irrigation, and we are so grateful to them," said a local villager.

Besides, the workers review their progress every day and update the inspection plan accordingly, so as to ensure a high work efficiency, the company said.

Hu Ludong, marketing director of the company, said Suiyang district alone in Shangqiu has already carried out 58 inspections on the electrical facilities, and the company will provide support for 1,500 more local households to utilize such facilities for irrigation.

Hu said 6.86 million yuan (\$942,873) has been invested so far across the city for 56 new transformers; and 1,575 electrical hazards related to well pumps have been successfully eliminated.

The company said further efforts



Top: A power staff member (right) offers electricity usage guidance to a farmer in Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region, in June. YUAN HONGYAN / FOR CHINA DAILY **Above:** Employees carry out maintenance work on transmission lines in Chuzhou, Anhui province, in May. SONG WEIXING / FOR CHINA DAILY

will be made to consolidate the existing achievements and ensure the stability of power supply. A long-term working mechanism will also be in place to better support farm irrigation.

Zhou Mi, a researcher at the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said as effects of climate change continue to intensify, agricultural irrigation is playing an increasingly vital role in boosting farmers' incomes and safeguarding their livelihoods.

Zhou said if the country wants to

ensure the proper operation of agricultural irrigation, as well as further increase its efficiency, efforts must be made to provide reliable power supplies and properly adjust them in accordance with the different growth stages of crops.

"Power supply companies in Laiwu district and Shangqiu have set a good example for us. Their moves have created favorable conditions for local farmers to grow crops and fight climate change," Zhou said.

He said the power suppliers could further contribute to agricultural

production by reducing electricity prices in the sector and lowering production costs.

Meanwhile, in Tianchang, a county-level city of Chuzhou in Anhui province, farmers are busy drying and storing grain, as well as transporting it all over the country.

However, the ongoing hot weather has seriously disrupted the normal operation of the grain dryers, exhaust fans and other agricultural equipment.

Against such a backdrop, State Grid's Chuzhou Power Supply Co said it has further improved electrical maintenance with efforts like regular visits to clients and teaching sessions on how to measure the temperature of the equipment.

As a result, local farmers can properly deal with overheating issues concerning agricultural equipment, and use electricity more safely, said the company.

Efforts have also been made to understand the needs of clients, provide them with consulting services 24/7, and explain the latest electricity pricing policies to them, the company said.

Manor Lake Group, a Chuzhou-based firm focusing on processing and selling agricultural products, is one of the company's main clients.

Manor Lake said currently its grain drying, inspection, storage

and security systems are all fully automated, and the major power source is gradually changing from diesel to electricity.

According to Manor Lake, the power supplier's recent moves not only help it achieve transformation smoothly and ensure safe production, but could also further advance agricultural modernization in Tianchang.

The company said it will continue to keep a close eye on the progress of grain drying in the city and cooperate with the local government to better serve local farmers.

As a major agricultural country, China has always attached great importance to safeguarding agricultural production amid extreme weather events.

Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University, said the electricity consumed by agriculture accounts for a relatively small part of the country's total, so it is usually not difficult to ensure ample power supplies for the sector amid extreme weather events.

However, Lin said the power suppliers still need to adjust and balance the supply to different regions more flexibly, especially when there is an unexpected event, so as to strengthen the resilience of the power grid and better contribute to China's agricultural production.

By LIU ZIZHENG and LI JIAYING

"Drone inspection complete, surrounding environment clear, ready for takeoff," said Sun Kai, a power line maintenance technician conducting repair work in the Gobi Desert in Yongning county, Yinchuan of the Ningxia Hui autonomous region.

Like taking an elevator up to reach an office, power line workers use flying equipment to rise from the ground to reach 25-meter-high lines in about three minutes. And within 40 minutes, they complete the live-wire repair job.

"This is the fastest I've completed a task in my years of maintenance work," said Sun.

"The 'flying man' equipment allows us to go directly to the work point without climbing scorching towers or winding through ladders, preserving our energy for handling the defects. Additionally, the dual protection of transmission and backup ropes ensures safety throughout the process."

The "flying man" equipment is a portable electric lift device developed for high-altitude work and rescue, using a motor to assist personnel in ascending, descending and hovering on suspended insulated ropes.

Drones can carry and deploy insulated traction ropes, using small ropes to pull larger ones over the wires to the ground, establishing ascent and descent channels and safety backup routes for high-altitude workers.

The integration of drones and electric lift devices in power line maintenance is set to become a

mainstream approach for live-line operations, said the workers of State Grid's Yinchuan Power Supply Co, who use the device.

"Compared to traditional tower climbing and insulated ladders, it reduces the number of high-altitude workers from two or three to one, saves about two hours per task, minimizes safety risks, reduces labor intensity, and significantly enhances operational efficiency and safety," said a company representative.

Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University, said China has promoted the intelligent transition of its power grid in an orderly manner over the past few years.

"As a wide range of high-end technologies and devices like the 'flying man' equipment continue to emerge across the country, the transition process is expected to be further advanced and accelerated," said Lin.

Meanwhile, about 34 kilometers away, a drone scans the radio frequency identification tags on electrical equipment, collects the required information and promptly transmits it to the power supplier in Xixia district of Yinchuan.

An RFID tag is an electronic tag that exchanges data with an RFID reader by using radio waves. It could help identify an item, track its location and record its movement.

State Grid's Xixia Power Supply Co started to utilize such drones and RFID tags to inspect the power grid at the end of 2022, which has not only improved its work efficiency, but also significantly

Drones, electric lift devices transform grid maintenance



A technician inspects power transmission cables by using "flying man" equipment in Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region, in June. YUAN HONGYAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

lowered labor costs.

The company said currently all the utility poles, transmission towers, transformers and main ring units in the district are equipped with RFID tags, which has made the management and deployment targeting them more efficient and accurate.

Besides, the company said it had equipped the drones with high-resolution cameras and RFID readers

and has constructed an online system to aggregate all the data concerning local electrical equipment.

During the inspection process, the drones could first understand the equipment's operation status by reading the RFID tag and then compare it with the historical data in the system, so as to effectively identify the hidden hazards, said the company.

Zhou Mi, a researcher at the Bei-

jing-based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said the development environment for China's power grid has changed significantly over recent years — renewable energies are gradually replacing traditional ones, and the rapid development of electric vehicles has generated new demand.

Zhou said the proper utilization of drones, artificial intelligence and other high-end technologies could help match supply and demand in the sector, and allows the power grid to achieve transformation more smoothly. Such moves will also inject fresh impetus into the country's economic growth and environmental protection.

Jiyuan, a county-level city in Central China's Henan province, has also actively utilized drones to inspect and improve the local power grid, as part of its efforts to ensure stable power supplies.

When a power grid fault occurs, drones will receive instructions from a flaw detector and promptly fly to the problem area.

Making use of advanced AI technologies, the drones are able to accurately identify the problem, capture images and assign tasks to the maintenance personnel accordingly.

In addition, the drones could help collect the images and coordinates of local utility poles, thereby further enriching databases and increasing the accuracy of the grid map.

Zhou Bocheng, a staff member of State Grid's Jiyuan Power Supply Co, said 88 percent of the city is covered by mountains and hills, and the transmission lines span

forests, valleys and rivers.

Zhou said such a complex geographical environment used to seriously hinder the inspection and maintenance of the power grid, because the workers had to travel to the problem areas.

"Thanks to the drones, now all the transmission lines can be inspected via computers, which has significantly improved our work efficiency and made the work process more transparent," said Zhou.

"Nowadays, in just 30 minutes, a drone could complete a task that used to take two people three hours."

According to the company, continuous efforts will be made to expand the application scenarios of drones and thereby better meet local electricity needs.

Their moves came after the National Energy Administration released guiding opinions on the high-quality development of the power grid in February, which stressed further efforts to empower the digital and intelligent transition of the power grid.

The guiding opinions said cutting-edge technologies such as network communication, big data and automation will be better leveraged, and scientific and technological innovation in the sector will be further promoted. Efforts will also be made to step up the upgrading and replacement of old and energy-intensive equipment.

With the transition completed, the country is expected to better integrate renewable energy sources into the power grid, and ensure its stable and energy-efficient operation.

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



Left: A wetland area in the Shandong Yellow River Delta National Nature Reserve in Dongying, Shandong province, in October. **Right:** Migratory birds fly over the reserve. PHOTOS BY XU SUHUI / XINHUA

Oriental storks find shelter in Shandong

By LI MENGHAN in Dongying, Shandong
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On a sweltering late afternoon in June, a tour bus navigated a private road flanked by verdant grass in the Shandong Yellow River Delta National Nature Reserve. Towering reeds stood erect in the wetlands, which reflected the blue sky and its billowing white clouds.

The bus passed a power line pole, on top of which a nest was perched. The nest was sheltering two black and white birds, one standing and the other squatting.

"These two birds are oriental storks that enjoy first-level State protection," said Hu Yuwei, a tour guide in the nature reserve. "You're lucky to be on this bus, because the breeding season for this species will be over shortly. It runs from February to early July, and once the fledglings have learned to fly, they tend to favor wetlands in the central area rather than nest high up on power line poles, making them hard to spot."

"Seen from below, the birds, with their long beaks, necks and legs, seem to be much smaller than they really are," Hu said.

The oriental stork, with red skin encircling its eyes — which some jokingly refer to as eyeliner — stands out from other stork species, she said.

The number of oriental storks is severely depleted, mainly because of habitat loss and overhunting, and they are listed as endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List. To address the problem, diligent conservation measures taken by the city of Dongying, Shandong province, have resulted in the species now being frequently seen in an area in which it had once never set foot.

Wetland restoration

The area, in northeastern Dongying at the Yellow River estuary, was once seen as inhospitable for birds and other wildlife because water was scarce during the dry season and overwhelming during the wet season, flooding the land, said Hu, a Dongying native.

Recognizing its ecological, geographical and societal significance, the city established a nature reserve in 1990, which has since grown to 153,000 hectares. The reserve received national-level status and became known as the Shandong Yellow River Delta National Nature Reserve two years later.

Toward the end of the decade, the oriental stork began appearing there.

"The oriental stork is particularly sensitive about its living environment and is considered an indicator of how healthy wetlands are," said Zhao Yajie, deputy director of the ecological monitoring center in the nature reserve. "In fact, it had never been seen in the nature reserve before the late 1990s."

The migratory birds mainly inhabit marshes, wetlands and pond shores. They are found during the summer in the provinces of Heilongjiang and Jilin in North-

east China and the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, and during the winter in Anhui, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangsu and Jiangxi provinces. They are also present in Japan, the Korean Peninsula and Russia.

"In the autumn of 1997, the reserve's first oriental stork was observed pausing here on its journey southward, using the location as a temporary stopover," Zhao said. "In 2003, a group of the storks nested here for the first time, coinciding with the wetland conservation project in the nature reserve that was occurring at the time and underscoring the project's success."

The first successful hatching of the species occurred in 2005, she added.

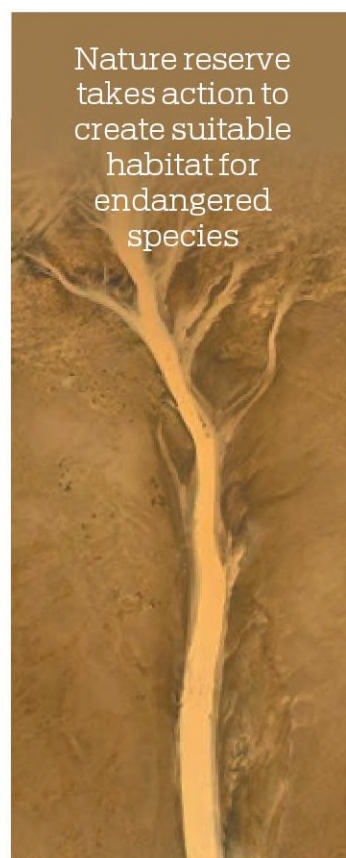
In 2002, a wetland restoration project was launched in the nature reserve. It involved building dams to prevent seawater from intruding and injecting water from the Yellow River during its peak flow period into the reserve to retain freshwater and reduce salinity. This was an effective way to create a freshwater wetland environment and provide a suitable habitat and food resources for oriental storks, she said.

Rainfall is scarce in the Yellow River Delta in Dongying — only about 590 millimeters a year — and with as much as 1,550 mm of water being evaporated from the wetlands annually, more of it is essential. The reserve has thus adopted replenishment measures, including diverting water from the Yellow River during its peak flow period in June, she said.

Following years of wetland restoration efforts, there are now more than 20,000 hectares of freshwater wetlands in the reserve. The expansion has led to the oriental stork establishing itself as a regular resident of Dongying, where it lives from February to November, she said.

Habitat creation

As a wading bird species, the oriental stork is between 110 and 120 centimeters tall,



Above: The Yellow River empties into the Bohai Sea in Dongying. XING GUANGLI / XINHUA **Below:** Oriental storks gather at a wetland area in the Yellow River Delta reserve in Dongying. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



weighs 4 to 5 kilograms and has a wingspan of up to 220 cm. However, its timid, vigilant and solitary nature leads it to favor habitats far from human activity and high up in buildings or trees, Zhao said.

"High soil salinity in the Yellow River Delta means the region is unsuitable for tall trees to grow, and oriental storks opt to nest on top of power line poles, which is an electricity hazard," she said. "In addition, the lack of nesting materials makes the nests less secure."

To tackle the problem, the nature reserve has built artificial nests designed especially for the oriental stork since 2007. Positioned on 15-meter-high cement poles, each nest is made of galvanized steel, resembling a bowl with a top diameter of 2.4 meters, a bottom diameter of 1.2 meters and a depth of 35 cm.

Small-scale terrain adjustments have been implemented in the area to cater to the diverse living habits and feeding behaviors of different bird species, enabling waterfowl to frolic in deep waters and wading birds to stand and feed in shallow waters.

Fish fry are released into wetlands every spring to meet the oriental storks' elevated demand for food reserves during the breeding season, Zhao said.

Advanced technology such as artificial intelligence recognition systems and 5G internet have been employed to automatically monitor bird populations and capture real-time data on environmental factors including hydrology, meteorology and air quality. In addition, some key birds have been banded to keep track of their migration patterns.

"Empowered by technology, we can reduce human disruption in wildlife habitats, enhance our understanding of these animals and take prompt action when they are in danger," Zhao said, adding that the rescue principle in the nature reserve is to preserve their wild nature and release them back into the wild once it is possible to do so.

Legal support

Under the guidance of the nation's nature reserve regulation, the Shandong reserve is divided into three zones — core, buffer and experimental — each of which has its own permitted activities and restrictions.

"The area functions primarily as a nature reserve and then as a scenic site," said Hu, the tour guide, adding that the area has adhered to national regulations and confined tourist activities to the experimental zone with stringent controls on the number of visitors.

Last year, the area welcomed 800,000 visitors, a relatively low figure compared with other sites of similar size.

"The city of Dongying obtained the right to establish its own legislature in 2015, and the second substantive local regulation it rolled out was the Regulation on the Shandong Yellow River Delta National Nature Reserve, considering its geographic importance and the significance of its ecological diversity," said Hou Lingxiao, a member of the Dongying People's Congress.

The regulation sets out specific requirements for the management and protection of the nature reserve and its resources, such as the rescue of wild animals, the implementation of a wetland water replenishment mechanism and the prevention of invasive species. In addition, it details the penalties for illegal activities, which according to Hou provides solid legal support for the conservation of the nature reserve.

Following the implementation of the national Yellow River Protection Law last year, Shandong adopted its own protection regulation this year.

The nature reserve, now dubbed "the international airport for birds", has seen the population of oriental storks grow from two nests of seven fledglings in 2005 to 202 nests of 526 fledglings this year, with the number of bird species nearly doubling from 187 in the early 1990s to 373 today, Zhao said.

Zhao attributed these positive outcomes to years of extensive conservation endeavors, which have effectively stabilized the numbers of rare animal species and improved the local environment.

"We hope that the practice in the nature reserve provides insights on biodiversity conservation and environmental restoration, and the area will continue to thrive as the bird's shelter," she said.

Workers see progress in efforts to eliminate invasive plant

By LI MENGHAN

After four years of control, monitoring and maintenance efforts, a national nature reserve at the Yellow River estuary has cleared up the majority of an invasive species from the United States plaguing the area, in an effort to transform a "green desert" into a place where native plants can thrive.

"The entire coastal zone appeared to be lush and green, but it was actually a deceptive green desert where most of the native flora and benthic organisms had died. The soil smelled foul whenever roots were dug out," said Zhou Licheng, head of the planning and construction department in the Shandong Yellow River Delta National Nature Reserve in Dongying.

Zhou attributed the bleak scene to the invasion of smooth cordgrass, or *Spartina alterniflora*, a perennial herb native to the US Atlantic coast and a dominant plant in coastal intertidal wetlands due to its tolerance of fluctuating water depths and salinity.

Its strong vitality and reproductive capacity have also made it a feared invasive species in coastal areas.

In 2010, smooth cordgrass began to expand its coverage in the nature reserve at a speed of 20 percent per year, eventually reaching 8,733.3 hectares with a density of 200 to 500 plants per square meter. It can grow up to 2 meters above the ground, with roots extending to a depth of 1 meter, Zhou said.

The rampant expansion of the species not only encroached on the growing space of native plants, but also deprived animals of food resources and habitats, leading to significant damage to local biodiversity.

"Senior staff workers told me about the presence of swans in the nature reserve, but I have never seen them," said Zhao Yajie, deputy director of the ecological monitoring center in the nature reserve, adding that the roots of plants other than smooth cordgrass seemed to be withered.

Realizing the severity of the situation, the nature reserve has worked with the Chinese

Academy of Sciences to explore control methods for smooth cordgrass since 2016, and these methods began being implemented in 2020.



Tractors are deployed to curb smooth cordgrass in the Shandong Yellow River Delta National Nature Reserve in Dongying, Shandong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Given the plant's adeptness at both sexual and asexual reproduction coupled with its robust survival traits, the nature reserve has implemented a comprehensive control strategy.

All above-ground vegetation is trimmed before seed maturation to prevent seed dispersal. Subsequently, the designated area is enclosed with a special film to capture and contain as much as 60 centimeters of seawater. The water is used to effectively eradicate the root system by forcing it to endure a high-salinity environment over a 90-day period.

In addition, continuous plowing has also proved to be effective after the roots are fragmented into 10-cm pieces and buried in cement, Zhou said.

Because of the muddy terrain, workers need to spend three to four hours using transportation modes such as boats, self-made all-terrain vehicles and excavators to reach the work site. Upon arrival, they often opt to extend their stay to maximize efficiency.

In addition, whenever there are stormy and windy conditions, workers must promptly evacuate to one of 50 safety platforms in the area, he recalled.

The restoration of native plants such as *Suaeda salsa* and seagrass beds has also been implemented in the area, which has contributed to biodiversity conservation and soil quality improvement, Zhou said.

Presently, more than 99 percent of smooth cordgrass has been removed from the reserve, leading to the return of some creatures that had been absent in the area for years, he said.

However, he emphasized that eradication has not been achieved. The nature reserve will continue real-time monitoring and regular maintenance and promote control efforts so that the area will not revert to a "green desert".

He added that the reserve's experience in controlling smooth cordgrass may provide a lesson for other coastal areas in China, which are also plagued by similar problems.