

Beijing's backbone

Central Axis, a centuries-old ensemble of landmarks, holds lasting appeal CULTURAL HERITAGE, PAGES 8-9



Energy storage capacity to see robust uptick BUSINESS, PAGE 14



Barren no more

Once saline marshes, inland ponds now home to thriving marine life CHINA, PAGE 5

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Xi highlights modernizing nation's defense

Systematic perspective, overall planning key for improving comprehensive capability

By ZHAO LEI zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, has called for the continuous improvement of the nation's border, coastal and air defense systems.

Xi, who is also Chinese president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, said on Tuesday that the modernization of the border, coastal and air defense systems is an inherent requirement for the overall modernization of China's national defense and armed forces, and an essential measure to safeguard the country's development and rejuvenation.

He said that border, coastal and air defense systems are important symbols of national sovereignty, major guardians of national security and a crucial foundation of national development, adding that the Party always attaches great importance to these.

Xi made the remarks at a study session of the Political Bureau of the 20th CPC Central Committee on Tuesday.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, the Party has implemented a series of related reforms and measures. It has effectively protected the country's sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, and also ensured national security and a strategic advantage, said the general secretary.

Xi said that China's border, coastal and air defense systems have been facing new opportunities, challenges and sophisticated variables that have been emerging from the rapidly changing global geopolitical situation.

He said that authorities in charge of this work must uphold a systematic perspective, strengthen their overall consideration and planning, and improve the comprehensive capability of safeguarding the country.

He also called for the integrated development of border, coastal

and air defense systems and socioeconomic growth in border and coastal regions, requesting local and military authorities to enhance the joint construction and sharing of infrastructure.

More efforts should be placed on the use of science and technology to establish multidimensional, intelligent defense networks, Xi said, adding that friendly and practical cooperation with neighboring countries should be maintained to gain understanding and support for China's endeavors on its defense systems.

The commander-in-chief also called for deepening reforms, boosting innovation, optimizing management mechanisms, improving coordination among local and military authorities, and strengthening the rule of law in this field.

Moreover, he underlined the importance of improving air traffic management, nurturing the sound growth of the low-altitude economy, and optimizing civil air-defense systems.

During the study session, Major General Huang Jizhong from the CMC's Joint Staff Department elaborated on issues concerning the building of modern border, coastal and air defense systems, and put forward his suggestions.

Xi also extended Army Day greetings, on behalf of the CPC Central Committee and the CMC, to all service personnel, as well as members of the militia and reserve forces, as Thursday marks the 97th anniversary of the founding of the People's Liberation Army.

In another development, Xi recently sent a reply letter to members of an armored infantry company of the PLA Ground Force to encourage them to hone their combat skills and make more contributions to the military.

Soldiers from the elite company, which was inspected by Xi during a visit 10 years ago, sent him a letter to report their work and achievements.

Aquatic glory



Above: Divers Chen Yuxi (left) and Quan Hongchan of China compete during a gold medal-winning performance in the women's synchronized 10-meter platform final on Wednesday at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games in France. LI YING / XINHUA Left: Gold medalist Pan Zhanle of China celebrates after winning the men's 100-meter freestyle swimming competition and setting a new world record. UESLER MARCELIN / REUTERS

WORLD WATCH

By John Quelch

Cultural link helps China, US better understand each other

In a world riddled with political and economic competition, it remains universally acknowledged that cultural appreciation forms the cornerstone of international understanding. Despite current tensions between the United States and China, the currency of soft power — based on cultural understanding and mutual respect, especially among young people — can bring about peace and prosperity.

Following President Xi Jinping's invitation to 50,000 American youths to visit China over the next five years, China's central and provincial governments are bolstering efforts to give them opportunities for engagement with Chinese society, realizing the strategic value of cultural familiarity.

Short-term exchange programs for students and intensive Mandarin language courses, for instance, improve language skills and foster a sophisticated understanding of China's long history and diverse cultural heritage.

The one-week immersion program that Duke Kunshan University and Jiangsu province developed for 70 students from Duke University and other American colleges powerfully exemplifies this investment in mutual understanding. This initiative, which will take place in August, promises to be an exciting voyage through the cultural, historical and economic strongholds of Nanjing, Suzhou and Shanghai — cities that have witnessed China's remarkable present and the ebb and flow of the country's storied past.

Short-term exchange programs apparently have the potential to improve understanding. However, a Harvard Business Review insight — a customer retained is several folds less costly than a new one acquired — suggests that investing in US students already enrolled in full-time degree programs in China could be more advantageous and economically cost-effective.

Schools such as DKU are trailblazers in providing a global-oriented degree education in a Chinese setting, giving students a global outlook and the capacity to prosper in a multicultural society. Immersed in China's educational and cultural environment, international students have the potential to become genuine ambassadors of cultural understanding, bridging gaps through their first-hand accounts.

As the executive vice chancellor of DKU, an English-speaking, research-oriented liberal arts and sciences university located just outside of Shanghai, I am quite familiar with the powerful results that these kinds of exchanges can deliver.

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Defense chief: Military ready to engage in cooperation

By JIANG CHENGLONG jiangchenglong@chinadaily.com.cn

Minister of National Defense Dong Jun said on Wednesday that the Chinese military is willing to engage in pragmatic and friendly cooperation with the armed forces of other nations to create a world of lasting peace and universal security.

He made the remarks during a reception held by the Ministry of National Defense at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing to celebrate the 97th anniversary of the founding of the People's Liberation Army, which is on Thursday.

Dong said that the Chinese military is also ready to work with the armed forces of other countries to implement

the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, as well as the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, to foster a security framework characterized by fairness, justice and joint construction and sharing.

In his speech, Dong extended his greetings to the officers and

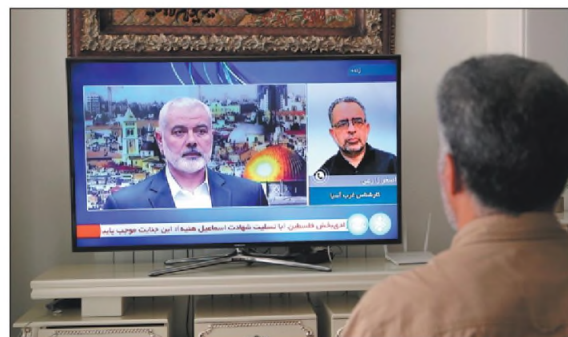
personnel of the PLA, members of the armed police and paramilitary units, and paid tribute to veterans and heroes who contributed to the development of the people's armed forces and representatives of army role models.

He said that the PLA is steadfastly advancing at a new historical juncture, underscoring that all

military personnel are guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Strengthening the Military and are committed to following the path of building a strong military with Chinese characteristics.

He also stressed the importance of forging absolute loyalty to the Party, focusing on combat readiness, enhancing capabilities, and consolidating and improving the integrated national strategic system and capabilities to achieve the centenary objectives of the PLA.

Hamas leader assassinated



A man watches the news on TV after Hamas Political Bureau Chief Ismail Haniyeh was killed by an Israeli airstrike in Tehran, Iran, on Wednesday. FATEMEH BAHRAMI VIA GETTY IMAGES

Recovery expected to gain a firmer footing

By OUYANG SHIJIA ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn

China's economic recovery is expected to gain a firmer footing in the remainder of the year, as policymakers are poised to roll out a package of stimulus measures aimed at stabilizing growth and deepening structural reforms in the second half, analysts said on Wednesday.

They said the focus will be on defusing local government debt risks, expanding domestic demand and stabilizing the real estate sector, which will help to significantly

boost confidence among investors, consumers and businesses.

Their comments came as official data released on Wednesday showed a mixed picture of the economy, with China's factory activity shrinking for the third consecutive month in July and the nonmanufacturing sector expanding at a slower pace.

A State Council executive meeting held on Wednesday emphasized the need to optimize and strengthen macro policies, calling for efforts to better implement existing policies and come up with new incremental policies.

Analysts said the latest PMI readings offer a glimpse of challenges and pressures facing the economy, as data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed that China's official purchasing managers index for the manufacturing sector stood at 49.4 in July, down from 49.5 in June. This is below the 50-point mark that separates growth from contraction.

China's nonmanufacturing PMI, which includes subindexes for service sector activity and construction, came in at 50.2 in July, down from 50.5 in June, NBS data showed.

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PAGE TWO

Police pups bound ahead in battle to lick crime

Canine training focuses on humane, rewards-based system



A police dog trains on an obstacle course at the Beijing Police Dog Breeding Center. PHOTOS BY WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY



A three-month-old Labrador undergoes training.

Model corgi

In March, a corgi puppy named Fuzai — meaning “lucky boy” in Chinese — became a reserve police dog in Weifang, Shandong province, the first of the breed to serve in China. The stereotype of short-legged, overly friendly corgis was broken by Fuzai’s outstanding ability to search for explosives.

His training video, posted on social media platform Weibo, has been viewed more than 2.16 million times with related hashtags viewed over 13 million times.

Zhao Qingshuai, Fuzai’s handler at the Weifang Police Dog Breeding Center, told local media that the uniformed pooch began its training when it was two months old, and demonstrated talent for the task immediately.

In the early stages of police dog training, different canines might show different abilities to learn and practice skills.

A study by Xia Xiaobo, director of the puppy training team at the Beijing Police Dog Breeding Centre, found it takes about 97 to 99 times for a police dog to master the skill of sitting down after smelling explosives. But a more talented dog might achieve this in less than 90 attempts.

Some puppies prefer to take in the outside world using their sense of smell, while others prefer to use their vision. By observing these behavioral patterns, police dog handlers develop their potential law enforcement capabilities as the puppies grow.

Hide and seek

Song Zheng, a 26-year-old police officer, clearly remembers the first time Andy — a black German shepherd — successfully sniffed out a hidden knife during a training session.

Song had concealed a knife with a “suspect’s” scent in one box and a knife with a different person’s scent in another box as part of a training exercise. “Andy was not very clear about the rules of the game in the beginning,” Song said.

The dog eventually learned to determine the correct box through rewards-based

behavior reinforcement. “He just didn’t get the idea back then,” said Song. “Gradually, he realized that there was a rule that he needed to follow. Only by doing the right thing could he earn the ball; otherwise, there would be no ball to play with.”

For the first three days, Andy would react to all the distractions after entering the training room, Song said. On the fourth day, however, he started to understand the aim of the training exercise.

“I have no secret to training police dogs,” Song said. “I feel that all training theories are quite simple, but in terms of day-to-day training, it’s more like playing mind games with the canine. Every day, you are thinking of setting various conditions to challenge the dog. At the same time, he is also thinking of shortcuts to give you what you want.”

At the Beijing Police Dog Breeding Centre, Song is known for his connection with and affection for Andy, whom he grooms almost every morning.

In 2020, when he was 22, Song encountered then 7-month-old Andy for the first time. He took the puppy for 10-kilometer runs in the playground three times a week for about two years.

The officer and dog were separated for a few months when Song was temporarily transferred to another division of the criminal investigation corps. But the reunion didn’t happen as Song had imagined.

“I thought he’d be really excited to see me again after that period of time, but it didn’t happen that way,” he said.

“He’d been sticking by me ever since I took him out of the doghouse. But his mood didn’t seem to fluctuate very much when I returned, so I’d say he has a very stable character.”

Experienced handlers told Song that Andy had a good grounding to practice bite-and-hold techniques to counter attacks, but Song wanted the dog’s training to focus on searching for explosives.

“I don’t feel any loss that Andy wasn’t trained to attack,” said Song. “I find that evi-

dence collection and the search skills we’ve been improving, which are part of criminal investigations, require full concentration and are more fulfilling when missions are completed.”

Training sessions

For a puppy to become a qualified police dog, it needs to meet several conditions, according to Xia, the puppy training team director. It should have a strong search and retrieve drive, while character and courage are important qualities for a canine to perform the role, he explained.

“If a puppy does not want to acquire things, it will be hard for it to perform different types of missions later when on duty,” Xia said. The ideal age to start a puppy’s basic training is when it is about 3 months old, in order to get a sense of its character and cultivate its adaptability to different circumstances.

“We have an elimination process since we do not rule out the possibility that there are little puppies that do not meet requirements,” he said. “But we prefer to create a playful environment for them, similar to a kindergarten, which allows them to develop essential skills unconsciously while they’re having fun.”

For the puppies unable to meet all the standards immediately, extra lessons take the form of pats on the back, hand claps, snacks and verbal encouragement to help them catch up.

A towel is a good tool for puppy training because it cannot only be used as an inducement, but also protect the developing dog’s teeth if it pulls too hard, said Xia.

Training typically involves four sessions a day, twice in the morning and twice in the afternoon. However, on scorching summer days, the training is reduced to twice daily, with a session limited to one to two hours.

Xia said the habits instilled in daily training are essential for the dog’s professional life.

“Puppies have a make-or-break period, which is between three and six months old. Training during these three months lays a solid foundation for the dogs and their abilities will improve rapidly afterward,” he said.

Xia gave an example of a Belgian Malinois, an active, highly intelligent breed of dog with strong athletic ability and good obedience. The Belgian Malinois is well-suited to the role of a police dog, but during its puppy stage it can be very sensitive and require a handler’s full attention and care. “Through constant interaction with the puppy or continuous petting during training, the bond between the trainer and little Malinois is boosted, which soon helps desensitize it,” he said.

Xia and seven other auxiliary police officers train the puppies at the breeding center. Spring and autumn are the seasons when breeding dogs give birth, and currently there are more than 30 puppies in the center, all born this spring.

“Early morning and late evening are the slightly cooler parts of the day in summer and recently we’ve started training the puppies during these times,” Xia said. “Besides training their retrieving instincts, the puppies have been practicing climbing stairs, and crawling through hoops and tunnels. We’ve included various distractions into the training to strengthen the young police dog’s psychological resilience.”

Their diversified diet includes beef, chicken, eggs, and milk. To ensure optimal nutrient absorption, officers feed the puppies with smaller kibbles.

The base also has a veterinary center and the dogs are given routine checkups and are provided with treatment when needed.

“It’s such a fulfilling journey to train these puppies from the very beginning. We tailor our training methods to each individual dog, and it’s really something to watch them grow up from when they couldn’t do anything to a time when they can,” said Xia.

A police dog’s working life usually depends on its physical condition. Healthy, strong dogs often remain in service until about the age of 10.

Ujan is now 4 years old. After the early struggle to train the dog, Zhao said: “I’m proud of Ujan and treasure every chance to work with him.”

By XIN WEN
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When 23-year-old Zhao Yingxi collected her first police dog for training in 2020 she had little choice in the matter.

She and her fellow dog handlers had drawn lots for the puppies and she ended up with Ujan, a 1-year-old male German shepherd that already weighed a whopping 40 kilograms.

Zhao is a slight woman, and it’s hard to imagine the then novice dog handler training such a large, strong animal. When she first encountered Ujan, the young canine’s body almost filled its entire kennel.

She thought of exchanging the dog for a more docile one, and the start of its training didn’t go well. “Ujan is a demanding dog and I had a really hard time,” she said.

The puppy refused her simple command to sit, for example, and Zhao felt she had no affinity with the dog, which made her feel depressed. “Other dog handlers also took care of Ujan, helped train him, and took him to the sports ground for competitions such as tug-of-war. He behaved quite well and excited with them, not like with me,” she said.

The frustration continued and Zhao and Ujan were the only team to fail the first assessment. After that, she adjusted her mindset and encouraged Ujan more, allowing him to rest between training sessions.

The situation improved, and Zhao adopted a different training approach for Ujan. Instead of disciplining him, she focused on activities he enjoyed.

In China, police dogs play an important role in criminal investigations. Their handlers have developed training methods so the canines can search for blood, track narcotics, hunt out material evidence and even combat criminal suspects.

There are more than 14,000 police officers nationwide handling over 29,000 police dogs on active duty, data released by the Ministry of Public Security last September showed.

Public security organs at all levels should have police dogs as a supporting force, and each category of police work should have a proportion of canines based on needs, according to a ministry regulation.

The Beijing Police Dog Breeding Center is the base for the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau criminal investigation corps ninth division, and currently houses more than 300 police dogs on active duty. The center breeds new puppies on a regular basis, cares for retired dogs, and maintains a special cemetery to honor meritorious police dogs.

Instead of relying on cruel, outdated training methods to control what are generally believed to be fierce dogs, the center fosters a scientific, humane and rewards-based system.

If such training methods are used at an early stage, a police dog’s overall behavior is better, although individual differences among dogs exist, experts said.



A police dog demonstrates skills during training at the center in Beijing.



Top: Puppies that are about 3 months old practice retrieving skills at the center. Above left: A police dog undertakes an obstacle course. Above right: A veterinarian conducts routine checkups on a Belgian Malinois.



TOP NEWS

Riding low

Equestrian performers show gravity-defying acrobatic tricks on Tuesday during a horse-racing competition in Litang county of the Ganzi Tibetan autonomous prefecture, Sichuan province. More than 10,000 spectators, including tourists, gathered for the event, which runs through Thursday.

LIU ZHONGJUN
CHINA NEWS SERVICE



Upcoming COP29 set to prioritize climate finance goal

By HOU LIQIANG
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Azerbaijan, the host of the 29th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, more commonly known as COP29, has vowed to make every effort to ensure a fair and ambitious climate finance goal for developed nations.

The goal, according to COP29 President-designate Mukhtar Babayev, should fully take into account the needs and priorities of developing states.

In an exclusive interview with China Daily, Babayev, who is also Azerbaijan's minister of ecology and natural resources, expressed gratitude for China's climate leadership and emphasized his country's willingness to collaborate with China in addressing the concerns of developing nations during the November gathering, in which nearly 200 countries will participate.

As an active supporter of the Belt and Road Initiative, Azerbaijan sees enormous potential for collaboration with China on climate action and green technology, Babayev said. "COP29 will be a litmus test for the Paris Agreement and global climate action and cooperation. We must address all the most fundamental and pressing issues, with climate finance as a centerpiece," he said.

COP29's vision is to deliver on the outcomes of the Global Stocktake — a comprehensive assessment of the world's progress on climate action which concluded at last year's COP28 in the United Arab Emirates — to keep the global ambition of

limiting the temperature increase to 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels within reach, and to build on the progress so that the convention can address the urgency and scale of the climate crisis, he noted.

The 2015 Paris Agreement aims to keep the global temperature rise this century well below 2 C and to pursue efforts to limit the increase even further to 1.5 C.

"Our plan to deliver this vision is based on two parallel and mutually reinforcing pillars of enhancing ambition and enabling action, with climate finance as our top priority," he added.

Enabling action involves putting in place the means to implement climate change measures and provide support — financial, technological and capacity building — at the national, regional and global levels for all stakeholders, Babayev said.

The COP29 presidency aims to facilitate an agreement among parties on a fair and ambitious New Collective Quantified Goal on climate finance, he said. The agreement should address the urgency and scale of the climate crisis, while also taking into account the specific needs and priorities of developing countries.

"But this is not just our priority," he said. "The COP29 presidency has heard the voices of so many parties and communities that are counting on all of us to take this step at COP29. We must all go the extra mile together to deliver this historic milestone."

In 2009, developed countries



Mukhtar Babayev

pledged to deliver \$100 billion per year in international climate finance by 2020. The Paris treaty extended the target, requiring contributing nations to maintain the annual contribution through 2025. However, many developing nations say that the commitment was never fully honored.

Babayev said it's regrettable that the \$100 billion goal was not met on schedule, but he cited his appreciation for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's announcement that in 2022, developed countries jointly mobilized \$115.9 billion for developing nations to address climate change.

"We must address the fact that climate finance is currently flowing in at an insufficient scale and in unequal directions. To meet our climate ambitions, we need reform to make finance available, affordable and accessible," Babayev noted.

He said the work on climate finance should represent progression beyond previous efforts. Transparency and accessibility will also be key facilitating conditions that will require effort from multiple stakeholders.

Babayev pledged all-out efforts from Azerbaijan to act as a bridge between developed and developing nations at COP29 to reach consensus. Noting a "deep relationship that spans centuries" between Azerbaijan and China, Babayev said his country will work closely with China to advance the climate finance issue at COP29.

As an active supporter of the BRI, he said Azerbaijan sees the initiative as particularly relevant from a climate action perspective, as it "allows for and fosters international collaboration and exchanges on green innovations".

He highlighted COP29 as "another crucial stage in closer cooperation" between the two countries.

The president-designate said he appreciated China's support for Azerbaijan's vision for COP29. He also expressed gratitude toward China for urging developed countries to accelerate the implementation of their climate finance commitments to developing nations at the G20 meetings this spring.

"We will continue to work very closely with China as we move forward along these shared climate finance priorities," Babayev said.

China is already engaging with the international community in advance of COP29, and Azerbaijan is encouraged by positive international dialogues on climate change, including talks between the Chinese and United States climate envoys, he said.

He also lauded China's instrumental role at the G20 meetings in advocating for and advancing green finance, noting that the nation's leadership "is crucial on the international stage".

"Any geopolitical tensions and uncertainty in the international environment must not distract us from the imperative to collaborate and address climate change as the greatest transnational challenge of the century — and China is demonstrating that," he added.

Low-carbon ambition wins wide applause

Key plenum elevates China's commitment to reducing emissions to a new level, expert says

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels
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China's ambitions of achieving low-carbon development as mentioned by the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China have won applause from international climate and clean energy experts.

Belinda Schaepe, China policy analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, which is based in Helsinki, Finland, said the third plenum has sent out a powerful message on climate and energy, underscoring China's commitment to green and low-carbon development.

China will make concerted efforts to cut carbon emissions, reduce pollution, pursue green development, and actively respond to climate change, said the communique of the third plenum.

"This elevates China's commitment to reducing emissions and tackling climate change to a new level and could pave the way for ambitious targets in China's upcoming Nationally Determined Contribution to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change," she said, referring to China's efforts to reduce national emissions as a key part of the Paris Agreement. The contributions are commitments that countries make to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions as part of climate change mitigation.

Schaepe said the third plenum confirms the recent policy transition from focus on energy intensity to carbon reduction.

"This is a positive direction and indicates that China is moving closer to post-peak carbon reduction," she said.

She said the main focus of the plenum was new quality productive forces as a guiding force of China's economic growth going forward with particular emphasis on new energy industries.

She said the government aims to implement fiscal, tax, financial, investment and pricing policies and standards to support low-carbon development.

"This continued industrial policy support will further strengthen

China's clean energy sector and potentially accelerate the domestic transition," she said.

She noted that the Chinese government has proposed to improve measures for green government procurement and refining a green taxation system.

"If implemented well, these policies could be transformative for high-emission sectors such as steel to accelerate heavy industry decarbonization," she said, adding that the steel sector may have reached a turning point with no new permits given for coal-based steel plants in the first half of 2024, indicating progress on the path to decarbonization.

She also applauded China's ambitions to improve the carbon accounting system and certification systems.

"The anticipated expansion of the national carbon market to include the aluminum, cement and steel sectors provides opportunities for faster emission reductions in these sectors," she said.

Paul Dorfman, a visiting fellow of Science Policy Research Unit of Sussex Energy Group, University of Sussex in the United Kingdom, praised China's achievements in the renewable sector.

"It is now clear that renewables will do the heavy lifting for the net-zero energy. This is good news for China, as it cements its position as the global leader in renewables development — with twice as much solar and wind power capacity under construction as the rest of the world combined," he said.

Dorfman said China installed more solar power units in the past year than it had in the previous three years combined.

With 180 gigawatts of utility-scale solar and 159 GW of wind power already under construction, China has installed more than 100 GW of solar power capacity in just the first half of 2024.

He said if their collective planned utility-scale solar and wind projects come online, China could easily reach 1,200 GW of installed wind and solar capacity by the beginning of 2025 — driven by improved system integration, lower curtailment rates, and enhanced solar and wind competitiveness.

Taking stock of damage



Kim Jong-un, top leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and Premier Kim Tok-hun inspect a flood-stricken area on Wednesday in the North Pyongan Province of the country. KCNA

Japan called on to stop smearing China

By WANG QINGYUN
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Beijing has slammed Tokyo for the negative comments it made during its recent meetings with Washington, urging it to maintain the political foundation of China-Japan relations.

Liu Jinsong, director-general of the Foreign Ministry's department of Asian affairs, summoned Akira Yokochi, chief minister of the Japanese embassy in China, on Tuesday, shortly after Japan and the United States held a series of meetings in Tokyo.

Japan and the US held the "2+2" meeting and a ministerial meeting on "extended deterrence" on Sunday. On Monday, the two countries participated in the foreign ministers' meeting of the Quad, a grouping that also includes Australia and India.

A spokesman for the Foreign Ministry expressed strong opposition on Tuesday to interference from Japan and the US in China's internal affairs as well as their smearing of China.

Liu, the director-general, expressed China's grave concerns and strong disapproval over the negative words

and deeds against it by the Japanese side during the meetings, as well as the many fallacies, dangerous moves and false narratives in the meetings' documents, a ministry statement said.

The Japanese side's smearing and attacks on China contradict its statements on promoting a strategic relationship of mutual benefit between the two countries, Liu said, calling on Tokyo to meet Beijing halfway and truly work toward such a relationship.

Liu urged Japan to adopt an objective and rational perception of China, stop making unwarranted comments

on China's internal affairs, and cease forming "small cliques" with certain countries to create confrontation.

Yokochi said that Japan's position on handling the Taiwan question in accordance with the 1972 Japan-China joint communique remains unchanged. Japan is willing to advance the strategic relationship of mutual benefit between the two countries, he added.

The ministry also announced measures against US Representative Jim McGovern, a Massachusetts Democrat, for words and deeds that have interfered in China's internal affairs and undermined its sovereignty, security and development interests.

Mo Jingxi contributed to this story.

Exchanges: Sports, arts crucial to fostering understanding

From page 1

Consider the case of Peter Ballentine, an American student of the DKU Class of 2022. DKU prides itself on having a truly international campus community, with about 30 percent of its student body being international. International students account for no more than 20 percent of all students at most other universities. While attending DKU, Ballentine made friends with students from all over the world and worked together with his professors and fellow students on everything from the curriculum to the school's culture, which gave him invaluable experience collaborating with people from different cultural

backgrounds. After graduation, he received funding from the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program of the United States for his work with a Duke University research team and is currently pursuing a PhD in electrical engineering at Columbia University.

By observing the success stories of Ballentine and many of his peers, it becomes clear to me that it is imperative to establish more incentives, such as scholarships, for American students to enroll in degree programs in China, live here, learn about its transformation into the second-largest economy in the world in merely four decades, something unprecedented in

human history, and recognize the complexity of its culture.

It becomes even more urgent that more Americans can study full-time in China, especially considering that the number of Chinese students studying in the US far exceeds that of American students in China. That is a challenge not only for China but also for the US, regardless of whether the US considers China a major rival or a potential partner in solving global problems. This disparity suggests that Chinese students and likely future leaders of China are far more knowledgeable about the US than Americans are about China.

Of course, cultural exchanges, which go beyond student

exchanges, include organizing academic and business conferences that emphasize global issues like public health and environmental conservation. As the two biggest economic powers, China and the US can use such forums to advance initiatives that prevent pandemics and address climate change.

In addition, China's history, culture and 59 UNESCO World Heritage sites remain huge attractions to many Westerners. More accessible or visa-free agreements may inspire more Americans to travel to China more than once by showcasing attractions beyond Beijing, Shanghai and Xi'an. Linguistic proficiency is also

essential for cultural diplomacy. More accessible Chinese-language training at institutions in the US will allow American students to engage more deeply with Chinese culture and ideas, building enduring appreciation and relationships.

Not to be overlooked is the role of sports and performing arts in diplomacy. Friendlies in soccer and basketball, along with global tours from institutions like the New York Philharmonic, convey heartfelt exchanges that create lasting memories for participants and spectators alike. As with the symbolic Ping-Pong Diplomacy 40 years ago, such events spawn friendships beyond the realm of politics. China's adorable envoys, the giant pandas, also have a unique role to play, as they transcend language and politics to generate goodwill and improve conservation.

In summary, the key to overcoming geopolitical tensions lies not necessarily in grand gestures but in a constant flow of cultural exchanges across a wide range of fields, including language, art, education, sports and wildlife diplomacy. Every little bit helps. Every single person-to-person interaction counts. By improving cultural understanding at the individual level, the US and China can develop a spirit of cooperation that is the best guarantee of long-lasting peace.

The author is executive vice chancellor and distinguished professor of social science at Duke Kunshan University and the John deButts professor of practice at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

High-tech parts for telescope on way to S. Africa

Four dishes to be delivered for world's largest astronomy observation network

By ZHAO LEI in Shijiazhuang
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The first middle-frequency dishes of the Square Kilometer Array radio telescope, the world's biggest astronomy observation network and an international mega-science project, have begun to be transported to their destination in South Africa.

At a ceremony on Wednesday morning in a northwestern suburb of Shijiazhuang, the capital of Hebei province, experts announced that the first batch of four Square Kilometer Array middle-frequency dishes — SKA-Mid for short — had passed quality examination and were being transported by heavy-lift trucks to a cargo port in Tianjin, where they will be put on a ship to South Africa.

The Square Kilometer Array is an ambitious scientific endeavor involving several nations including China, the United Kingdom and Australia. It is not a single radio telescope, but a collection of various types of antennae called an array, and is spread over long distances with up to 1 square kilometer in total collecting surface area, the equivalent of 140 soccer fields.

The project is managed by the SKA Observatory, an intergovernmental organization based in Manchester in the UK.

China is responsible for the research and development of the SKA-Mid dishes as well as the production for the first 64 such instruments.

Most of the parts for the large parabolic dishes, including the main reflectors, servo devices and support arms, were designed and built by the Shijiazhuang-based 54th Research Institute of China Electronics Technology Group Corp, which is the major Chinese contractor in the SKA project.

Yin Qihua, deputy project manager for SKA-Mid, said the first four dishes are scheduled to arrive in South Africa in the coming months and then be installed in the Karoo region.

"After they arrive at their destination, Chinese engineers will work with local workers to assemble and fine-tune them," he said after the ceremony.

Delivery of the 64 SKA-Mid dishes is expected to be finished

before the end of 2026, and all of them will be mounted in the Karoo region, Yin said.

The operation of SKA-Mid requires extremely high accuracy in terms of beam deformation, pointing precision, electromagnetic shielding and electromagnetic compatibility, according to Du Biao, chief designer of the dish at the institute.

"Its design and production are very challenging for us," he said. "To solve these demanding technical issues, our researchers and engineers made all-out efforts to develop world-class technologies for its servo systems, dynamic simulation, and calibration and testing methods."

Another major section of the SKA project, the low-frequency antennas, or SKA-Low, will be located in the remote Murchison area in Western Australia.

Eight other African nations, including Botswana, Ghana and Kenya, will also house some of the mega-science mission's facilities.

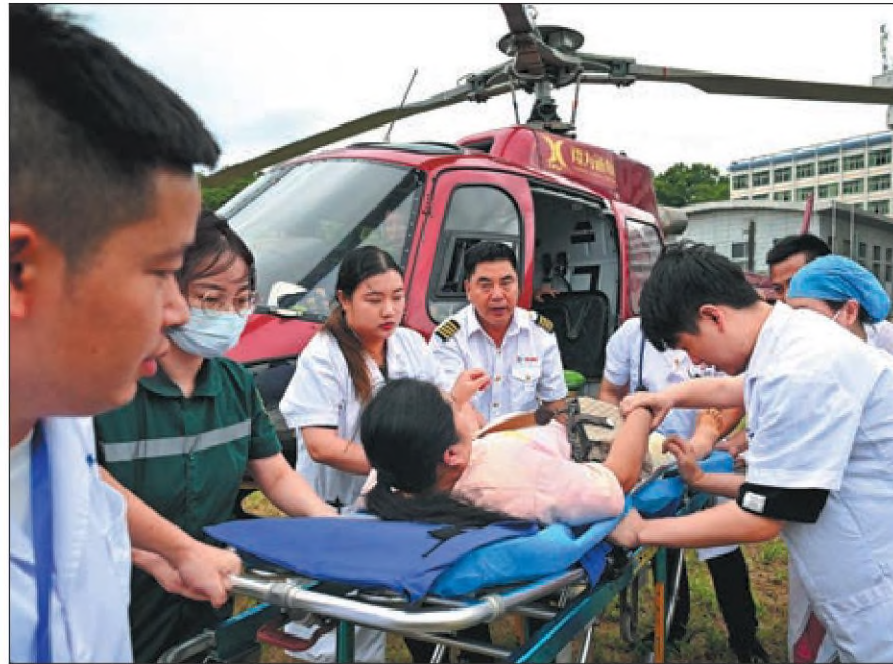
All of the sites have been chosen for scientific and technical reasons, including radio quietness.

Upon its scheduled completion in the coming decade, SKA will be the largest and most advanced astronomy system on Earth and is expected to provide an unprecedentedly detailed insight into the history of the universe. It will also enable scientists to better understand the nature of gravity, explore the origins of life and cosmic magnetic fields, and search for extraterrestrial life.

The super network's ultra-large collecting area will give it 50 times the sensitivity and 10,000 times the survey speed of the current best — the Karl G. Jansky Very Large Array in New Mexico in the United States.

The full array will produce data at a rate more than 100 times that of global internet traffic, according to Chinese scientists involved in the program. They said the system will be so sensitive that, metaphorically speaking, it will be able to pick up conversations from an aircraft 50 light-years away.

It is China's second-largest international science collaboration after the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor, the world's largest nuclear fusion experiment.



Hospital flight

He Yulan, who is 33 weeks pregnant, is prepared for a helicopter flight from Tianping village in Zixing, Hunan province, to Zixing Second People's Hospital for a checkup on Wednesday. Since Friday, Zixing has been hit by heavy rain due to Typhoon Gaemi, with precipitation in many areas setting records. Communication, transportation and electricity supplies have been disrupted in many townships, and rescue teams have been arriving in Zixing to carry out missions.

GUO LILIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Hainan upbeat on new 144-hour visa-free policy

By CHEN BOWEN in Haikou
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Hainan's embrace of the 144-hour visa-free policy for foreign tour groups entering the island province from Hong Kong or Macao has led to the development of more than 20 tourism products and routes tailored for such visitors, Liu Cheng, deputy director of the Hainan Provincial Department of Culture, Radio, Film, Television, Publications and Sports, said at a news conference in the provincial capital, Haikou, on Wednesday.

Since Tuesday, people holding ordinary passports from countries with diplomatic relations with China have been able to enjoy visa-free travel to Hainan for up to 144 hours after visiting Hong Kong or Macao and joining a tour group of two or more people organized by a legally registered travel agency in Hong Kong or Macao, according to a notice issued by the National Immigration Administration.

Visitors must enter and exit as a group through designated open ports in Hainan, with activities limited to the province. The duration of

stay will be calculated starting from the day after entry.

Liu said that with the introduction of the policy, he is confident that in the near future, Hainan will evolve into a globally recognized tourist destination and a haven for vacationers.

Zhen Zhigang, deputy director of the Hainan Provincial Public Security Department, said the new policy is the latest measure taken by the immigration administration to support the comprehensive deepening of high-level opening-up in Hainan and to provide services for the construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port.

He added that the move aims to promote Hainan as a highland of openness with a favorable business environment, facilitate the economic development of Hong Kong and Macao, promote exchanges between the two special administrative regions and the Hainan Free Trade Port, and better integrate them into the national development framework.

"Hainan province boasts China's most favorable visa-free entry policy," Zhen said. "Currently, more

than 80 percent of foreign tourists entering Hainan do so visa-free, making it the predominant method for foreigners visiting the tropical island."

Luo Zhengyu, deputy director of the Haikou General Station of Exit and Entry Frontier Inspection, said border inspection authorities are optimizing customs clearance procedures for tour groups, allowing travel agencies in Hong Kong or Macao to pre-declare by 4 pm the day before the groups' arrival and enjoy expedited customs clearance upon entry. When tour groups enter or exit, travel agency staff are permitted to enter the designated port area to pick them up or drop them off. The border inspection authorities are also providing conveniences such as exempting tour group members from the stamping of entry-exit endorsements and filling out foreigner entry cards, thereby reducing waiting times for customs clearance.

"The new policy, along with existing ones such as visa-free entry for citizens of 59 eligible countries and visa-free entry for foreign tour groups arriving by cruise ships, is

generating a snowball effect, better catering to the diverse and personalized needs of foreign tourists visiting Hainan, promoting the formation of a more open, business-friendly and influential hub in the province," Luo said.

Mai Weiben, CEO of Hainan Wenhua Tourism Group, said he expects the policy will attract people working and traveling in Hong Kong and Macao who have not yet benefited from Hainan's visa-free entry policy for 59 eligible countries.

"Our travel agency is enhancing our tourism products and preparing a reserve of foreign language tour guides for lesser-spoken languages, aiming to enhance the quality of services for tourists entering through the new policy and tourist attraction channel," he said.

A representative of the National Immigration Administration said on Tuesday that the administration will continue to optimize and improve regional visa-free entry policies, further advance the immigration management system, and more openly welcome foreign nationals to China.

Two Chinese sites make magazine's global Top 100

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang
and HUANG ZHILING in Chengdu

While some parents have been racking their brains about where to take their children for the long summer holiday, two options have jumped to the forefront: a seaside escape from home or a relics exploration.

The seaside community of Aranya in Qinhuangdao, Hebei province, and the Sanxingdui Museum in Guanghan, Sichuan province, were recently listed as two of "the world's greatest places of 2024 — 100 extraordinary destinations to explore" by Time magazine.

The Aranya community, about 2.5 hours from Beijing by high-speed train, is luring young Chinese visitors with its minimalist design and otherworldly serenity, Time said in an article published on July 25.

Yang Zhenning, a director of the community, said construction of Aranya began in 2013 and it now covers more than 300 hectares along the Bohai Sea.

"Our core concept is that life can

be more beautiful," Yang said, adding that the community has invested big in the design of its space and architecture.

"We have invited outstanding designers from around the world to create a spatial system of high aesthetic, spiritual, emotional and functional value, constructing buildings such as hotels and restaurants within the community," Yang said.

Residents and tourists in the community can enjoy a variety of facilities such as libraries and bookstores, meeting tourists' different needs.

Upon stepping into the community, tourist Li Xue was struck by its exquisite architecture.

"I have taken countless photos of the buildings incorporating aesthetic design elements," the 38-year-old doctor from Beijing said.

She drove to the community from the capital on a weekend last month.

In addition to visual enjoyment, what impressed Li the most was the quality of service and the warmth and care she received.

"Whether it was asking for direc-

tions or recommending attractions, the staff members' attitudes and service quality were always warm and enthusiastic," she said.

About 80 percent of the community's tourists are from Beijing, with some also coming from places across China such as Guangdong province, Shanghai and Tianjin, according to Yang. The number of international tourists has also increased, he added.

From January to June, Aranya received 1.37 million visits. In July, the community experienced continuous rainy days for half a month and received 352,000 visits, roughly in line with the same period last year.

In Guanghan, the Sanxingdui Museum has a display area of 22,000 square meters, showcasing more than 1,500 sets of cultural relics including pottery, bronze, jade, gold and ivory from the Sanxingdui Ruins.

Covering 12 square kilometers, the Sanxingdui Ruins, on which the museum sits, include the remains of an ancient city, sacrificial pits, residential quarters and tombs.

Scholars believe the site was established 2,800 to 4,800 years ago,

and archaeological discoveries show it was a prosperous, highly developed cultural hub.

The site was discovered in 1929 when Yan Daocheng, a local villager, unearthed a pit full of jade and stone artifacts while repairing a sewage ditch at the side of his house.

Since the 1930s, archaeologists have conducted excavations there and had a major breakthrough in 1984 when the remains of large palaces and parts of the eastern, western and southern walls of an ancient city were found.

In 1986, two large pits full of bronze artifacts, including masks and figurines, were dug up. The discoveries confirmed the site comprised the ruins of a city that was the political, economic and cultural center of the ancient Shu Kingdom, an ancient civilization that existed in what is now Sichuan province.

The site was one of China's most important archaeological discoveries last century.

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Parts of the SKA radio telescope are loaded on a truck in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province, on Wednesday, to be transported to Tianjin and then onward to South Africa. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Economy: More measures aimed at stabilizing growth likely

From page 1

Yang Xin, an analyst at Hongta Securities, said the latest PMI readings point to pressures from the still-weak domestic demand, highlighting the need for stepped-up macroeconomic support to prop up the world's second-largest economy.

"Factors affecting the readings include extreme weather events such as heat waves and floods, traditional off-season for industrial production in July, the existing trends of deglobalization, and declining property sales," Yang said.

The Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Com-

mittee held a meeting on Tuesday to analyze the country's economic performance. The meeting pledged to step up macroeconomic support in the second half of the year, with greater focus on expanding domestic demand, cultivating emerging sectors and further widening opening-up, in a bid to meet the nation's annual growth target for 2024.

Citing key measures mapped out at the meeting, Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International, said he expects to see a series of measures aimed at stabilizing the growth in the second half, including an accelerated push for issuing local gov-

"We estimate that the official manufacturing PMI may rise to around 49.7 in August, and we need to keep an eye on the correction in the housing market."

Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International

ernment bonds in the third quarter.

"We estimate that the official manufacturing PMI may rise to around 49.7 in August, and we need to keep an eye on the correction in the housing market," he said.

NBS data showed that China's economy grew 5 percent year-on-year in the first half, which is consistent with the country's preset annual growth target of around 5 percent for 2024. In the second quarter, China's GDP grew 4.7 percent year-on-year, cooling from 5.3 percent growth in the first quarter.

"To achieve the annual growth target, China's second-half GDP growth rate should hit about 5 percent," said

Xiong Yuan, chief economist at Guosheng Securities, who estimated that the economic recovery may pick up pace in the third quarter, bolstered by a recovery in investment and robust export performance amid strong policy stimulus.

"Policymakers will likely roll out stimulus measures in the near term, including speeding up the issuance and use of local government special bonds, reducing the reserve requirement ratio and interest rates, defusing local government debt risks, and employing further property easing steps," Xiong added.

Louise Loo, lead economist at British think tank Oxford Economics, warned that the broader economy is still facing headwinds from sluggish consumer spending, rising tariff risks and disinflationary forces,

which will likely more than offset stimulus tailwinds in the near term.

"We expect the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, to cut its benchmark rates again in the fourth quarter, and also in the first quarter of 2025, thereby leading to a lower terminal rate in the medium term," she said.

On the property front, Loo said that key housing activity indicators have shown no signs of troughing despite the feedthrough of unprecedented measures focused on destocking the large property inventory overhang.

"More efforts to expand the scope of facilities catered toward clearing the excess housing supply and encourage marginal homebuyer demand are necessary, and now likely, in the coming months," she added.

CHINA

Sheep shearing season begins in Xizang grasslands

By PALDEN NYIMA and DAQIONG in Lhasa

In the picturesque grasslands of Gerze county in Ngari prefecture of the Xizang autonomous region, the arrival of summer signals commencement of the annual sheep shearing season.

With an average altitude of 4,500 meters above sea level, the pastoral village of Tarab in Oma township was recently abuzz with activity as herders prepared for the traditional sheep shearing event, a significant cultural and economic milestone for the community.

Against the backdrop of black yak-hair tents and the aroma of local delicacies such as yogurt and *tsamba* — roasted highland barley flour — herders from Tarab village gathered to shear over 300 sheep, officially kicking off the shearing activities for the year.

With well-defined roles and coordinated efforts, the herders diligently sheared, trimmed, sorted and packaged the wool, while singing the harmonious tunes of traditional songs and dances.

One can hardly see any signs of frustration or fatigue on their faces. Sheep shearing is not merely a customary practice but an integral part of the herders' livelihoods in the area. As each sheep shed its woolen "coat", the herders engaged in skillful maneuvers, exchanging breeding insights and shearing techniques, fostering a sense of community and shared knowledge.

Dorje, a village official of Tarab, said that the significance of sheep shearing extends beyond its tradition, playing a vital role in animal husbandry production.

By shearing the sheep, not only does it promote their growth and health by preventing parasite

5,000 sheep

have been bred in Tarab village in Gerze county, Xizang autonomous region.

infestation, but it also serves as a key source of economic sustenance for the herders, contributing to their increasing prosperity over the years.

In Tarab alone, the sheep breeding scale has surpassed 5,000, with wool production emerging as the primary income generator for the herding community.

"The amount of wool sheared by each household reflects a portion of their income, showcasing the economic importance of this seasonal ritual," said Dorje.

"The festivities surrounding the sheep shearing event are not just about the harvest, but also a celebration of the rich cultural heritage of the Tibetan people."

Before the shearing process begins, elaborate preparations are made, and traditional ceremonies are conducted, underscoring the deep-rooted connection between the community and its customs.

Gachung, a skilled herder from the village, proudly shared his accomplishment of shearing the wool of 38 sheep within 40 minutes, securing the top position in the annual sheep shearing competition. "I am pleased and honored to have been chosen as the winner of this year's shearing celebration. I hope in the future, despite the changes of time, this ancient tradition can survive for the future generations," Gachung said.

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A Tibetan herder shears a sheep in Gerze county, Xizang autonomous region. SONAM RINCHEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Generating solar energy nonstop without sunlight

LANZHOU — In Guazhou county of Northwest China's Gansu province, a solar thermal energy storage power station can generate power for 24 hours nonstop.

Its main project has begun commissioning and will be put into operation by the end of this year, according to the China Three Gorges Corporation.

The solar thermal energy storage power station can generate electricity with or without direct sunlight, thanks to heliostats and molten salt, while achieving stable all-day power output.

Two adjacent heat-absorbing towers, sharing one turbine generator, are settled in the power station. Beneath the towers, heliostat arrays are installed, covering a lighting area of 800,000 square meters. Notably, the heliostats can pivot and follow the direction of sunlight, like a sunflower tracking the sun through the course of the day.

Assisted by such a function, which turns sunlight into green energy, the power station attracts the sunlight into the two heat-absorbing towers to power up the turbine generator.

With a very high definition, the heliostats can reach 94 percent reflection efficiency, which reflects more sunlight to the heat-absorbing tower, greatly improving the efficiency at power generation. At the foot of the heat-absorbing towers, there are two huge storage tanks filled with molten salt at 300 C and 500 C.

The molten salt in its liquid form can store several times more heat

than water. The solar energy collected by the heat-absorbing towers during the day is stored in the form of heat in the salt, achieving a stable and continuous power output for 24 hours.

Once in operation, the power station will serve as the basic regulation power supply, forming a clean energy base in a total installed capacity of 700,000 kilowatts together with the surrounding photovoltaic and wind power. The annual electricity generation will reach 1.8 billion kilowatt-hours, cutting about 1.53 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

Since China introduced new energy bases in its vast deserts, including the Gobi, large-scale solar thermal power generation development has also kicked off.

Solar thermal power generation integrates energy storage and power generation, which is one of the effective means for new energy to replace traditional energy safely and reliably, said Hu Wenping, an official at the China Electric Power Planning and Engineering Institute.

According to a blue book on China's solar thermal power industry in 2023, the total installed capacity of the country's solar thermal generating units above megawatt-level reached 588 megawatts, accounting for 7.8 percent of the global cumulative installed capacity of solar thermal power generation.

XINHUA



A worker carries a fish farmed at the Yellow River Economic Fish and Aquatic Germplasm Resources Field in Helan county, Ningxia Hui autonomous region. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Ponds in Helan county are no longer barren

Several marine products being raised across fishing farms

By HU DONGMEI in Yinchuan and ZHENG CAIXIONG

Years ago, ponds in Helan county were barren saline-alkaline marshes. Now many marine products, including freshwater fish, are being raised across a myriad of fish farms in the county in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region.

The county government has found a new path to curb its saline-alkaline land to develop its economy through fishing, allowing the aquatic product farming industry to shine in the inland region.

According to Dong Yuehui, director of the Yellow River Economic Fish and Aquatic Germplasm Resources Field, more than 5 metric tons of rainbow trout and dozens of fish species, including carp, grass carp, mandarin fish and sturgeon, are being raised in 20 huge circular aquaculture farms in the field.

"It is the first time rainbow trout are being introduced for aquaculture in Yinchuan, capital of Ningxia. And in addition to Yellow River fish, we are trying to breed various new types of fish and shrimp in the field," Dong said, adding that giant freshwater shrimp have also been introduced for the first time this year.

In the beginning, the new varieties were raised in the farm's circular breeding pools for temporary cultivation, while controlling the circulating water through full automation to regulate the water temperature and oxygen content to ensure the growth rate.

"Now rainbow trout are gaining weight, with some fish weighing more than 500 grams, and can be sold," Dong said.

After October, a great deal of rainbow trout will enter local markets and arrive on dining tables, he said.

Many aquatic products raised in the field are also being sold in the Xizang and Inner Mongolia autonomous regions, and the provinces of Gansu and Qinghai, he added.

Located in Helan's Sishilidian village of Changxin township, the farm, which was built in 2021, mainly engages in the standardized reproduction, breeding and protection of the germplasm resources of Yellow River fish.

"The entire workshop has adopted a fully automated, factory-based water circulating aquaculture model, and the filtered fish manure and feed are transported to the rice fields to become bio-fertilizers. And through such circular aquaculture, water consumption can be reduced by 30 to 40 percent," he said.

Qiang Zuozhou, another executive in charge of the field, said Ningxia has a wide distribution of saline-alkaline lands that are suitable for raising aquatic products.

The soil salinization in the Yellow

River irrigation area mostly belongs to the saline soil distribution type, with salinity ranging from 2 to 18, and pH values between 7.7 and 9.3.

The development of aquatic product farming has obvious advantages, making the taste of the fish, shrimp and crabs raised in Ningxia even more delicious, he said.

Also, the South American white shrimp has become the most successful domesticated aquatic product variety in Ningxia, he added. The annual output of South American white shrimp is expected to hit more than 60 tons in Helan this year, he said.

Raising fish and shrimp in saline-alkaline land not only revitalizes resources, but also has broad market prospects.

To further promote the development of "land-based aquatic products", fish farms in Helan have also optimized deep processing and extended the industrial chain, Qiang said. They are churning out fish balls and fish cakes, as well as pre-cooked vegetable production lines, he said.

Yu Fang, deputy director of Helan County Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, said the suitable aquaculture area in the county has remained stable at more than 38.66 square kilometers, accounting for 11.6 percent of the total in Ningxia.

"Helan's total fishery output is 63,500 tons, representing 30.6 percent of the total of Ningxia, helping build the county into a national

demonstration zone for healthy and ecological aquaculture," Yu said.

"The county's total annual output value of fishery has reached 817 million yuan (\$113.47 million), accounting for 15.9 percent of Helan's total output value of agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery, making it the largest county in terms of fishery industrial development in Ningxia," she added.

Yu also said that the breeding area of aquatic products in Helan is now more than 8 million square meters, accounting for 20.7 percent of the county's total fish farming areas.

The main varieties include South American white shrimp, largemouth black bass, spotted catfish and river crab.

Meanwhile, many sea fish and aquatic products, including large yellow croakers, green crab, mandarin fish, fragrant fish and spotted shrimp are also being raised in Helan, and they are all growing well, she said.

"The aquatic products from Helan are selling well not only in local markets, but also in Xi'an in Shaanxi province, Lanzhou in Gansu province and surrounding major cities, playing an important role in helping local farmers increase their incomes," she said.

To expand aquaculture, Helan will further deepen cooperation with multiple domestic aquatic research institutions and universities, and strengthen the scientific and technological innovation awareness of fishery breeding enterprises.

"Great efforts will be made to achieve technological breakthroughs in the breeding of saline-alkaline tolerant varieties and the research and development of specialized feed nutrition formulas for saline-alkaline water environments in the following months," she added.

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Macao children benefit from Tianjin festival

TIANJIN — Once the plane touched down, Ngan Chin-hong, 65, wasted no time in taking a large group of young artists straight to a children's art center in Tianjin, where she reunited with many old friends.

Ngan, chairperson of the Macao Children Arts Troupe, led two teams from the Macao Special Administrative Region to participate in the five-day 2024 Tianjin International Children's Art Festival, which concluded on July 26. It was the 11th time they participated in the event. "The children were eager to sign up, and we selected the best of the best, finally settling on 40 people from the art group of over 700 to rehearse new songs and dances," she said.

On stage, the children took on the roles of little birds, sharing the story of Macao's efforts to protect its ecological environment and endangered species. They also performed a variety of songs and dances to highlight the vibrant scenes of Macao since its return to the motherland in 1999.

Team member Wong Hio-wai made many new friends and swapped WeChat account details with them.

"I have seen many performances



Members of the Macao Children Arts Troupe stage a performance in Tianjin on July 23 during the 2024 Tianjin International Children's Art Festival. XINHUA

by children from the Chinese mainland and abroad, and I have benefited a lot," the 12-year-old said.

Ngan believes that, through the festival, children from Macao can start a journey of friendship and heart-to-heart interaction, promoting in-depth exchanges of artistic achievement between the two places,

as well as appreciating the mainland's development.

She said their artistic exchanges with the Chinese mainland started in the 1980s, when many mainland artists came to Macao, injecting momentum into the development of art and culture.

In 1998, children's art troupes from

Beijing, Tianjin and the provinces of Yunnan, Guangdong and Jilin were invited to Macao to perform. That same year, Ngan took troupe members, including singer Long Chi-lam, to attend the first edition of the TICAF.

"Many team members got more opportunities by attending this art festival. Long was later invited to the Spring Festival Gala and became well-known on the Chinese mainland," Ngan said.

Many former members of the troupe still maintain close connections with the mainland. Some of them have grown up, entered famous Chinese mainland schools and excelled in their respective fields, according to Ngan.

During their trip, the Macao children also climbed the Great Wall, tasted Tianjin delicacies and learned how to make lacquer fans and fragrant sachets.

"The experiences are novel and unforgettable," said Lei Chong-ian, a 12-year-old participant who added that he hopes to attend the event again next time.

XINHUA

WORLD

Rain hinders rescue efforts as death toll rises in India

CHORALMALA, India — Soldiers and rescuers worked through slush and rocks under steady rain, looking for survivors and searching for bodies in the hills of India's Kerala state on Wednesday, a day after more than 167 people were killed in monsoon landslides.

Nearly 1,600 people had been rescued from the hillside villages and tea and cardamom estates in Wayanad district, and 225 were still missing, authorities said on Wednesday. They said at least 167 people died and 195 were injured, while the local Asianet news TV channel put the death toll at 230.

Chinese Ambassador to India Xu Feihong said his thoughts are with the bereaved families.

"Deeply saddened to hear about the tragic landslides in #Wayanad, #Kerala. Our thoughts and hearts are with the people there and bereaved families," he wrote on X.

Heavy rain in Kerala, one of India's most attractive tourist destinations, led to the landslides early



Indian rescuers cross a temporary bridge to reach a landslide site in Wayanad district, Kerala state, on Wednesday. FRANCIS MASCARENHAS / REUTERS

on Tuesday, sending torrents of mud, water and tumbling boulders downhill and burying or sweeping people away to their deaths as they slept.

Experts said the area had been receiving heavy rain in the past two weeks that had softened the soil and that extremely heavy rainfall on Monday triggered the landslides.

The Indian Army said it rescued 1,600 people and has begun the process of constructing an alternative bridge after the main bridge linking the worst affected area of Mundakkai to the nearest town of Chooralmala was destroyed.

Near the site where the bridge was washed away, a land excavator was slowly removing trees and boulders from a mound of debris.

"We are quite sure there are multiple bodies here," said Hamsa T.A., a fire and rescue worker, pointing to the debris. "There were many houses here, people living inside have been missing."

Aparajit Chakraborty in New Delhi contributed to this story.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Report: Nearly 1,000 deaths at Native schools

By MAY ZHOU in Houston
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A US report has confirmed that at least 973 American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian children died while attending federal Indian boarding schools between 1819 and 1969 but acknowledged that "the actual number of children who died while in Indian boarding schools is greater".

Many of the children were buried in at least 74 marked and unmarked burial sites at 65 former schools across the country, according to the report released Tuesday by the US Interior Department. The actual number of children who died and the number of potential burial sites are probably greater, the report said.

The Indian boarding school system was established by the US government to "civilize" and assimilate Native Americans into Anglo American culture. Indian children were forcefully taken from their homes and put into the boarding schools.

The Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative under the Interior Department has identified by name 18,624 Indian children who entered the school system. A total of 417 boarding schools at 451 specific sites have been found and listed in the report. It also identified 1,025 other institutions "that did not satisfy the four criteria used for this investigation but were nevertheless used to advance similar assimilation and education policy goals".

In a letter presenting the report to Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, the first Native American Cabinet secretary, the Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Bryan Newland, who led the investigation, wrote: "For the first time in the history of the country, the US Government is accounting for its role in operating Indian boarding schools to forcibly assimilate Indian children, and working to set us on a path to heal from the wounds inflicted by those schools."

Newland described one piece of history related to the schools. "On December 28, 1890, the US military entered Third Mesa of Hopi and took 104 children from their families so they could be sent to the Keams Canyon Boarding School. Four years later, on November 25, 1894, two US cavalry companies with rapid-fire artillery guns arrived again at Third Mesa to arrest 19 Hopi leaders as prisoners of war after they refused to send additional Hopi children to the school."

Newland said those Indian leaders were imprisoned for almost one year on Alcatraz Island, a former US military installation in San Francisco Bay.

The report also said that the US government appropriated more than \$23.3 billion in inflation-adjusted dollars between 1871 and 1969 for the federal Indian boarding school system and other similar institutions and associated assimilation policies.

After removal from their Indian tribes and families, many children

sent to the boarding schools didn't return home, the report said.

Indian children in boarding schools were punished for using their own native language in the schools. Some suffered sexual abuse. The report shared some accounts of the boarding school experiences in the project "The Road to Healing".

“For the first time in the history of the country, the US Government is accounting for its role in operating Indian boarding schools to forcibly assimilate Indian children ...”

US Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Bryan Newland

"To this day I can still see that nun standing and she said, 'Here,' she gave me a bag and I said, 'Oh, what is it?' 'Oh, it's from your brother.' 'Oh, is he here?' 'No, he's dead.' I could still see her standing there and I was still a little girl. And I thanked her," a Minnesota participant was quoted as saying.

"I experience feelings of abandonment because I think of my mother standing on that sidewalk as we were loaded into the green bus to be taken to a boarding school. And I can see it — still have the image of my mom burned in my brain and in my heart where she was crying. What does a mother think? She was helpless," said an Arizona participant.

"Unfortunately, Wrangell was a place that attracted pedophiles and many matrons, men and women, perpetrated themselves upon little boys and girls. And what I witnessed in the boys dorm were matrons sodomizing boys in their beds or in the bathrooms. We saw girls going home in the middle of the school year pregnant, and a lot of these children were like 11 and 12, 13 years old," a participant from Alaska stated.

The report cited studies showing that Native children who were separated from their parents suffered both physically and mentally and have had higher rates of suicide and substance abuse compared with the general population.

The report said the US government "should issue a formal acknowledgment of its role in adopting a national policy of forced assimilation of Indian children and carrying out this policy through the removal and confinement of Indian children from their families and Indian Tribes and the Native Hawaiian Community and placement in the Federal Indian boarding school system".

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Tariff hike fears drive Chinese EV sales

By JULIAN SHEA in London
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The surge in Chinese electric vehicle sales across Europe in June was mainly driven by looming tariff threats, newly released data reveal.

According to analytics company Dataforce, Chinese carmakers captured a record 11 percent of the European EV market in June. The figures, which include the United Kingdom, show that about 23,000 EVs were registered in June, marking a 72 percent increase from the previous month as consumers raced to beat anticipated price hikes within the European Union.

In early July, the EU announced plans to impose extra duties of up to 37.6 percent on Chinese EV imports because of what it called "unfair" state subsidies benefiting manufacturers in a keenly contested market.

Data from Dataforce further highlight that 40 percent of the surge in imports came from dealers, rather than consumers, stocking up on vehicles ahead of

the tariff implementation.

Chinese state-owned SAIC experienced the greatest uptick in sales, shifting just under 13,400 units in June, as opposed to rival BYD's sales of just under 4,000.

SAIC vehicles are subject to the harshest tariff of 38 percent, compared with the 17 percent on BYD.

Chinese EV imports to the United States have been subject to 100 percent tariffs since the start of the year, killing sales there, but there is still huge demand in the UK, which took 12 percent of vehicles, and the EU, with 36 percent, according to Chinese trade specialist website Soapbox.

Surging prices

The Guardian cited research by Spanish bank BBVA showing that a Chinese car in Europe was up to twice as costly as in the domestic market, with some vehicles, such as BYD's Dolphin, selling for almost three times the price.

In Italy, sales incentives in June to increase EV purchases were all snapped up in less than 9 hours, the

Italian government said, with most interest coming from individual buyers.

One consequence of the tariff standoff could be an increase in investment by Chinese EV makers in Europe, as a way round the additional fees.

The BBC reports that BYD's first European factory is already being built in Hungary and production could start before the end of next year, SAIC is reportedly looking at sites, and another manufacturer, Chery, has signed a partnership contract to start manufacturing vehicles in Spain.

"It's a well-architected plan to encourage companies to shift their investments to the EU, instead of relying on exporting from China," said Bill Russo, CEO of strategy and investment organization Automobility in Shanghai.

"The fact that some companies are taxed higher than others is a signal that they will make the penalty higher or lower based on the degree the company is committed to investing in the EU."



Tears and tributes

People take part in a vigil near the scene in Hart Street, Southport, England, on Tuesday, where three children were stabbed to death and 10 others were injured in a knife attack at a dance school on Monday. A 17-year-old boy has been arrested.

JAMES SPEAKMAN VIA AP

Strengthened China-Africa ties urged ahead of summit

By EDITH MUTETHYA

in Nairobi, Kenya
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As China and Africa reflect on their achievements since the inauguration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, or FOCAC, in 2000, experts emphasize the need for attention to further solidify bilateral relationship.

During a virtual FOCAC dialogue hosted by the Ghana-based Africa-China Centre for Policy and Advisory on Tuesday, they highlighted the upcoming FOCAC summit in Beijing from Sept 4 to 6 as a good opportunity to enhance China-Africa relations.

The meeting will be the fourth time it is held in the form of a summit, via which the two sides will celebrate friendship, explore cooperation and chart the course for the future, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said on Tuesday. David Monyae, director of the

Centre for Africa-China Studies at the University of Johannesburg Confucius Institute, said African countries should pay attention to China's resolve articulated at the recent third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. The country aims to drive its economy with new technologies such as artificial intelligence, advanced materials, biotech and green energy.

The continent should take advantage of China's technological advancements, he said, suggesting that Africa could assemble electric vehicles locally to significantly benefit the continent.

Monyae emphasized the need for increased collaboration between China and Africa in infrastructure development through the Belt and Road Initiative, as Africa moves forward with the implementation of the Continental Free Trade Area.

"Africa still faces a huge infrastructure finance deficit (of) over

\$100 billion," he said. "African leaders must negotiate infrastructure deals with China, focusing on huge infrastructure that enhances regional integration. Priority must be given to infrastructure that does not speak to only one country but one that speaks across countries within the economic regions."

Stacey Links, an assistant professor at Leiden University in the Netherlands, said research should continue to be the cornerstone for shaping policies on China-Africa relations.

Dispelling misinformation
"A lot of misinformation around China-Africa relations is slowly changing because of the research that has been done," Links said.

She said research will help in identifying gaps, challenges and risks and in recommending improvements so that FOCAC remains steadfast and strong. Going forward, she said China

and Africa should consolidate their existing areas of cooperation such as green energy, agriculture and infrastructure development and ensure these initiatives are effectively implemented.

Zhu Yaxiong, an associate professor at Zhejiang Normal University in China's Zhejiang province, said China-Africa cooperation under FOCAC should look at the continent's pressing needs such as green energy, agriculture and infrastructure development.

Highlighting China's own development trajectory, Zhu said China is competent to assist African countries in advancing their economies. This includes modernizing agriculture and generating employment opportunities, he said.

"China has successfully achieved food security for its population. If African countries can adopt scientific approaches to agriculture, they too can ensure food sufficiency for their people," he said.



The ruins of a building that was part of a Native American boarding school on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation in Mission, South Dakota, are shown on Oct 15, 2022. Federal officials with the Interior Department called on the US government Tuesday to apologize for a nationwide system of boarding schools in which Native children faced abuse and neglect. MATTHEW BROWN / AP

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.

South Korea faces existential issue: OECD

The South Korean economy is poised to continue its recovery in the latter half of this year but the country must address its "existential issue", which stems from problems such as low productivity and a declining population, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development said on July 11.

"We publish surveys every two years, but this one is about an existential issue for (South) Korea," said Vincent Koen, the OECD's country studies division chief in the economics department, during a press briefing at the Ministry of Economy and Finance building in the city of Sejong.

One urgent issue South Korea must address is the population decline and its notoriously low fertility rate, according to the OECD Economic Surveys: Korea 2024 report released that day.

"Supporting people to have the number of children they desire would dampen the projected population decline, while lengthening working lives and welcoming more foreign workers would counteract the adverse effects of aging," the report noted.

For this, Koen also called for structural reforms in the labor market, improvements in labor and family policies, and changes in societal norms to counter population decline.



Empty cradles in a newborn room at a public postpartum care center in Seoul, South Korea, on December 26. YONHAP

The report also called for a "decisive upgrade" in South Korea's export-oriented growth model to bolster declining productivity.

Citing the gap between large and small companies as a key reason for falling productivity, the OECD urged reforms to create a level playing field for competition. Stricter management of subsidies and benefits for small and medium-sized companies as well as streamlined regulations to enhance market competition are recommended, the report said.

Meanwhile, the OECD survey report forecast a 2.6 percent growth outlook for the South Korean economy this year, driven by improved exports and strengthening domestic demand in the second half.

"With inflation falling back and renewed demand for computer chips powering a wave of investment in AI across the world, exports are again driving growth," Koen said.

For 2025, the OECD expected that South Korea's economic growth would slow to 2.2 percent.

Unlike exports, private consumption in South Korea has been weak in the first half of the year, pulled down by high interest rates and weak real wage growth. The OECD anticipates the domestic market to rebound in the latter half.

"(South Korea's) elevated debt servicing burdens and accumulated inflation will continue to weigh on private consumption and investment in the short term, but domestic demand should strengthen from the second half of 2024," the report stated.

THE KOREA HERALD

On fire



Artists watch a firebreather perform during a procession to mark Bonalu festival at Akkanna Madanna temple in Hyderabad in the Indian state of Telangana, on Monday. Bonalu is a festival and a public holiday in Telangana in honor of Goddess Mahakali, who wishes for health and happiness. NOAH SEELAM / AFP

PLUGGING GAPS

Lack of local expertise, unsupportive education system cited as reasons behind foreign worker rise

An increasing number of foreign nationals are seeking permits to work in Bangladesh because of a lack of skilled managers and an education system not tailored to meet industrialization in the country.

A total of 16,303 applications from nationals of 101 countries were approved by the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority in the fiscal year of 2022-23, up about 8 percent year-on-year.

Of the cases, 6,256 are for new work permits while 10,047 are renewals, according to the annual report of the state-run investment promotion agency.

In 2021-22, 15,128 applicants from 106 countries received the permits, which is a staggering 87 percent increase from that in the fiscal year preceding it. Of the figure, 7,790 were for new work permits and 7,338 renewals.

Government agencies such as the Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority, the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority, the NGO Affairs Bureau and some ministries grant permits to foreign nationals to work on projects.

For example, as of June 2024, over 1,800 permits were issued for foreign nationals to work inside export processing zones.

Nationals from India secured the highest number of work permits at 3,159 in the fiscal year of 2022-23, followed by those from China (2,339), Sri Lanka (759) and Belarus (727).

Industry insiders said foreigners were hired based on their skills and on their past records of being industrious as they can contribute to outstanding outcomes for industrial development.

Mohsina Yasmin, executive member of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority, said

“Even though local professionals can be hired at a lower pay, investors recruit foreign professionals offering high remunerations due to their professionalism and skills.”

Khondaker Golam Moazzem,
research director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue

the professionals were meeting the skills gap in the national workforce of the industrial sector, abiding by the laws of Bangladesh and paying taxes.

The authority provides work permits according to the guidelines for skilled technicians and managerial level positions as they can help generate skills for manpower, Mohsina said.

She pointed out that the agency issued work permits solely to those foreign nationals who were engaged in registered industrial projects, commercial offices and other organizations.

The agency does not maintain data relating to the total number of foreign workers in Bangladesh, she said.

Abdul Matlub Ahmad, president of the India and Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said Bangladeshi investors, especially in the garment and automobile sectors, usually hire highly skilled Indian engineers and managers.

"Besides, there are a lot of Indian entrepreneurs of small and medium enterprises who avail long-term work permits instead of short-term visas for having to regularly travel to Bangladesh."

Ahmad said he had also hired six highly skilled Indian engineers for his Nitil Niloy Group to develop the skills of local engineers and managers.



Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the yearly increase in the number of foreign nationals indicate that the labor market of Bangladesh offered flexibility and satisfaction.

"However, a continuous rise of foreign nationals in the industrial sector was a clear indication that the local graduates and professionals are not as skilled as the foreigners."

"Even though local professionals can be hired at a lower pay, investors recruit foreign professionals offering high remunerations due to their professionalism and skills."

The economist also said this trend raises questions and sends a negative impression about the knowledge being imparted by the educational institutions in the country.

Moazzem suggested building skilled manpower by ensuring quality education to reduce dependency on foreign nationals and to reduce pressure on the forex reserve.

Ferdous Ara Begum, chief executive officer of think tank Business Initiative Leading Development, blamed the skills gap in the local workforce and a lack of quality education at the tertiary level.

Besides, public university graduates tend to leave the country after gaining skills as they do not get the facilities that meet their expectations although the government spends a large amount of money on their education, she alleged.

Ferdous Ara also said there were allegations that some foreign nationals come to Bangladesh without job visas and work on a temporary basis.

"It is really tough to identify these temporary workers who come under tourist visas."

THE DAILY STAR



Joy ride

Tourists ride camels at Clifton Beach in Karachi, Pakistan, on July 25. Karachi is the most prominent coastal city of Pakistan. The Clifton beach in Karachi is now home to multiple leisure activities including camel rides, buggy rides, horse rides, plastic plane flying among others.

FAREED KHAN / AP

Volunteers tap AI to fight illegal wildlife trade

Exposing illicit wildlife trade that thrives on e-commerce platforms is like a game of whack-a-mole, even with the use of artificial intelligence tools.

Illicit online listings of the likes of ivory, pangolin scales or even live animals are often disguised using emoji, other languages and code words such as "rare collectibles" that make them difficult to detect, said Jayasri Srikantan, who spearheads a volunteer effort under wildlife conservation group World Wildlife Fund to flag illegal trade to the authorities.

But an AI model is being developed to assist WWF's volunteers — called cyber spotters — to evaluate flagged listings on e-commerce platforms with greater accuracy.

The system, trained on thousands of wildlife product samples and their estimated black market prices, helps to prevent false positives, ensuring the group's credibility with law enforcement partners.

The program's accuracy rate is about 90 percent for now, said Jayasri, adding that new code words and trends are regularly added to the system to keep it up to date with current trends.

Deployed in 2023, the WWF's Cyber Spotter AI model is part of an initiative to fund and kick-start AI projects in Singapore to spur AI adoption, led by national AI program AI Singapore.

The AI system, which has been in the works since 2022, is designed to help improve the accuracy of reports compiled quarterly by the WWF and by its pool of more than 400 volunteers in Singapore, who trawl local e-commerce platforms for hours each month for signs of illegal wildlife trade, said Jayasri, WWF Singapore's head of education and outreach.

Images and text from postings flagged by the cyber spotters are uploaded to an AI model, which analyzes text and photos for clues of illegally traded wildlife and their products.

The team needs to avoid flagging replicas by mistake and must look out for clues in each listing's images, text and prices to ascertain if it truly involves an exploited animal. Listings that have a high mix of these elements could be flagged by the software as genuinely illegal.

"It's trickier than it sounds," Jayasri said. Spotting ivory, for instance, is not as easy as it seems, as Schreger lines — unique patterns found within an elephant's bones that guarantee its authenticity — are tough to discern through often blurry images online.

Some sellers brazenly list protected wildlife products online, but others employ tactics to conceal their illicit offerings, Jayasri said. These tactics include using emoji or code words that hint at the creature being sold, or employing emoji representing the animal, which all "make it challenging for our team to identify genuine listings accurately."

Ivory replicas can be sold at low prices while real elephant ivory is more likely to be listed in the hundreds of dollars, Jayasri said.

"But sellers can play all sorts of tricks to slip under the radar, like lowering the prices or using other code words so that they aren't suspected. The AI needs to consider all of this."

The system does not replace the work of volunteers, who conduct final checks on the reports before they are submitted.

Jayasri said the team here flags tens of thousands of listings each year in an effort to prevent the illegal trade — the second leading cause of wildlife loss after deforestation worldwide, and among the world's most profitable crime sectors.

The end goal, Jayasri said, is to fully automate the system so that an AI model is able to trawl websites for illegal listings and compile a report on its own, but the technology has some way to go before achieving this level of autonomy.

The international agency aims to introduce the system to its other branches soon, she said.

THE STRAITS TIMES

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Axis is central to capital's appeal

An ensemble of landmarks representing the backbone of Beijing was envisioned centuries ago and still plays vital role in modern life, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports.



Top: A statue of a water-harnessing beast unearthed from the Zhengyang Bridge ruins. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY. Above: Southern Section Road Archaeological Sites, a component of the Beijing Central Axis. PROVIDED BY BEIJING MUNICIPAL OFFICE FOR CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF BEIJING CENTRAL AXIS TO CHINA DAILY

Researchers unearth bridge to reveal past

By **WANG KAIHAO**
wangkaihao@chinadaily.com.cn

This archaeological research was an important preparation process for the successful application of UNESCO World Heritage Site status for the Beijing Central Axis. "The Beijing Central Axis is not only a cluster of separate buildings," explains Deng Chao, director of the department of historic monuments under the National Cultural Heritage Administration. "The roads and bridges along the axis connect the heritage components and form a continuous entity." However, compared with many magnificent architectural structures rising along the northern section of the axis, the southern section needs to be better clarified in the public's eyes as it has a smaller number of grand buildings, as Deng notes.

Archaeology thus plays a crucial role in helping people understand the values of this section. On the Zhengyang Bridge site and other spots along the southern section of the Central Axis, Zhang's team has been devoted to unveiling some crucial but long-forgotten chapters of the past. In the Zhushikou area near the southern end of Qianmen Street, archaeologists found drainage ditches of the Qing Dynasty, the style of which is identical to those of royal resorts of that time. Remains of the Tianjiao Bridge, which is more than 1 kilometer to the south of Zhengyang Bridge, were also discovered. Thanks to the archaeological work, the southern section road, which was the route used for national rituals and ceremonies during the Ming and Qing dynasties, was gradually resurrected. Zhang's team found as many as seven layers of overlapped road foundations. She says that the bridge is still there, intact and well-sealed beneath the busy traffic of today.

A bridge made of bricks and stones, as well as a gosse wing-shaped revetment, was discovered. "We could only refer to ancient documents and paintings to imagine what Zhengyang Bridge was like," says Zhang Lifang, an associate researcher at the Beijing Archaeological Research Institute who leads the excavation. "Archaeology now provides a clear lineage of its evolution."

The bridge was first constructed with wood and reinforced with stones and bricks in 1489, according to records in a Ming Dynasty file. In the early 20th century, the arch bridge was widened and flattened to facilitate traffic. Later, the moat was filled. "We found cement under its arches, which shows vestiges of renovation in the early 20th century," Zhang says.

During its discovery, the bridge was still safeguarded by a 3-meter-long stone statue of a mythical water-harnessing beast. The lion-headed, tiger-bodied beast is covered with scales and decorated with auspicious clouds on some parts. Zhang says this remarkable statue echoes the bridge's exceptional status.

"The ancient city is returning in a new heritage landscape." JIANG BO, vice-president of the Chinese national committee for the International Council on Monuments and Sites, says: "Since the initiation of the World Heritage application project, Beijing residents have revitalized their memories and devoted themselves wholeheartedly to the protection of urban cultural heritage with unprecedented enthusiasm."

Those taking a trip to central Beijing are often recommended to ascend Jingshan Hill and be treated to a rare bird's-eye view of the capital's old city. Its summit offers a panorama of the Forbidden City, with its palaces in vermilion and imperial yellow laid out in all its sublimity.

When turning around and facing north, the equilibrium of symmetry rooted in traditional Chinese aesthetics and beliefs is more readily apparent — the Hall of Imperial Longevity resting downhill, beyond it the Dianmen Inner and Outer Streets splitting the view in half, further extending to the Bell and Drum Towers.

Such structural balance can be found throughout Beijing's old city, from the Yongdingmen Gate in the south running through the Tiananmen Square Complex and the Forbidden City, up to the Bell and Drum Towers in the north, stretching a total of 7.8 kilometers.

This is the Beijing Central Axis, celebrated as "the backbone of Beijing." It denotes the sequencing of UNESCO World Heritage Site status for the Beijing Central Axis. "The Beijing Central Axis is not only a cluster of separate buildings," explains Deng Chao, director of the department of historic monuments under the National Cultural Heritage Administration. "The roads and bridges along the axis connect the heritage components and form a continuous entity."

However, compared with many magnificent architectural structures rising along the northern section of the axis, the southern section needs to be better clarified in the public's eyes as it has a smaller number of grand buildings, as Deng notes. Archaeology thus plays a crucial role in helping people understand the values of this section.

On Saturday, at the 46th session of the World Heritage Committee in New Delhi, India, "Beijing Central Axis: A Building Ensemble Exhibiting the Ideal Order of the Chinese Capital" was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Covering an area of 589 hectares and a buffer zone of 4,542 hectares, the entry, with 15 components, marks China's 59th World Heritage Site and Beijing's eighth.

Neutrality and harmony

According to Iyu Zhou, director of the National Heritage Center at Tsinghua University, the planning concept of the Beijing Central Axis originates from the philosophical ideals of neutrality and harmony, and the cultural tradition of "choosing the center" within Chinese civilization. "It serves as a material embodiment of the traditional Chinese worldview, values, and concept of time and space, carrying strong symbolic significance," Iyu says.

The concepts behind the Beijing Central Axis date back to *Kaogongji* (*Book of Diverse Crafts*), written before 221 BC, which details the principles of capital city planning. During the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24), the book was rediscovered and incorporated into the Confucian classic *Zhouli* (*Rites of Zhou*), becoming the orthodox Confucian thinking regarding the ideal paradigm of the capital city.

The Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) selected in the 13th century the site for what is today's Beijing to build its capital, Dadu. A datum point was set on the east bank of today's Shichahai Lake, where the Central Platform and the Central Tower were established. Extending southward from the Central Platform, a preliminary axis was determined, and the palace city was constructed on it. With the Central Platform at the center, a rectangle grid was designed to be the boundary running through the Tiananmen Square Complex and the Forbidden City, up to the Bell and Drum Towers in the north, stretching a total of 7.8 kilometers.

Based on the guidelines prescribed in *Kaogongji*, ancient Chinese built the temples, altars and government buildings that are aligned with or placed symmetrically along the Central Axis.

Many building locations match accounts in the book, including "court in the front, market at the back", corresponding to the imperial court, the Forbidden City, and the markets by the Bell and Drum Towers, as well as "an ancestral temple on the left, an altar of land and grain on the right", denoting the Imperial Ancestral Temple and the Altar of Land and Grain, located symmetrically on the east and west sides of the Central Axis.

"Throughout the city's construction phases, the Central Axis commanded the entire city's layout, setting a symmetrical design. This is particularly significant in reflecting the characteristics of our culture and aesthetics," Iyu says. "This is why today, when we stand on the Central Axis, taking photos or filming footage, we can find countless angles that illustrate this centuality, symmetry and order."



A bird's-eye view of the major part of the Beijing Central Axis that runs 7.8 kilometers north-south through the heart of the capital city. The ensemble of building complexes and archaeological sites was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List on Saturday. PROVIDED BY BEIJING MUNICIPAL OFFICE FOR CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF BEIJING CENTRAL AXIS TO CHINA DAILY

International Council on Monuments and Sites. With the downfall of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), the Central Axis went through functional transformations that enhanced public access. Beginning with the Altar of Land and Grain in 1914, the sites were gradually opened to the public as parks or museums. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Tiananmen Square was expanded and added with a complex of public facilities, adhering to the planning philosophy of the Beijing Central Axis. The Central Axis provides a testimony to the transformation of China from a dynastic rule system to a modern state. Since 1978, conservation projects and archaeological research on the heritage sites have not ceased, and areas allowing public access have been gradually increasing. In the 12 years leading up to the inscription, policy documents were

long been emphasized," Jiang says. "With the downfall of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), the Central Axis went through functional transformations that enhanced public access. Beginning with the Altar of Land and Grain in 1914, the sites were gradually opened to the public as parks or museums. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Tiananmen Square was expanded and added with a complex of public facilities, adhering to the planning philosophy of the Beijing Central Axis. The Central Axis provides a testimony to the transformation of China from a dynastic rule system to a modern state. Since 1978, conservation projects and archaeological research on the heritage sites have not ceased, and areas allowing public access have been gradually increasing. In the 12 years leading up to the inscription, policy documents were

issued to enhance preservation and management, environmental upkeep, and public involvement, including a three-year action plan from 2020 to 2023, the Regulations on the Conservation of Beijing Central Axis Cultural Heritage, and the Conservation and Management Plan for Beijing Central Axis (2022-2035).

Preservation efforts Zhao Yan, a resident living in the hutong (alleyway) near Dianmen Inner Street, says that she has observed changes gradually taking place in her neighborhood, particularly thriving commerce and environmental improvements. "With the heritage conservation efforts, the street has gradually regained its former glory. The sides of the street are now teeming with shops. At night, the beautiful light shows attract tourists from home and abroad. The street has become so vibrant," Zhao says.

"Before, the charm of the hutong was mostly in the warmth among the neighbors. But with the improvement in environmental quality and the addition of various amenities, many elderly residents who had left the area years ago have now moved back."

Her family members have been actively involved in the preservation of the Central Axis, with her parents running the front market at the back of the street. "My roots and my family are here. I love this area deeply and I have fervently wished for the Beijing Central Axis to be included as a World Heritage Site, so that people from all around the world can get to know my home," she adds.

Apart from the community volunteer programs, anyone with an interest in Beijing's cultural heritage can contribute to the preservation cause through their mobile phones. To encourage public awareness and participation, the Beijing Cultural Heritage Bureau, Beijing Municipal Office for Conservation and Management of Beijing Central Axis, and technology company Tencent together launched a WeChat mini-program, which allows users to learn about Central Axis' history and values through gameplay and virtual tours.

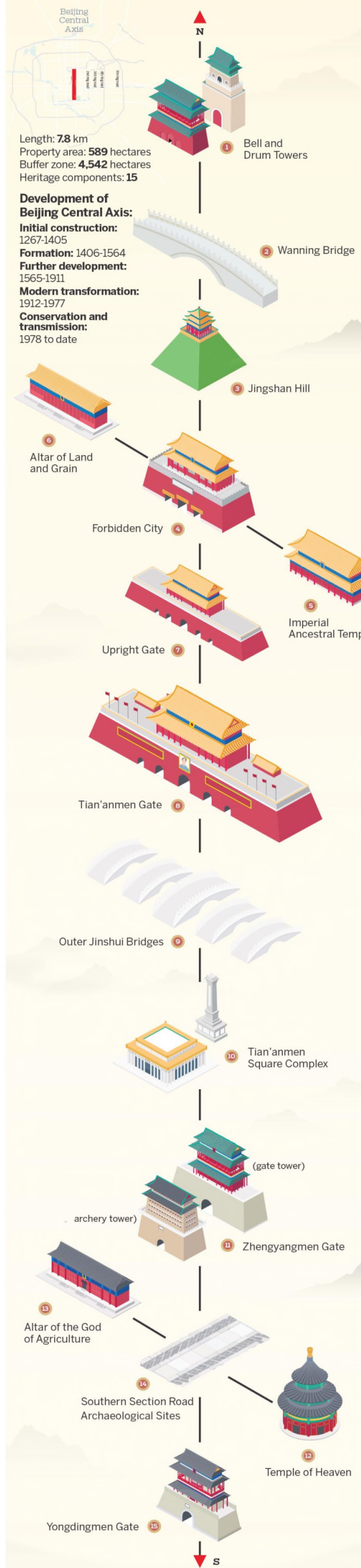
"We will also enhance international cultural exchanges, uphold the Global Civilization Initiative, and contribute profound and lasting cultural strength to the building of a community with a shared future for mankind."

Wang Kaihao contributed to this story.

Contact the writer at chengyuezhu@chinadaily.com.cn

MAP OF HISTORY

The Beijing Central Axis runs for 7.8 kilometers north-south through the heart of the old city. The initial construction of the axis dates back to the 13th century, and it was fully formed by the 15th century. It is the result of continuous refinement over seven centuries, an ensemble of building complexes and archaeological sites that defines the overall layout of the old city.



TEXT BY WANG KAIHAO / CHINA DAILY; GRAPHICS BY SU JINGBO AND LI XUOTIAN / CHINA DAILY



Historical landmarks along the Beijing Central Axis include (from left) Forbidden City, Altar of Land and Grain, Qianmen Street, Temple of Heaven and Jingshan Hill. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY AND PROVIDED BY BEIJING MUNICIPAL OFFICE FOR CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF BEIJING CENTRAL AXIS

LIFE

Youngsters take Budapest by storm

Guangzhou Symphony Youth Orchestra experiences a rhapsody with its first concert in Hungary, **Chen Nan** reports.

The Guangzhou Symphony Youth Orchestra in concert at the Hungarian State Opera House in Budapest on July 23, in celebration of the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Hungary. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

On Andrássy Avenue in the heart of the Hungarian capital Budapest stands a magnificent building: the Hungarian State Opera House. It is one of the country's most important musical institutions, enchanting audiences since its completion in 1884. Its grandeur and acoustics make it one of the finest opera houses in the world.

The Hungarian State Opera House has been the location of many memorable moments. For example in 1888, its then 28-year-old music director, composer Gustav Mahler, conducted the world premiere of his *Symphony No 1*, signaling the arrival of a new era of music.

On July 23, the Guangzhou Symphony Youth Orchestra, headquartered in Guangdong province, performed both Chinese and Western classical pieces there to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Hungary, using music to narrate a cultural story of harmony and shared destiny.

After concluding the concert, the youth orchestra also made their debut at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing on Friday performing the same pieces.

"The music we performed during the concerts was technically and artistically demanding. We worked very hard during rehearsals and did our best in our performances. I am very proud," says Jing Huan, the youth orchestra's music director and principal conductor. She adds that over 100 members of the orchestra, mostly students from middle schools in Guangzhou, performed in Budapest.

"They showed no signs of fatigue after the long journey. Instead, they were brimming with energy and vitality, displaying a level of immersion and imagination that surpassed even that of more experienced adult symphony orchestras," Jing says.

The first half of both concerts was given to Chinese compositions, including the symphonic prelude of *Instants d'un Opera de Pekin (Moments From a Peking Opera)* by Chen Qigang, and the cello and pipa (a four-stringed Chinese lute) concert to *A Happy Excursion* by Zhao Lin,



Clockwise from top: Pipa player Zhang Qiang and cellist Li-Wei Qin perform with the Guangzhou Symphony Youth Orchestra at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing on Friday; the youth orchestra plays in Budapest; conductor Jing Huan and the Guangzhou Symphony Youth Orchestra at the concert in Budapest on July 23.

featuring soloists Li-Wei Qin on the cello and Zhang Qiang on the pipa.

"I particularly like *Moments From a Peking Opera*, though it's very difficult to play. I need to be able to control my fingers to express its quiet, ethereal feel. In contrast, I also need to play loudly, with dramatic expres-

sion," says 12-year-old violist Huang Jingyu, who has been playing with the youth orchestra since 2018. "It's always a great experience to play music with the other members of the orchestra who share a love for music."

"In the music played by these young people, we can almost hear

the grand narratives of an ancient land and the aesthetic traditions of the Chinese. As a member of the audience, I was moved to tears by the sheer talent these young musicians displayed. Music is an international language that can unite people and help build a better future

together," said ballet dancer Aliya Tanykpayeva, who was born in Kazakhstan and is the principal ballerina of the Hungarian State Opera, after the concert.

During the second half, the orchestra played Franz Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No 2* and Igor

Stravinsky's *The Firebird Suite* (1919 version).

According to Jing, Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No 2* was the highlight of the tour and was a display of the orchestra's youthful energy and vibrancy. "The romanticism and sensitivity of the young performers was particularly moving," she says.

"The most interesting piece we played was *The Firebird Suite*, which was also the hardest for me. The composition gradually builds in intensity, creating an atmosphere of anticipation. I also like its vibrant and colorful use of musical instruments," says 23-year-old Song Wanlin who plays the flute. Song joined the orchestra in 2015 and now studies at Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt Weimar (University of Music Franz Liszt Weimar).

As the final note of *The Firebird Suite* slowly faded, the audience at the Hungarian State Opera House erupted in prolonged and enthusiastic applause.

According to orchestra head Chen Zhimin, the Guangzhou Symphony Youth Orchestra has toured internationally since 2015, including Germany, France, Japan and Spain, and has left its mark on many of the world's prestigious musical events. Last year, the orchestra performed at the Verbier Festival in Switzerland. Before that, it gave commemorative concerts in Barcelona, Valencia and Madrid, to mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Spain.

Founded in July 2011, the Guangzhou Symphony Youth Orchestra was the first in China to be organized and administered by a professional orchestra — the Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra — which coaches its members, including those with and without backgrounds in music.

For its 10th anniversary in July 2021, the orchestra embarked on its first China tour. Though its members are young, they've worked with many accomplished musicians, among them conductor Yu Long, composer and conductor Tan Dun, cellist Yo-Yo Ma and pianist Chen Sa.

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Lessons about China in a simple case of swapped bikes

At 6 pm, as I leave the office to go to dinner, I look to the right and see there are no rental bicycles. I turn left — zero bikes!

The feeling is almost as shocking as realizing you don't have your cellphone. Anyone who lives in China knows how complex that is.

I felt this way because I use bicycles a lot. They are so convenient and have become a daily routine. I realize that since I started liv-

ing in other countries, the bicycle has become my favorite means of transportation to nearby places, as well as for longer trips on weekends. The benefits are multiple, starting with the feeling of well-being after pedaling for a long time. Let's say that I don't play sports often or go to the gym and cycling is one of my favorite exercises.

Beyond my personal preference for bikes and the many stories I have about them, rental bicycles have allowed me to feel the pulse of the city and also discover, through a simple misunder-

standing, the urban intelligence behind the service.

The situation I described at the beginning was worrying at first. How would I get around the city? I know there are the subways, buses and taxis, but I prefer the bicycle a thousand times. These days, I know the pulse of the city. Seeing a few bicycles available and many in use on the streets when I go to lunch or dinner for example, is a sign of a healthy city. It is also surprising to see how, even at dawn, there are people on bicycles, couples, groups of friends, who are not in a hurry to

get somewhere but just cycling for fun.

I recently parked my bike in front of a store to buy something. When I returned, there were two bicycles, one blue and one green, the colors of the bikes I usually use. I always activate the bike using the Alipay app, but this time something happened that I didn't expect. I was getting on the bike — the blue one — to continue on my way, when a person came out of the store and told me that I was on his bike. I answered, saying "no, it's the one I was using." I don't speak Chinese yet and he

didn't speak English but there was a very simple solution. He told me to show him my cellphone and look at the app interface and the bike. The situation was clear. The color of the buttons on my screen was green and that on his, blue. It was obvious, without saying a word, which bike belonged to whom. My head exploded! Everything is so well thought out!

Social engineering in this country with megacities is something to which to tip your hat. Perhaps I am describing a situation that is not at all complex but the engineering

decisions, wayfinding and the use of color, for example, to solve issues that are not as common as my confusion over which bike was mine, led me to imagine all the planning behind the implementation of this type of service. All this makes me admire China from the point of view of a resident.

Everything is so easy in this city, as it is in all of China, but it is here that I am beginning to get to know the country and to admire its quality of life.

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COMMENT

Editorials

EU economic security plan fails to find favor among skeptical bloc members

As a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman stressed earlier this week, it is in the interest of both China and the European Union to properly handle their differences through dialogue and consultation on the basis of mutual respect. To that end, it is not conducive for the EU to take protectionist moves citing unfounded security concerns.

When European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen unveiled the Economic Security Strategy in June last year as part of the plan to bolster the EU's economic security through "de-risking" from "countries of concern", she wouldn't have expected the initiative would turn out to be a political hot potato more than one year later. Yet that is what it has become, as the majority of the bloc's member states are questioning the policy's viability.

The strategy, though it does not mention China, is widely believed to be part of Von der Leyen's efforts to align the bloc more closely with the United States and reduce economic reliance on China, which she considers a "systemic rival". The strategy proposes to further restrict foreign investment in the EU's key infrastructure and apply coordinated controls on exports to "rivals" of technologies in high-tech sectors such as semiconductors and artificial intelligence, among other measures aimed at strengthening the EU's economic security.

It could take up to three years for the strategy to come into force. Yet given the huge negative impacts the strategy is likely to have on trade and investment, as well as on research and innovation, the proposed policy is quite unpopular among national governments, with only one of the EU's 27 member states — Lithuania — having expressed full support for plans to screen outbound investments, according to reports citing diplomatic sources.

Such a policy is also opposed by various industry bodies. It would "be a major interference in entrepreneurial decisions and international investment flows", the Federation of German Industries reportedly said in a written submission to the commission's consultation, adding that it "rejects any new mechanisms to control foreign direct investment".

Likewise, a submission from SEMI Europe, the industry association representing the global electronics manufacturing and design supply chain, said that "the introduction of state controls on European companies' outbound investments is not the right policy path to achieve economic security since it would constitute a major interference within the realm of companies' business decisions and international investment flows".

The US initiated its own mechanism last year to restrict US investment in China in such high-tech sectors as computer chips and artificial intelligence. By trying to toe the US' anti-China line on the economic and high-tech front, the EU risks causing more damage to the rules-based international economic order and accelerating the trend of de-globalization, which runs counter to its own economic interest.

The EU has taken a series of protectionist measures in recent months targeting Chinese electric vehicles and solar panel makers. This, in addition to the overstretching of the concept of economic security, will only serve to further shake the confidence of companies from China and other countries in Europe's business environment.

Despite the talk of "decoupling" or "de-risking", China-EU trade has kept its growth momentum in recent years due to their economic complementarity. China and the EU are both important segments of the global industry and supply chains, and together serve as a staunch force promoting an open world economy. China has never posed any economic security risks to the EU; instead, the country has always remained a trustworthy trading partner of the bloc.

As for the differences that exist between them, the two sides should engage in dialogue rather than confrontation. The EU should abide by the basic norms of a market economy, and embrace free trade and fair competition, so as to avoid further compromising the mutually beneficial trade and economic cooperation between the two sides.

'Project 2025' raises genuine concerns

The Heritage Foundation unveiled its so-called Project 2025: Presidential Transition Project as early as April last year. But it was not until Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump had to respond to the Democrats' attack on him, citing what the conservative think tank claims is a 922-page blueprint for the next president of the United States, that the project rang any alarm bells for the public.

Reportedly more than 140 people working in the former Trump administration took part in the project, dozens of whom hold posts in the conservative organizations behind the project, including Trump's former senior advisers Mark Meadows and Stephen Miller. That prompted the Democrats to cite the report — which calls for an overhaul of the US governance system to centralize power in the hands of the president — as highlighting the prospective threat to US democracy if Trump wins the White House this year.

In her first public remarks as the leading Democratic presidential candidate, US Vice-President Kamala Harris vowed to defeat two enemies: Trump and "his extreme Project 2025 agenda". In response, the former US president said on social media that he knows nothing about the project. "I have no idea who is behind it. I disagree with some of the things they're saying and some of what they're saying is absolutely ridiculous and abysmal... I have nothing to do with them."

That the director of the Project 2025, Paul Dans, who was previously chief of staff at the Office of Personnel Management in the Trump administration, is departing from the role on Tuesday, which was welcomed by Trump's team, can be regarded as the Republican Party's latest attempt to cool down the situation to avoid the report from becoming a stumbling block to Trump's election campaign.

"Reports of Project 2025's demise would be greatly welcomed and should serve as notice to anyone or any group trying to misrepresent their influence with President Trump and his campaign — it will not end well for you," said a statement of the Trump team.

Notably, neither the Democrats nor the Republicans have bothered to provide solutions or even suggestions on the numerous questions the report raised. Instead, they have only used the report as a tool to smear each other.

Although the suggestions the report proposes are indeed absurd, including abolishing the US Department of Education to realize fair and true education of the US, many problems it touches upon are real obstacles to enhancing the US' domestic governance. The two parties' indifference to the problems identified in the report shows that all they care about is seizing power rather than using the power to address real challenges at home and abroad.

Despite the Republicans' emergency PR work to minimize the potential damage done by the report — in which China was defined as the US' enemy and mentioned nearly 500 times in what some describe as a "shockingly malicious" way — the report unequivocally reflects the growing far right sentiment in the US. Symptomatic of this, many in the US political circle hold a wrong perception of China, always viewing China from a hegemonic perspective. But China is not the US. It does not seek to replace the US as the hegemon.

The Sino-US relationship remains at a critical juncture of deescalation and stabilization. The US side needs to meet China halfway in their common efforts to continue to recalibrate the direction, manage risks, properly address differences, remove interference, and advance cooperation.

The report shows that the rise of the far right is by no means a phenomenon restricted to the political circle of Europe but is instead becoming a defining trend in Western politics. The rest of the world should be fully prepared for the West tilting increasingly to the right, which means more self-centered policies that care little about the spillover effects of national policies, less coordination and cooperation to address common challenges and hotspot issues, and more international governance reforms stalled in an all-your-fault blame game.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Policies to expand foreign trade will give competitiveness a boost

As external demand and supportive policies improve, China's trade in goods reached a new high in the first half of 2024, with overall foreign trade exceeding 21 trillion yuan (\$2.9 trillion), and export growth in June of 10.7 percent year-on-year, exceeding all expectations.

The improving external demand and accelerated development of new business forms will continue to support China's import and export.

More important, China's recovering foreign trade, featured as steady growth in quantity and significant improvement in quality, will ensure the integrity and stability of the global industry and supply chains.

China's exports have risen from 64.6 percent of its foreign trade in 2023 to 65 percent in the first half of this year, reflecting the potential of its export industries. The country's trade partners have become more diversified, with the share of emerging markets in its exports

increasing to 55.3 percent in 2023. In the first half of this year, imports and exports to countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative reached 10.03 trillion yuan, with a year-on-year growth rate exceeding China's overall export growth rate by 1.1 percentage points, showing an ever-closer trade exchange between China and these countries.

At the same time, in the first half of the year, imports and exports of private enterprises accounted for 55 percent of the country's total foreign trade, an increase of 2.5 percentage points over the same period last year, and their exports accounted for 64.9 percent of the country's total exports.

China's foreign trade is seeing stable growth, its foreign trade enterprises having a resilient production system and capacity, its new forms of business having a strong momentum, its export market diversification steadily advancing, and its export enterprises' anti-risk ability

having significantly improved.

Many of China's export products occupy a dominant position in the international market, and China's manufacturing in various fields enjoys competitiveness. With the transformation of "made in China" into "created in China", China's new export growth points will continue to emerge and the cultivation of new growth drivers for foreign trade will be accelerated.

A series of policies introduced by China to stabilize orders for foreign trade enterprises and expand the foreign trade market will further promote and stabilize the international competitiveness of its foreign trade sector. The country should well implement the adopted policies, strengthen the policy reserve according to the new situation and new tasks, and help foreign trade enterprises reduce costs, increase efficiency, and enhance competitiveness.

— SHANGHAI SECURITIES NEWS

Improve consumption for high-quality growth

The central authorities have recently called on boosting consumption, namely enhancing the purchasing power and willingness of middle- and low-income groups. This cannot be separated from increased income, as income growth directly enhances residents' purchasing power and stable income growth increases people's willingness to consume.

By 2023, consumption had been the primary driver of China's economic growth for 10 consecutive years. Compared to boosting consumption among those with middle- and above-middle incomes, there is greater room for improvement in incomes for those with lower incomes. By raising minimum

wage standards, increasing employment opportunities, and optimizing tax policies, these groups' disposable income can be directly or indirectly increased.

Further, since low-income groups in the country are primarily located in rural areas, improving the income of rural residents can enhance the consumption capacity of middle- and low-income groups.

By promoting the development of emerging industries such as agricultural product processing, rural tourism, and e-commerce, not only can more job opportunities be created but also it can promote further optimization of the country's industrial structure and tap into the potential of the primary industry. This

is also conducive to further driving up the income of rural residents and narrowing the urban-rural gap. Structural optimization requires the participation of all sectors helping with agricultural technology promotion, innovation in rural financial services, infrastructure construction, and education and training in digital marketing methods.

With the upgrading of China's economic structure and the increase in residents' income levels, consumption should play a key role in promoting growth. Economic policies will inevitably need to shift more toward benefiting people's livelihoods and boosting consumption.

— BEIJING NEWS

What They Say

Summit will write new chapter of Sino-African friendship

The 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation will be held in Beijing from Sept 4 to 6, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At the summit, Chinese and African leaders will discuss the major plans for China-Africa friendly cooperation and jointly draw up a blueprint for opening up new space for cooperation, under the theme of "Joining Hands to Advance Modernization and Build a High-Level China-Africa Community with a Shared Future".

China and Africa have stood together through the good and hard times over the past decades, and this has provided a source of strength for the continuous growth of China-Africa friendly relations. Similar historical experiences and common historical missions have forged strong bonds of friendship between them. China pursues the greater

good and shared interests in its relations with African countries. It has always regarded the development of solidarity and cooperation with African countries as an important cornerstone of its foreign policy, and has always adhered to the principles of sincerity, real results, amity and good faith.

China is a reliable friend and sincere partner of African countries, and it endeavors to promote their development and vitalization. China and Africa have always focused on cooperation and promoted the implementation of the various outcomes of the FOCAC, which has effectively promoted the common development of China and African countries, brought tangible benefits to the Chinese and African people, and laid a solid foundation for building a high-level China-Africa community with a shared future. The fruitful cooperation results prove that the FOCAC is a united, stable and efficient cooperation mechanism.

At the China-Africa Leaders' Dialogue

held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in August last year, China announced the launch of the initiative to support African industrialization, plans to help Africa promote agricultural modernization and a talent training project. These three major initiatives cover areas in which African countries urgently need increased inputs, demonstrating China's sincerity in supporting Africa's development with practical actions.

The vigorous development of the Global South represented by China and Africa has influenced the course of world history. China and Africa will take the upcoming summit as an opportunity to further deepen their solidarity and cooperation, safeguard the common interests of developing countries, jointly advocate an equal and orderly world featuring multipolarization and inclusive economic globalization, gather more consensus on jointly promoting modernization and building a high-level China-Africa community with a shared future.

— PEOPLE'S DAILY

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COMMENT

He Dexu and Xi Penghui

Modern fiscal system key for socialist market economy

The third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, held from July 15 to 18, adopted the resolution on further deepening reform comprehensively to advance Chinese modernization. Eleven years ago, in 2013, the third plenary session of the 18th CPC Central Committee adopted the "Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Continuing the Reform" in order to establish a "proper relationship" between the government and the market, and allow the market to play a decisive role in resource allocation and better leverage the role of the government.

In the years since the 18th National Congress of the CPC in 2012, China has realized that modernizing the fiscal system is necessary to comprehensively deepen reform, and establishing a modern fiscal system is essential for building a high-level socialist market economy and advancing Chinese modernization.

Modernization of fiscal and tax system

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the Party has advanced the modernization of the fiscal and tax systems. For example, China has adjusted the division of financial responsibilities and expenditure between the central and local governments, with the central government assuming the responsibility of spending more on basic public services such as education, healthcare and eldercare. It has also optimized the structure and management of transfer payments, with general transfer payments increasing in scale and proportion, and established a mechanism for direct allocation of fiscal funds.

In terms of tax policy, China has replaced the business tax with value-added tax (VAT), simplified and reduced VAT rates, while gradually introducing VAT refund policies, implementing a comprehensive personal income tax system, raising the tax exemption threshold and reducing the tax burden of residents. It has also made significant progress in implementing tax laws.

China practices comprehensive budget management, which covers all sources of government revenue and expenditure, and has introduced performance-based budgeting while making government and department budgets much more transparent, implementing a cross-annual budget balance mechanism and allowing local governments to issue debt so they can broaden their financial channels and fiscal policy tools. This suggests China has established a more or less modern fiscal system framework in the years since the 18th CPC Central Committee's third plenum.

In the new era, the comprehensive deepening of reform requires the establishment and improvement of a modern fiscal system. And the 20th CPC Central Committee's

third plenum has recommended ways to use a modern fiscal system to promote Chinese modernization.

Tax-sharing reform should be optimized

The mismatch between local governments' financial resources and spending responsibilities has been a major issue since the initiation of tax-sharing reform. While the central government has been allocating more funds to basic public services since the 18th Party Congress, the fundamental contradiction of tax-sharing persists. This contradiction can be effectively resolved by establishing a modern fiscal system, which will strike the right balance between financial resources and spending responsibilities across all levels of government.

First, there is a need to strengthen the central government's macroeconomic control. China's vast territory and regional differences in resource endowment, social structure and economic development necessitate strong central macroeconomic control to facilitate normal fiscal activities in less-developed regions.

Second, the central government should spend much more on shared matters and take measures to ease the financial pressure on local governments, because lower level governments face fund shortage after being made to shoulder more spending responsibilities.

Third, the local tax system should be improved. A robust local tax system can help local governments meet their expenditure needs and incentivize local initiatives. Since local taxes do not generate enough revenue to meet the local governments' financial needs, the point of collection for consumption tax, currently a central tax, should be shifted to the local authorities so as to increase their tax revenue.

And fourth, the transfer payment system should be digitalized, as the digital economy facilitates the cross-regional flow of goods.

Modern tax system for market efficiency

Optimizing the tax structure, enhancing the direct tax system and increasing the proportion of direct taxes are tax reforms which can improve market efficiency, reduce the tax burden of businesses and promote social equity, thus helping build a high-level socialist market economy.

Since 2017, China has reduced its VAT



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

rates from four to three tiers, addressing the problem of "high levy, low deduction" and "low levy, high deduction". However, multiple tax rates still cause problems, undermining tax neutrality and increasing management costs. To address this issue and modernize the tax system, China should gradually simplify VAT rates.

Also, including high-energy-consuming, environmentally harmful, and luxury goods in the tax base and appropriately raising taxes on luxury goods can promote green consumption and address environmental concerns and help align economic development, industrial policy and social needs.

And reforming the personal income tax

regime to support the growth of the middle-income group is crucial for achieving common prosperity. While the tax rate structure should be optimized, the number of tax brackets reduced, and marginal tax rates lowered, people's tax burden should be further alleviated by increasing special deductions and raising the standard deduction amount.

More importantly, developing new quality productive forces is necessary to realize high-quality development and implement comprehensive reform. This includes enhancing tax support for applying technological innovation to industry and creating a favorable tax environment for institutions

A robust budget system is the soul of modern fiscal management, as it focuses on easing budget constraints, which determines the scope and mode of government revenue and expenditure.

and enterprises engaged in basic research.

Fiscal discipline and efficiency

A robust budget system is the soul of modern fiscal management, as it focuses on easing budget constraints, which determines the scope and mode of government revenue and expenditure. It is necessary to adhere to the budget norms. The principles of "no expenditure without a budget" and "no overspending" should be upheld to prevent misappropriation of funds, and a budget execution monitoring system established to detect deviations early and make timely corrections, and fiscal audit supervision strengthened to make sure all expenditures comply with budget requirements.

Besides, China's budget coordination needs improvement, especially when it comes to managing idle government assets and funds, coordinating the "four budgets", (public budget, social security fund budget, State-owned capital operation budget, and government fund budget), and expanding State-owned capital operation budgets.

To resolve the conflict between proactive fiscal policies and fiscal sustainability, a budget cycle should be designed to incentivize all levels of government and effectively implement fiscal policies. Also, a meaningful cross-annual budget balance mechanism should be established to fill the fiscal revenue shortfalls during economic downturns and address the problems created by annual budget balance requirements.

Moreover, China's debt structure should be optimized by increasing central and general debt, reducing local debt costs and debt risks, and preventing disorderly local borrowing. And while the proportion of implicit debt should be reduced, local government debt should be more strictly managed to prevent and address systemic financial risks, and ensure local government bonds are used for designated projects, in order to increase the returns on investment and reduce idle funds.

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Mark Pinkstone

Washington's attempt to thwart maritime peace blatant

Before the ink had dried on the peaceful, humanitarian agreement China and the Philippines signed on July 21 to end the confrontations over their maritime disputes in the South China Sea, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin descended on Manila to pressure President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to maintain control over Ren'ai Jiao, which is part of China's Nansha Islands.

A day after Beijing and Manila signed the agreement, Blinken announced that he would travel to Laos, Vietnam, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore and Mongolia between July 25 and Aug 3 to reaffirm the work of the United States with its allies and partners in the "Indo-Pacific" region.

US maintains wrong perception

In the Laotian capital of Vientiane, Blinken met with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Saturday. Wang stated that the US maintains a misguided perception of China, frequently interpreting China through the framework of its own hegemonic logic. He emphasized that China is not the US and has no intention of emulating it.

On Tuesday, Blinken and Austin met with Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo and Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro in Manila to "discuss ways to deepen coordination on shared challenges, including the South China Sea...".

But on July 21, a day before the State Department announced the details of the 2+2 meeting, a crucial deal was reached after a series of meetings between Philippine and Chinese diplomats in Manila with an exchange of diplomatic notes aimed at establishing a mutually acceptable arrangement on the Ren'ai Jiao without conceding

either side's territorial claims.

The Philippine government issued a brief statement announcing the deal without providing details: "Both sides continue to recognize the need to deescalate the situation in the South China Sea and manage differences through dialogue and consultation and agree that the agreement will not prejudice each other's positions in the South China Sea," the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs said.

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued an online statement, saying Beijing and Manila had reached a provisional agreement on "the humanitarian resupply of living necessities" to a Philippine warship which Manila illegally grounded on Ren'ai Jiao in May 1999. Many see this as a move signaling the willingness of two sides to defuse tensions in the South China Sea.

The deal calls for the removal of the stranded ship, pending which China would allow the supply of food and other humanitarian aid to the personnel on the Philippine warship. The Nansha Islands have long been considered Chinese territory, as their inclusion is embodied in the nine-dash boundary drawn up by China as its territorial waters.

However, Japan, the Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam have disputed this at the instigation of the United States, which has a heavy presence in the Pacific theater, comprising more than 616,000 military personnel, civilian employees and dependents in 21 countries.

To ramp up control of the South China Sea, US President Joe Biden met with the heads of state of Japan and the Philippines in the White House earlier in the year, feed-

ing them false information that the potentially oil-rich islands in the South China Sea belong to them and urging them to grab them with help from the US.

Washington's moves heightening tensions

Since the White House summit, the US has continued its belligerent military maneuvers in the South China Sea and West Pacific waters with its allies, involving war games to provoke China into taking retaliatory action.

The facts are straightforward. In 1958, the Chinese government declared a 12-nautical-mile territorial sea and included territories like Dongsha Islands, Xisha Islands, Zhongsha Islands, Nansha Islands, and other Chinese islands. Prime Minister Pham Van Dong of Vietnam sent a diplomatic note to Premier Zhou Enlai, supporting China's territorial sea decision and expressing respect for it. There was no objection from the US, the United Kingdom, France or the Philippines until massive gas and oil reserves were found around the islands in the 1960s.

At the encouragement of the US, the Philippines announced the creation of a new municipality, Kalayaan, in the southern end of the Philippines. To strengthen its claim, the Philippines grounded an old US warship, the USS *Harnett County*, on Ren'ai Jiao in 1999, staffed it with a handful of sailors and claimed it as Philippine territory.

That was strongly challenged by China, because the Nansha and Xisha islands near Hainan are all part of China's maritime territory.

Incumbent Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is sticking to its guns, claiming that its 200 nautical miles exclusive economic zone is legal under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the

Sea, a convention which the US recognizes but has not ratified because it does not agree with a clause deemed to be "unfavorable to American economic and security interests". However, under Article 15 of UNCLOS, the Philippines' claim of 200 nautical miles is unlawful, because it should extend to only 100 nautical miles from the Philippines' Palawan Island.

And Article 15 of UNCLOS entails that, "lacking agreement between two States on the delimitation of their territorial seas", the boundary shall be the equidistance line unless historic title or extraordinary circumstances require a boundary at variance with equidistance.

In this regard, history is on China's side. According to British international law professor Anthony Carty, all the islands, shoals, and reefs in the Nansha and Xisha islands, the Zhongsha Islands, Ren'ai Jiao, and Huangyan Island are outside the 100 nautical-mile zone provided by UNCLOS and are situated within China's nine-dash line.

False claims by Manila in South China Sea

Carty has written a book, *The History and Sovereignty of the South China Sea*, on the subject. During his research, he found that in the mid-1950s, a US under-secretary of state wrote that while the Philippines had no claim to the Xisha Islands, "it is in the US interest to encourage them to make a claim anyway to keep communist China out of the area". And the French ambassador to Beijing wrote in 1974 "that all of this unrest in the South China Sea is due to French interference in the region and is further due to the Americans inciting the Vietnamese to make claims for embarrassing China".

When asked by a Chinese journalist if he saw external forces exploiting the South

China Sea dispute, Carty replied that there is absolutely no doubt that this whole dispute is entirely about the Americans trying to make life difficult for the Chinese, and the aggression that is building up against China and the scapegoating of China by the whole of the so-called democratic community of the world is appalling.

Academics, including Carty, have produced a litany of treaties and agreements dating back to the US' colonization of the Philippines (1899-1946) that prove beyond doubt that the shoals belong to China. Japan did take control of the islands during World War II, but all the islands should be returned to China after the end of the war according to the 1943 Cairo Declaration and the 1945 Potsdam Proclamation.

Even former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte said Washington is inciting Manila to fight for its rights in the South China Sea. The US has five existing military bases in the Philippines, with four more in the pipeline.

According to USA Today, expanding new bases is part of the US armed forces' realignment strategy along the Pacific Rim. Working with its allies, the US will use sites in Japan, Australia, Guam and the Philippines as quick-response bases against possible attacks by China, which is nothing but scaremongering by the US, because China's foreign policy is based on maintaining peace and stability, and promoting common development, as indicated by its latest peace deal with the Philippines. This is something that the US should take into account when talking with its Asian partners.

The author is a former chief information officer of the Hong Kong SAR government, a PR and media consultant, and a veteran journalist. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

GLOBAL VIEWS

BELINDA SCHAEPE

Ways to change

Despite the challenges, there are opportunities for China-EU climate cooperation going forward

In the aftermath of the recent European Parliament elections, climate cooperation between China and Europe stands at a critical juncture. The election outcomes, which saw a rise in right-wing populist parties and a weakened Green party influence, present both challenges and opportunities for advancing shared climate goals. As Europe recalibrates its climate policies and industrial strategies, it is crucial to examine the implications for China-Europe relations and propose viable solutions to foster stronger cooperation.

The European elections resulted in significant political shifts, with right-wing populist parties gaining traction and green parties experiencing losses. The rise of populist sentiments and the resulting fragmentation in the European Parliament pose a potential threat to the stability and predictability of European policymaking, including when it comes to climate policies and relations with China. However, despite these changes, centrist parties have managed to secure a strong presence, ensuring the continuity of the European Union's climate agenda.

As Europe intensifies its focus on integrating green technologies into broader industrial strategies, competition with China in sectors such as electric vehicles, solar panels and wind turbines is likely to increase. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has framed European climate policy as an economic and security policy to ensure European competitiveness. In her view, it is "a race that will dictate who will be the first to climate neutrality and first to develop the technologies that will shape the global economy for decades to come".

The EU's recent subsidy investigations and tariffs on Chinese EVs exemplify the growing trade tensions. Under the new Commission, the EU will continue to pursue its "de-risking" efforts and introduce further policies aimed at enabling European companies to compete with China on green technologies. These trade tensions will have to be carefully navigated by both sides to avoid escalation.

The geopolitical landscape, influenced by the looming US elections and potential policy shifts under a possible second Donald Trump administration, puts the global climate agenda at risk. Geopolitical tensions are already driving up military spending around the world, at the expense of urgently needed finance to mitigate and adapt to climate change. A withdrawal of the US from multilateral climate agreements could pressure China and Europe to step up their global climate leadership. Navigating these geopolitical uncertainties requires strategic diplomacy and robust multilateral cooperation.

Despite the challenges outlined above, together China and Europe can lead global ambitions in tackling climate change. The EU aims to become the first carbon neutral economy by 2050, and 2023 saw the lowest level of EU emissions since the 1960s. With the Fit for 55 package and the RePowerEU plan, the EU has raised its carbon reduction target to 55 percent and that for renewable energy consumption to at least 42.5 percent by 2030. Going forward, the EU is expected to strengthen these policies in an ambitious updated Nationally Determined Contribution to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. China has also introduced ambitious climate targets and has seen the largest growth in the use of renewables

worldwide. As a result, China's emissions have declined for the past few months and may have already seen a peak in 2023. This puts China in a strong position to bolster its leadership role by introducing an ambitious NDC that provides a pathway for reducing emissions by 30 percent in 2035, including guiding emission-intensive and green technologies sectors with clear policy direction.

The green transition presents significant economic opportunities for both Europe and China. China is already a global leader in green technologies with clean energy as the top driver of economic growth in 2023, contributing 40 percent to GDP growth. The EU's Net Zero Industry Act and Critical Raw Material Act aim to strengthen European competitiveness in green technologies. The EU and China can both work toward creating resilient and sustainable supply chains for the technologies of the future by fostering the production capacity of renewables globally. While acknowledging and carefully managing potential trade tensions, the EU and China can create a constructive race to the top and support the global green transition.

Climate finance is another area where both China and the EU could have a significant impact. The EU, together with its member states, is the largest provider of climate finance worldwide. The EU has played a key role in establishing the newly created Loss and Damage Fund for countries highly impacted by climate change and achieving

the global target of \$100 billion in climate finance from developed to developing countries. Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, China is not mandated to provide climate finance, but it has pledged to provide 20 billion yuan (\$2.5 billion) through a dedicated South-South Climate Cooperation Fund back in 2015. So far, 10 percent of this funding has been delivered. Both Europe and China could play an even bigger role in the upcoming climate negotiations at COP29 and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation to assure countries of further financial support to help them meet the climate challenge.

Going forward, EU-China cooperation on climate change should center on four key areas.

First, China and the EU should pursue continued bilateral engagement, through the High-Level Dialogue on Climate and the Environment and all other technical dialogue opportunities available, to work together to solve common challenges both face in the green transition, such as electricity market reform, grid flexibility, industrial decarbonization and climate adaptation.

Second, both sides should engage in open discussions on the differences and challenges in the bilateral relationship, particularly on the role of trade tensions related to green technologies and climate-related trade measures, to find compromises.

Third, in a fragmented and geopolitically vulnerable world, China

and the EU should continue working together in multilateral forums to champion new global initiatives to accelerate the global green transition.

Last, as leaders in the global fight against climate change, China and the EU can accelerate their domestic climate action in a pathway aligned to the 1.5 C target and find innovative ways to mobilize the global finance needed to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

The author is China policy analyst with the Center for Research on Energy and Clean Air. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

SONG GUOYOU

New Washington Consensus hurts

The US' suppression of China in the trade sector is undermining the very foundation of bilateral ties and disrupting global trade landscape, bringing more uncertainties to world economy

With the international order undergoing profound changes, the United States has made a major adjustment to its foreign trade strategy. The protectionism launched by the earlier Donald Trump administration was not scrapped by his successor Joe Biden; instead it has increasingly become the core of Washington's foreign trade strategy. The trade liberalization and free market economics advocated by the Washington Consensus was replaced by a "new Washington Consensus" that espouses protectionism and pragmatism.

Under the new circumstances, foreign trade not only serves the economic interests of the US, but also becomes a geopolitical tool Washington uses to preserve its global hegemony. As a trade and economic powerhouse, the US is reshaping the global economic landscape and having a profound influence on geopolitics and global relations by adjusting its foreign trade policy.

First, it is leading to a change in the US' trade policymaking mechanism.

In the past, the US' foreign trade strategy was mainly aimed at expanding free trade, and US trade representatives played an important role in promoting negotiations on bilateral and multilateral trade deals, pushing for the opening-up of foreign markets, and coordinating with the World Trade Organization. But as the WTO has been increasingly marginalized by the US, the US trade representatives have become a saboteur, instead of being a communicator between the US' trade agenda and the WTO.

As the role of the US trade representative has weakened, the US Department of Commerce has assumed bigger power in foreign trade issues. As the country tightens export controls, the Commerce Department is playing a larger role in examining and approving export products. And as the US steps up

fiscal support for prioritized industries, the department has become more important for its responsibility in screening eligible enterprises and projecting and granting subsidies. For instance, the department has granted tens of billions of US dollars in subsidies to the semiconductor sector during the Biden administration.

The US Treasury is also playing a bigger role in trade-related issues since it is in charge of granting tax credits to eligible enterprises in the clean energy field according to the Inflation Reduction Act. With the US foreign trade agenda increasingly serving its national security and major-power competition strategy, traditional non-commerce departments are more engaged in the making of trade policies.

Second, it is reshaping the US' domestic landscape of economic interests distribution.

Manufacturing is the largest beneficiary of the US' trade policy adjustment, which is intended to revive the country's hollowed-out manufacturing sector and boost the competitiveness of "Made in the US". Although the US manufacturing sector has not regained its peak phase, the decline has been arrested to a certain degree and a resurgence has been observed, with jobs and salaries on the rise.

Some regions have benefited from the influx of manufacturing investment. For example, the rust belt states of Indiana and Wisconsin in the north have seen their decline slowing down, and the manufacturing sector in southern states such as Texas and Louisiana has also developed for the better.

In contrast, multinationals, particularly large tech companies, are those whose interests have been impaired. Resorting to protection-



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

ist moves, the US government has reduced support for tech companies' global expansion. In the meanwhile, some multinationals have been forced to cut exports to countries sanctioned by the US, such as Russia and China, and curtail operations in these countries. For instance, Qualcomm and Intel have suffered significant losses due to the US' ban on exports of semiconductors to Huawei.

Third, it is intensifying geopoliti-

cal and economic competition and fragments the world economy.

Due to the US' increasingly prioritizing security in its foreign trade agenda, normal trade and economic relations have been disrupted, global production and trade networks are being restructured, and countries are being forced to choose a division of labor system that best suits their interests.

The US is trying to isolate China and draw more countries to join the US-led trade and economic system. But as it is unable to provide more public goods to the new partners in this US-led trade system, these countries cannot benefit from joining it and, rather, they have to pay the costs for the shift.

The US' destructive foreign trade policy has had huge

impacts on the global economy. According to the International Monetary Fund, the world is increasingly divided into three major trade blocs — a Western one led by the US and its allies, one with China and other BRICS nations at the core, and one of nonaligned states. The trade volume between the three blocs is 12 percent lower than the figure for trade within each bloc, with the pace of decline surpassing that at the beginning of the Cold War.

Fourth, it is damaging the China-

US trade and economic ties. Since Biden took office, the share of the US' imports from China in its total imports dropped by 4 percent. In 2023, the US and China traded \$664.5 billion worth of goods, a year-on-year decrease of 11.6 percent, which marked the sharpest decline since the two countries established diplomatic relations.

Though the US government has replaced the original narrative of "decoupling" from China with "de-risking" from China, its trade policy is essentially still aimed at containing China. In these circumstances, China-US trade will keep shrinking and face systematic restructuring.

The first is interest restructuring. The old interest structure will be reshaped along with the adjustment of the US' trade policy, and whether a new equilibrium can be formed will depend on the strategic directions of the two countries.

The second is rules restructuring. The US government attempts to seek legitimacy for its adjusted trade strategy by changing domestic and foreign policies. The US and China will compete over setting global economic and trade rules, and it remains to be seen whether a new set of rules can be agreed on by both countries.

The third is space restructuring. The geological landscape of labor division formed by old trade relations will face major changes, and the US and China are seeking to formulate a new landscape of labor division. Thus, a restructuring of industry chains is inevitable.

Interdependent trade relations have long been the cornerstone of China-US relations. The US' suppression of China in the trade sector undermines the very foundation of bilateral ties and disrupts global trade landscape, bringing more uncertainties to the world economy.

The author is deputy director and professor of the Center for American Studies at Fudan University. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

BUSINESS

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Fiscal policies to aid sci-tech innovation

Higher budgetary allocation will foster new growth momentum

By LIU ZHIHUA
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China will strengthen the implementation of fiscal and taxation policies supporting scientific and technological innovation, to promote industrial upgrades and foster new growth momentum, a senior official said on Wednesday.

Addressing a news conference in Beijing, Wang Dongwei, vice-minister of finance, explained how his ministry will help promote high-quality development.

"Focusing on 'strengthening foundation and targeting key areas', we will further support the enhancement of capabilities in scientific and technological innovation," Wang said.

Data from the ministry showed that the central government has earmarked 370.8 billion yuan (\$51.3 billion) toward science and technology expenditure in this year's budget, marking a 10 percent year-on-year increase.

The ministry is strongly committed to fostering the integrated development of scientific and technological innovation and industrial innovation, Wang said.

It will continuously scale up investment in basic research, applied basic research and frontier research, while refining the investment mechanism for basic research that features a combination of competitive funding with stable support.

In addition, it has also been supporting the initiation of a series of major national science and technology projects. Apart from ensuring funding for breakthroughs in key areas and core technologies, it will promote the integrated and clustered development of strategic emerging industries, and faster cultivation and growth of future industries.

Wang also told the news conference that the ministry has initiated two pilot programs to promote the deep integration of real and digital economies.

The three-year pilot program for the digital transformation of small and medium-sized enterprises started in 2023, with the pilot to be rolled out in 90 cities in three phases. Currently, 66 cities have participated in the pilot works.

The second initiative is to allocate 18 billion yuan, also in three batches, to support 60 cities in conducting pilot programs for new technological transformations in the manufacturing sector.

To enhance the resilience and security level of the industry and supply chains, the ministry will support efforts to resolve "bottleneck" issues in industry and supply chains, implementing a combination of various policy tools, Wang said.

Such support includes those for the development of industry chains in key sectors like integrated circuits, industrial mother machines — or machines used to manufacture machines, medical devices, industrial software and basic software, as well as those for fostering independently controllable industry and supply chains.

In addition, the ministry will work to promote high-quality development of the services sector and reinforce construction of modern infrastructure.

As for reforms in the fiscal and tax systems, Wang said the country will expand the sources of tax revenue at the local level and grant greater authority for tax management to local governments as appropriate, while regulating the management of non-tax revenue.

It will take steps to move excise tax collection further down the production-to-consumption chain and pass the power of collection steadily to local governments. The moves will be conducted in a measured and phased approach, step by step, in accordance with various categories of tax items.

The country will also improve the environmental protection tax system to include volatile organic compounds among taxable items, Wang said.

Yao Yang, director of the China Center for Economic Research at Peking University, said that the recently concluded third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China has set the direction for reforms in fiscal and tax systems, and the key is in implementation.

Yao said he expects the Chinese government to roll out more fiscal and monetary policy measures step by step in the second half to boost economic growth momentum.

Energy storage capacity to see robust uptick

By ZHENG XIN
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Fueled by innovative technologies and rapid advances in the renewables sector, China's energy storage capacity is poised for significant growth, the National Energy Administration said on Wednesday.

The country's power storage capacity has steadily increased this year, with over 44 million kilowatts already in operation by the end of June, up 40 percent year-on-year, the energy authority said during a news conference in Beijing.

The government has been continuously advancing energy storage technologies, with several compressed air energy storage, flow battery storage, and sodium-ion battery storage projects put into operation across the nation, Bian Guangqi, an NEA official, said at the conference.

New energy storage, or energy storage using new technologies such as lithium-ion batteries, liquid flow batteries, compressed air and mechanical energy, is an important foundation for building the country's new power system, which enjoys advantages such as quick response, flexible configuration and short construction timelines.

According to Bian, new energy storage systems are playing a critical role in ensuring grid connection of renewable energy, with the equivalent utilization hours of new energy storage in the operating areas of State Grid Corp of China, the country's largest power utility, reaching 390 hours during the first half of 2024, approximately doubling from the first half of 2023.

Meanwhile, figures for that of China Southern Power Grid's operating areas reached 560 hours, nearly matching the total utilization for 2023, he said.

According to Deng Simeng, a senior analyst in renewables and power research at global consultancy Rystad Energy, battery storage is drawing significant attention due to its crucial role and benefits, which include smaller devices, flexible site requirements and shorter construction periods compared to wind, solar and



A driver charges his new energy vehicle in Chongqing. SUN KAIFANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

other traditional power sources.

As numerous gigawatt-scale renewable base projects come online in Northwest China, the local grid system must integrate this renewable capacity, optimize power output and manage the intermittency issues associated with wind and solar energy, said Deng.

Given the rapid expansion of renewable installations, accelerating the development of new energy storage solutions will be a crucial breakthrough for the northwestern region. This will help mitigate renewable curtailment and ensure a more resilient and secure power grid, she added.

According to the administration, the northern and northwestern parts of the country have seen the fastest development of new-type energy storage facilities, accounting for over 50 percent of the newly operational energy storage installations nationwide.

In terms of application scenarios, independent energy storage and shared energy storage installations

account for 45.3 percent, energy storage installations paired with new energy projects account for 42.8 percent, and other application scenarios account for 11.9 percent.

The installed capacity of renewable energy has achieved fresh breakthroughs. In the first half of 2024, the nationwide newly installed capacity for renewable energy power generation reached 134 million kilowatts, a year-on-year increase of 24 percent, accounting for 88 percent of the total new power generation capacity in the country.

The NEA issued a notice in April titled "Promotion of New Energy Storage Integration and Dispatch Utilization", aimed at standardizing the integration of new energy storage into the grid and promoting efficient dispatch utilization of new energy storage. The notice outlined specific requirements for grid enterprises, power dispatch agencies and new energy storage project units.

The country has also been expanding the scale of charging facilities, with the total number of

charging piles nationwide reaching 10.24 million as of the end of June, a year-on-year increase of 54 percent, including 3.12 million public charging piles and 7.12 million private ones.

The total rated power of public charging piles exceeds 110 million kilowatts, meeting the charging needs of 24 million new energy vehicles, it said.

In the first half of the year, the nationwide charging volume for new energy vehicles was around 51.3 billion kilowatt-hours, a year-on-year increase of 40 percent.

Efforts are being made to address the charging infrastructure gap in rural areas, said Zhang Xing, a spokesman of the energy administration.

"We have organized charging infrastructure construction and promotion activities in some counties and towns, and more than one-third of the provinces have extended charging facilities to all townships, strongly supporting the rural adoption of new energy vehicles," Zhang said.

Briefly

Renminbi strengthens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, strengthened 18 pips to 7.1346 against the US dollar on Wednesday, said the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. In China's spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall 2 percent from the central parity rate versus the greenback each trading day.

Cultural sector posts steady growth in H1

China's cultural sector sustained steady growth in revenue in the first half, said the National Bureau of Statistics. Combined operating revenue of major enterprises in the sector amounted to nearly 6.5 trillion yuan (\$910.82 billion), up 7.5 percent year-on-year.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Consumption to power economy over long run

By WANG KEJU
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Among investment, exports and consumption — the key drivers powering China's economic development — consumer spending is well positioned to be the fastest-moving engine in the long run, a senior expert said, calling for stronger steps to further stimulate consumption.

Sufficient job creation, a robust and responsive supply-side ecosystem and new consumption models should be prioritized to bolster consumer spending, as outlined by the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, said Chen Wenling, chief economist at the Beijing-based China Center for International Economic Exchanges, in an exclusive interview with China Daily.

Consumption, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, played a major role in propelling growth in the first half of this year, with final consumption contributing to 60.5 percent of China's economic expansion, or 3 percentage points to the GDP growth rate.

Despite the government's concerted efforts to boost domestic consumption, the much-anticipated rebound in consumer demand has yet to fully materialize, Chen said.

Total yuan-denominated deposits grew by 11.46 trillion yuan (\$1.58 trillion) in the first half of 2024, with household deposits accounting for the majority, at 9.27 trillion yuan, according to data from the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank.

Household savings deposits have cumulatively increased by around 58 trillion yuan since 2020. This substantial buildup of savings suggests that consumers remain hesitant to unleash their purchasing power, Chen said.

Shoring up job creation and instilling a sense of income security will be instrumental in unlocking



Chen Wenling for ensuring employment.

Going forward, these reform measures will be delivered on the ground, which will enable the country to maintain a vibrant labor market over the long term while also allowing people to have a clearer view of their future income prospects, Chen said, adding that this, in turn, is expected to boost consumer confidence.

Chen also emphasized the pressing need to further upgrade the supply-side of consumption in order to better cater to the evolving demand of Chinese consumers.

China's ongoing manufacturing transformation has created a surge of homegrown brands characterized by improved quality, technological advancements and price advantages, including the burgeoning new energy vehicle sector, Chen said.

Chinese tech firm Xiaomi, for example, released its first self-developed new energy vehicle model SU7 in March, with prices ranging from 215,900 yuan to 299,900 yuan, and is aiming to sell 100,000 units this year.

So far, the company has received 100,000 units or a year's worth of orders, and it plans to ramp up production significantly to meet soaring demand.

The emergence of vibrant Chinese brands such as Xiaomi will be a key catalyst in unlocking the full potential of the country's vast consumer market, Chen added.

Moreover, new consumption models such as the trade-in program to replace old consumer goods with new ones should be further explored to revitalize the consumer market, Chen said.

Nation's appetite for gold investment up in Q2

By LIU YUKUN
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China saw a notable increase in investment sentiment for gold in the second quarter and may witness a further rise in investor appetite for such safe-haven assets, said the World Gold Council on Tuesday.

Gold exchange-traded fund inflows in the second quarter reached approximately 14 billion yuan (\$2 billion), or 25 metric tons, setting a record high. In the first half, Chinese gold ETFs continued to attract inflows, with holdings and assets under management surging 50 percent and 77 percent, respectively, largely driven by rising prices of the yellow metal, said the WGC.

Investment in gold bars and coins surged to 80 tons last quarter, up 68 percent year-on-year, marking the strongest second-quarter performance since 2013. Rising gold prices and investor demand for wealth preservation boosted total investment in gold bars and coins in the first half to 190 tons, a significant 65 percent increase from the first half of the previous year.

Wang Lixin, CEO of the World Gold Council (China), expressed cautious optimism regarding phys-



An employee sorts gold items at a jewelry shop in Renhua, Guizhou province. CHEN YONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

ical gold investment demand in China for the second half.

"With domestic interest rates declining and potential pressure on local assets, there is a likelihood of increased demand for safe-haven investments among investors. However, uncertainties in gold price trends could potentially temper demand for bars and coins in the latter part of the year," Wang said.

Conversely, demand for gold jewelry in China hit a second-quarter low not seen since 2009 at 86 tons,

impacted by soaring gold prices and the economic growth slowdown. First-half jewelry consumption in China dropped by 18 percent year-on-year to 270 tons.

In the second half, seasonal factors may spur a slight increase in domestic demand for gold jewelry, he added.

Globally, the second quarter witnessed record-high gold demand, rising 4 percent year-on-year to 1,258 tons, driving prices up, said the WGC. The average gold price for the quarter was \$2,338 per

ounce, an 18 percent increase year-on-year. Gold reached a record \$2,427 per ounce in May.

Global central banks' reserves of the precious metal increased by 184 tons in the second quarter, a 6 percent rise year-on-year, slower than the previous quarter.

Despite China's central bank, a major buyer, maintaining its gold reserves at 2,264 tons in May and June after 18 consecutive months of increases, John Reade, chief market strategist at the WGC, said this would not alter the council's previous projections that global central banks may continue to increase gold holdings over the next 12 months as they do not foresee material changes in the second half.

Gold used in technology jumped 11 percent year-on-year in the first half, as the AI trend continued to drive demand in the sector, said the WGC.

Globally, retail gold bar and coin investment was 5 percent lower at 261 tons in the second quarter, primarily due to weak demand from Western markets. The record gold prices took its toll on second-quarter jewelry consumption, with volumes falling 19 percent year-on-year to a four-year low of 391 tons. There was also a minor 7-ton decline in global gold ETF holdings in the second quarter, said the WGC.

PARIS 2024



FENCING

FROM A BOY TO A SWORDSMAN

Maturity and experience help Hong Kong's Cheung win historic second Olympic fencing gold



Cheung Ka-long celebrates beating Italy's Filippo Macchi in the men's foil individual gold-medal bout at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games on Monday. AFP



“When I was young, I was really emotional, but as I grew older, I learned to recognize and adjust to this aspect, perhaps due to gaining more experience, or perhaps, I just grew up.”

Cheung Ka-long

By OASIS HU in Hong Kong
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Two years ago, in a quandary following his gold medal win in the men's individual foil at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, Edgar Cheung Ka-long watched Michael Jordan's documentary *The Last Dance* for a second time to learn how the legendary basketball player sustained his drive.

“The conventional path to win a championship involves striving for a very long time, but I achieved this goal relatively early, so what should I strive for next?” the Hong Kong champion fencer told local media at the time.

Ultimately, he discovered the answer — to continue winning. Two years later, at the Paris Olympics, 27-year-old Cheung successfully defended his men's foil individual title on Monday.

This gold medal is the second for the Hong Kong, China team at this year's Olympiad. It also distinguishes Cheung as the first athlete in Hong Kong's history to successfully defend an Olympic gold medal, and the first to secure two. Also, as the last instance of a fencer successfully

defending the Olympic men's foil title dates back to 1956, this medal made Cheung the first athlete in 68 years to achieve such a feat.

Following Cheung's victory, his French coach, Gregory Koenig, highlighted the additional significance of the gold medal: it symbolizes the journey of how a young boy evolved into a mature hero.

“Three years ago, he (Cheung) was a fearless boy. Today, he has transformed into a man,” Koenig said.

Koenig recalled vivid memories of Cheung's state of mind before the Tokyo Olympics.

At the time, when confronted with defeat, Cheung would experience moments of self-doubt. He visited Koenig's home, confiding that he felt a loss of joy in fencing, unsure of how to proceed, and questioning if he was suitable for the sport.

But, Koenig was convinced of Cheung's ability. Employing various methods, the coach supported Cheung. He encouraged and assured him that everything was well-prepared, he just needed “a good mindset”. He even granted Cheung a weeklong break at a critical juncture to help him sort out his emotions. Cheung later described this break as having “saved his life”.

With a revitalized attitude, Cheung emerged victorious. On the evening of July 26, 2021, at the Tokyo Olympics, he bested Daniele Garozzo, the Italian fencer who had previously secured the men's individual title at the Rio Olympics, with a score of 15-11.

The gold medal marked a significant moment in Hong Kong's history, becoming its second Olympic gold in 25 years, following the region's first Olympic triumph, in sailing, at Atlanta 1996. Beyond the sporting realm, the victory also acted as a morale booster for the city, lifting its spirits during a somber period following social unrest and the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

A new term had even emerged in Hong Kong — the “Ka-long Effect”.

Cheung became a household name among the city's 7 million residents. Advertisements featuring him adorned the streets. One of his alma maters named a classroom after him, making him the third alumnus to receive such recognition. Numerous fencing schools sprang up, and hordes of young people regarded Cheung as a spiritual beacon.

According to local media reports,

Cheung took time to process the sudden change.

Initially, he found it hard to accept. “I couldn't believe that I was an Olympic champion; I was bewildered by the situation.”

Subsequently, he gradually embraced his new identity. He acquired the ability to decline public appearances that didn't resonate with him, select endorsements judiciously, and graciously interact with fans who asked to take photos together.

But, more importantly, Cheung understood how to discern what truly matters amidst various temptations and voices — his passion for fencing.

Cheung's family background is rooted in basketball, as both his father and mother were professional basketball players. Initially, his family encouraged him to pursue basketball, but Cheung's passion for fencing blossomed when he began learning the sport at the age of 10. During middle school, Cheung wanted to become a full-time fencer, which was opposed by his family. Cheung didn't give up. He spent a year persuading his family, and eventually they backed down.

It was that passion for fencing that propelled Cheung to continue after his Tokyo success. Over the next three years, Cheung won many competitions, including the Asian Games in Hangzhou in 2023, the 2024 Grand Prix in Turin, Italy, in February, and another Grand Prix in Shanghai in May.

Throughout this period, Cheung also honed his ability to cope with failure.

In the lead-up to the Paris Olympics, Cheung faced setbacks similar to those preceding the Tokyo Olympics. June's 2024 Asian Fencing Championships in Kuwait concluded with him exiting the individual competition in the round of 16 and finishing the team competition in fourth place.

However, compared to previous years, Cheung approached these challenges with greater resilience. Cheung acknowledged that the defeat was a “hit” for him, yet it served as a reminder that he should “give his all in every match and approach each fencing bout with determination”.

In a June interview talking about his preparations for the Paris Olympics, he stated calmly, “I am not overly concerned about defending

the title. My focus is on performing at my best without placing excessive pressure on myself.

“When I was young, I was really emotional, but as I grew older, I learned to recognize and adjust to this aspect, perhaps due to gaining more experience, or perhaps, I just grew up.”

On Monday, during the final of men's foil at the Paris Olympics, Cheung faced off against the Italian fencer, Filippo Macchi. The competition saw Cheung trailing 12-14, before leveling the score to 14-14. In three decisive moments, Cheung clashed with his opponent and won the crucial point, ultimately securing victory with a score of 15-14.

Koenig said Cheung's exceptional mental fortitude was a pivotal factor in his gold medal win, adding, “You can't believe how strong his heart is.”

What's more, after this victory, Cheung is not as bewildered as he was after his win in Tokyo. Facing the media, he affirmed his determination to secure another World Championship title. “I will persist in my efforts to create more milestones in my professional journey, with my next aim set on achieving the Grand Slam.”

GOLF

McIlroy eyes ‘probably biggest’ career win of the past 10 years



Rory McIlroy of Ireland laughs on the sixth tee during a practice round at the 2024 Paris Olympics on Tuesday. AP

Rory McIlroy is hoping to ease some of his recent heartbreak in the majors by winning “probably” his biggest title in 10 years this week at the Paris Olympics.

The Northern Irishman fell agonizingly short of winning his first major title since 2014 at this year's US Open, when he missed two short putts in the final three holes, losing by one shot to Bryson DeChambeau.

The world No 3 then missed the cut at the British Open in Troon.

McIlroy opted not to play when golf made its return to the Olympics after a 112-year absence at the 2016 Rio Games, saying he would not even watch the competition.

But, he has changed his tune since,

and narrowly missed out on a medal three years ago in Tokyo as part of a seven-man play-off for bronze, which was eventually won by Chinese Taipei's Pan Cheng-tsung.

McIlroy has won 17 PGA Tour titles since the last of his four major triumphs, including three Tour Championships and the Players Championship, but says Olympic gold would, at least, rank alongside those successes.

“It would be the achievement, certainly of the year, if not — I think for me, it's well documented that I haven't won one of the big four in 10 years,” he told reporters on Tuesday.

“It would probably be one of, if not the biggest win in my career in the last 10 years.

“I'd say my focus is pretty high. The last time you guys saw me, I didn't give a very good account of myself at Troon. I want to make sure I'm right where I need to be when I tee off on Thursday.”

McIlroy will have plenty of competition when the first round gets under way on Thursday at Le Golf National, the venue for the 2018 Ryder Cup, which Europe won comprehensively.

World No 1 Scottie Scheffler will make his Olympic debut, while reigning champion Xander Schauffele will also be among the favorites after his 2024 PGA Championship and British Open titles.

Paris will see comfortably the strongest field yet for a men's Olymp-

pic golf event, with eight of the world's top 10 competing.

“(In) the Olympics, you want the best players to be able to participate,” said Spain's two-time major champion Jon Rahm.

“Any tournament, you want the best players possible to be representing their country.”

Organizers are reportedly considering adding a mixed team event to the golf schedule for the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles.

The decision to only include 72-hole individual tournaments — the same format used by the majority of major tours week in, week out — was a controversial one when golf was first reintroduced to the program.

“I think some people were sur-

prised that it was only individual stroke play, and they didn't try to mix it up with some different formats,” said McIlroy.

“If that came to fruition in LA, where there was a mixed team event, or even another team event that was not mixed and Shane (Lowry) and I could play in it if we qualify, yeah, I'd love that.”

“I think that would be a great format to bring to this competition.”

McIlroy will start his bid for gold alongside Scheffler and Swedish sensation Ludvig Aberg on Thursday, while Schauffele partners Rahm and Norway's Viktor Hovland in another marquee group.

AFP

PARIS 2024

By SUN XIAOCHEN in Paris
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Along with records broken and medals celebrated, competing at the Olympics is more often littered with narrow defeats, last-gasp errors and mental meltdowns that build true character and sportsmanship.

Chinese athletes, as much as they strive to win, have had to learn the hard way, and perhaps the only way, in Paris that it's not just about wins and losses, but more about wins and lessons, as they draw strength from setbacks to come back stronger at the next try.

The Chinese men's gymnastics squad was the latest to fall foul of the suffocating mental grind on the Olympic stage, after an error-laden performance on the last apparatus in Monday's team final cost it dearly in its quest for gold.

After completing the first five events with almost flawless routines, the Chinese squad seemed almost certain to regain the men's team Olympic gold medal, entering the sixth and last apparatus, the horizontal bar, with a commanding 3.267-point lead over Japan.

Yet, with plenty of room for error, two of three Chinese gymnasts crumbled under the intense pressure of "almost there" — first veteran Xiao Ruoteng landing on his knees, followed by young substitute Su Weide falling twice off the bar. The sudden errors, that drew deep sighs across the Bercy Arena, threw Team China out of the driver's seat in a blink of an eye, allowing archrival Japan to come back in the last minute and secure the coveted team title.

The wild Japanese celebration soon took over the southern Paris arena, leaving Team China ruing the wasted effort of the first two hours and 15 minutes of the final, and the past three years of preparation, through tears of silver.

"It was a big and tough lesson learned for me today. I feel so bad that I failed my teammates, wasting the whole team's hard work and sacrifice," Su, who replaced injured teammate Sun Wei before the Games, said remorsefully at the post-final news conference.

"I am really struggling inside now, I can't think about my next step or how to improve from this yet."

Perhaps for Su, and any other Olympic debutant, there's no way that the strength needed to withstand such a brutal mental blow can be developed in training, but only forged by failure on the biggest stage.

In a similar fashion, in Tokyo three years ago, it was Japan that fell to Russia's extraordinary execution in the final rotation, losing the team gold by the narrowest margin in Olympic history — 0.103 points — at its home Games.

"We have to move on, though. We should leave this behind and focus on preparing for the individual events," said veteran Liu Yang, who will defend his men's rings gold medal on Sunday.

Hot water in the pool

Joining the men's gymnasts in suffering similar Olympic ordeals this year are some of China's best swimmers, namely defending Olympic champion Zhang Yufei and three-time world champion Qin Haiyang, who both missed out on gold in their first respective final sessions in Paris.

After being beaten to silver by just 0.05 seconds three years ago in Tokyo, Zhang had to come to terms



Some of China's athletes are facing the harsh reality of the Olympics, as the moment they've prepared so long for ends in crushing disappointment



Clockwise from top: Su Weide falls from the horizontal bar in the artistic gymnastics men's team final; epee fencer Sun Yiwen listens to the referee following her loss; Qin Haiyang in action during the men's 200m breaststroke heats; and Zhang Yufei tries to hide her emotions after finishing third in the women's 100m butterfly. REUTERS / AP



with a second narrow defeat in an Olympic 100m butterfly final, won by Torri Huske of the United States on Sunday, after having tried so hard and proved what was possible with a world championships title last year.

Huske's compatriot and world record holder Gretchen Walsh won silver in 100m.

The challenges Zhang has dealt with, other than her surging opponents in the pool, involved repeated doping tests — as many as four times a day prior to the Games — which had apparently thrown her off her regular pace and routine.

In the lead-up to Paris, some Western media organizations published sensationalized reports about a proven food contamination incident in early 2021 that involved 23 Chinese swimmers, including Zhang.

The groundless allegations resulted in a high-frequency testing program targeting Chinese swimmers, despite the fact they had all been cleared of any wrongdoing by several investigations and reviews by international authorities, severely disrupting their final preparations en route to Paris.

Zhang, however, refused to make any excuses, only vowed to regroup and refocus on defending her 200m title, and perhaps, try the 100m a third time at the next Games in 2028.

"I just hope I can have another chance, after I readjust myself and improve my level, to compete against these two great rivals again to the best of my ability," said Zhang, who will also compete in the women's 50m freestyle in Paris.

As composed and positive as Zhang appeared after the race on Sunday, the Chinese star couldn't hold back her emotions at last, weeping while waving to fans applauding her from the stands, showing a glimpse of the huge pressure on her shoulders in the build-up to the Paris Games.

Zhang had expressed concerns about the doping allegations in an earlier interview, stating that the irresponsible accusations could have soured her relationship with some of her competitors, potentially turning healthy competition into hostility.

This explained why she smiled so brightly, apparently with a sense of relief, after both Huske and Walsh invited Zhang to share the top step of the podium to take group photos together.

"It was kind of heart-warming that they did embrace me on the podium," said a smiling Zhang at the post-final news conference.

"Hopefully, I can have the chance to participate in the next Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 2028," she said.

For three-time men's breaststroke world champion Qin, his main take-away from a disappointing 100m final, where he fell from hitting the turn first to an eventual seventh place finish, was to keep improving his mental game.

Qin, the 2023 world champion and world record holder in the 200m breaststroke, and considered one of the favorites for gold, failed to qualify for the final with a time of 2 min 09.96 sec in his semifinal, 1.85sec behind the fastest qualifier Leon Marchand of France.

"I was solid in training, but I don't know what went wrong today. My first 50m was as fast as expected, but somehow I messed up with my pace in the second split. I feel like I wasn't mentally focused enough to pull it off," said Qin after the final.

World Cup next year, De Vos thinks that China is certainly a rising force in equestrian sports.

"I think they should continue to work hard for the future, and, with all the development of the sport in China, as well as the support from the government, medals are a real possibility in the future."

"We are also helping with the education of equestrians. There is a lot of work to be done, and we are working together with the federation to make that happen."

For Hua, he has not decided whether to take part in the National Games or the Asian Championships in Thailand next year, but one thing for sure is that he will continue to practice the sport he loves.

"There's no end in sight at the moment. I love what I do. As long as my body is happy for me to keep doing it, I will keep doing it," Hua said.

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Equestrian chief: China on course to be galloping success

By SHI FUTIAN in Paris and
LI YINGXUE in Beijing

After a century, Olympic equestrian events have returned to their roots in Paris, set against the grand backdrop of the Chateau de Versailles. First introduced at the 1900 Paris Games, and revisited in 1924, these historic competitions once again take center stage in the City of Light.

The equestrian events kicked off on Saturday and drew large crowds, as riders and their equine partners competed under sunny skies. On Monday, Great Britain triumphed in the team eventing, while host nation France and Japan secured the silver and bronze medals. Germany's Michael Jung clinched the individual eventing title.

"I think that we are here in the most beautiful venue of the Olympic Games, in the Palace of Versailles," said Ingmar De Vos, president of the International Equestrian Federation.

"I feel how different the equestrian events are in Paris, compared with any other games."

De Vos praised the infrastructure of the competition and said he was glad to see the global growth of equestrian sports.

"We have many more different nationalities competing than we did a hundred years ago. The horses are much better, and the athletes are much healthier. I think it's a completely different sport now. It's very technical," he said.

According to De Vos, Sunday's cross-country competition attracted an impressive 45,000 spectators, filling the stands to capacity. "The IOC told me that the equestrian events are among the most in-demand among visitors from all over the world, so we are very happy," he said.

"My main hope is that we have happy, healthy horses and safe athletes, and that they all enjoy the Games," De Vos said. "For many of them, it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, so I really hope that they enjoy it. This is the best way to promote themselves, to promote their sport and to promote the horses."



Ingmar De Vos

The Olympic Games offer a unique opportunity to watch a wide variety of sports and witness a global community of top athletes coming together to celebrate the Olympic spirit and values, he said.

Alex Hua Tian fully experienced the crowd's enthusiasm, remarking that the Paris Games symbolize the homecoming of equestrian sports.

"For the three previous Olympics that I've competed in Beijing, Rio and Tokyo, the equestrian sports have been a little bit exotic. It's a new sport for people in those places. It's

still developing and still growing."

"Whereas coming here, with the crowds at the cross-country and in the show jumping arena, it really gives you and the horse a very special feeling, let alone the surroundings of the Palace of Versailles. I'll never forget this moment."

Hua concluded his fourth Olympics with a 23rd-place finish in individual eventing, falling short of his best result of eighth place in Rio.

Hua and his horse were in a joint bronze medal position on a score of 22 after the first competition day, and they were excited for the cross-country stage. However, Hua faced a controversial setback during his run — his horse Chocs brushed against a flag, resulting in a 15-point penalty.

"We had a little incident where Chocs was distracted by one of the jump judges who was wandering around on the jumping line, and we hit the flag," Hua explained.

Hua lodged a formal appeal, but the jury upheld the ruling. "I have to

accept it," Hua stated.

Other penalties in the cross-country, and the earlier dressage stage, amounting to 42.6 points, saw Hua's ranking plummet from 3rd to 32nd. The podium well out of reach, the pressure eased for Hua, and he was able to enjoy the last competition day and just had fun.

While Hua was disappointed, he was proud of his horse. "He could not have tried any harder. He's such a talented horse. He is a total dream for anyone to bring here," he said.

De Vos thought that, without the mistake on the fence during the cross-country phase, Hua would have stood a very good chance of a podium finish.

"He was a bit unlucky yesterday, but it shows that there is the potential and that's really important for the country. It's really important to have an Olympic dream and to have a chance to gain medals," De Vos said.

With a growing number of international events being held in China, such as the Longines FEI Jumping