

Forging a close bond

Friendship between China's Fuzhou and US' Tacoma knows no bounds CITY DANCE, PAGES 8-9



Business delegation from China attends New York forum

WORLD, PAGE 10



Skating to stardom

Teen relishes Olympic journey in Paris, despite last-minute loss SPORTS, PAGE 16

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President Xi Jinping holds a welcoming ceremony on Monday for President of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste Jose Ramos-Horta at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing prior to their talks. YUE YUEWEI / XINHUA



President Xi Jinping meets with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in Beijing on Monday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Xi: Sound relationship benefiting Beijing, Rome

By ZHOU JIN zhoujin@chinadaily.com.cn

A sound and stable China-Italy relationship serves the common interests of both nations, President Xi Jinping told visiting Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni on Monday, urging the two countries to stay committed to mutual opening-up and cooperation.

During their talks at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing, Xi told Meloni that China's readiness to develop bilateral ties, as well as the importance it attaches to bilateral relations, remains unchanged, despite ongoing profound changes in the global landscape.

Win-win cooperation is still the nature of China-Italy relations, he said, calling on the two sides to continue to understand and respect each other's choice of development path.

On Saturday, Meloni kicked off a five-day official visit to China, her first trip to the country since assuming office in October 2022. In November that year, Xi and Meloni had a meeting in Bali, Indonesia.

China and Italy are located at the two ends of the ancient Silk Road, and the historical friendly exchanges between the two countries have made important contributions to exchanges and mutual learning between Eastern and Western civilizations, Xi said.

China and Italy should uphold and carry forward the Silk Road spirit, and view and develop bilateral relations from a historical, strategic and long-term perspective, he said.

A three-year action plan to strengthen the bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership was issued on Monday.

According to the plan, the two countries confirmed that priority will be given to cooperation in areas including trade and investment, finance, scientific and technological

innovation, education, green and sustainable development, health-care and people-to-people exchanges.

China welcomes investment from Italian companies and is willing to import more high-quality Italian products, Xi said during their talks, adding that he hopes that Italy will also provide a fair, transparent, safe and nondiscriminatory business environment for Chinese companies operating in Italy.

He said that China supports Italy in hosting the 2026 Winter Olympics, and expects Rome to provide visa facilitation for Chinese citizens to visit the country.

China sticks to the path of peaceful development and never seeks hegemony, Xi said, adding that it would like to share development opportunities with other countries.

Xi said he hopes that Italy will understand and support China's development philosophy and play a constructive role in promoting dialogue and cooperation between China and the European Union and in pushing for the positive and stable development of China-EU relations.

Meloni said that Beijing plays an irreplaceable role in dealing with global challenges, expressing her willingness to advance closer and higher-level partnership with China.

Italy opposes decoupling and disruption of industrial and supply chains as well as protectionism, she said, adding that it is ready to play a positive role in promoting ever-stronger China-EU relations that will deliver tangible outcomes.

Zhao Leji, chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the nation's top legislature, also met with Meloni on Monday.

See **Ties**, page 3

China, Timor-Leste enhance ties

Deepening of reforms expected to bring fresh impetus to bilateral cooperation

By MO JINGXI mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

China and Timor-Leste pledged on Monday to deepen partnership under the Belt and Road Initiative and expand cooperation in agriculture, green development, the digital economy, and air transportation, as part of broader agreements reached during talks between the heads of state in Beijing.

President Xi Jinping hosted Jose Ramos-Horta, president of the island country in Southeast Asia, at the Great Hall of the People, and the two leaders jointly witnessed the signing of multiple cooperation documents after their talks. A joint statement on strengthening their comprehensive strategic partnership was also released.

The four-day trip, which started on Sunday, is Ramos-Horta's first visit to the country since he took office in 2022, and the first state visit to China by a president of Timor-Leste since China established diplomatic relations with the country in 2002 on the day of its independence.

Xi spoke highly of the two countries' traditional friendship, which

dates back to the 13th century through the ancient Maritime Silk Road, saying that China always puts Timor-Leste at an important place in deepening cooperation with neighboring countries.

He commended Ramos-Horta, who was then foreign minister of Timor-Leste, for personally signing the communique on the establishment of diplomatic relations and taking the lead in proposing the development of a comprehensive strategic partnership with China.

"(You) are the pioneer, builder and defender of the friendly cause between China and Timor-Leste," Xi said, vowing to work together with Ramos-Horta to take ties to a new level and bring more benefits to their peoples.

Ramos-Horta is the first foreign guest Xi received since the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China was held two weeks ago, during which more than 300 major reform measures were endorsed.

During their meeting in Beijing, Xi told Ramos-Horta that China's comprehensive deepening of reforms "will bring new impetus

and opportunities for global economic recovery, regional development and cooperation between the two countries."

He called on China and Timor-Leste to aim for more high-quality pragmatic cooperation through the better alignment of development strategies in the key areas of industrial revitalization, infrastructure construction, food self-sufficiency and improving public well-being.

China will share experiences and technologies with Timor-Leste in terms of water conservancy and disaster prevention and mitigation, and will promote cooperation in fisheries and poverty reduction, among other areas, with the purpose of assisting in the country's economic self-reliance and diversified development, Xi said.

He also expressed China's willingness to join hands with Timor-Leste to promote the development of the Global South and strengthen bilateral coordination within the United Nations and other multilateral platforms.

China will engage in more bilateral and trilateral cooperation with Timor-Leste within the framework of the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and other platforms, he said.

The visiting Timor-Leste president said he has made many visits to China since 1976 and has witnessed China's greatest transformations, including the eradication of absolute poverty under the leadership of President Xi.

He said he appreciated the long-term assistance China has provided for his country's economic and social development as well as the precious support for its COVID-19 response.

As a staunch upholder of multilateralism, China has put forward the BRI and a series of important global initiatives, and facilitated reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as well as among Palestinian factions, Ramos-Horta noted.

"This shows that China is a peaceful global power that contributes to peace and development," he said.

Ramos-Horta also said that South China Sea disputes should be resolved through negotiation and consultation among parties directly concerned. Ramos-Horta said his country is willing to work with all countries in the region, including China, to jointly maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea.

Zhao Leji, chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislative body, also met with Ramos-Horta on Monday.

Collaborative effort key to sustainable growth

The challenges posed by climate change are becoming more and more urgent, and there is already a global consensus that only by transforming the development paradigm from quantitative growth to sustainable development and jointly achieving a more rapid energy transition can we help the human race and our future generations.

The history of sustainable development is rather short. The Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, titled Our Common Future, conceptualized the terminology in 1987. The report outlined the three major areas of sustainable development as economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly formulated the sustainable development goals which are composed of 17 global goals and 169 targets. After almost three decades since its inception, the concept of sustainable development took a



much more concrete shape. In order to achieve these goals, a strong collaborative effort of the people, governments, businesses and civil society the world over was called for. Unfortunately, it is not easy to achieve this collaborative effort.

Compared with the past, the world today is much more interconnected through trade, economic integration, artificial intelligence, the internet and other digital mediums.

However, we are increasingly facing a reality that we do not want to see. Since the time the world united to overcome the financial crisis caused by the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, which strengthened the Group of 20, it has been moving in a less desirable direction. Globalization is giving way to "slowbalization", a word

coined by The Economist, or even deglobalization, and from multilateralism to pluralism or even to unilateralism. The global divide has become more evident and in this dire situation, the reality is that poverty continues amid plenty, widening inequalities as well as deepening the environmental crisis.

In order to get back to the basics, Antonio Guterres, secretary-general of the United Nations, called for the opening of the Summit of the Future at the UN in late September this year. The main reason for hosting this global event is that as humanity is facing a set of unprecedented challenges, this can only be solved through global cooperation. Therefore, major topics at the Summit of the Future would be sustainable development, global peace, control of new technology such as AI, empowerment of future generations and reform of the UN system.

See **Climate**, page 3

INSIDE
Clean energy supply chain presents possibilities
Global Views, page 13

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'NEW PEASANTS' RETURN HOME TO RELAX, PROSPER IN VILLAGES

More young people abandon hectic city life for opportunities in rural areas

By CHEN NAN chenنان@chinadaily.com.cn



In the bustling heart of Shanghai, where life pulsates under towering skyscrapers and neon streetlights, 24-year-old Liang Yu once worked as a full-time model.

After graduating from college with a major in broadcast television, she had planned to work in the film industry or advertising. However, today she unexpectedly finds herself toiling on a farm and not missing the glamour of her previous life.

Along with her boyfriend, Wang Kairui, who is four years older than

her, Liang runs a 0.3 hectare farm in suburban Shanghai. Their farm, New Field, grows a variety of produce including tomatoes, pumpkins and chilies.

"I never considered working on a farm and I knew nothing about farming," said Liang, who was born and raised in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, and came to Shanghai to study at the Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts.

See **Farming**, page 2

PAGE TWO

From page 1

"The first time I ate a tomato that I had planted myself, I was amazed. It tasted sweeter than anything available in the stores. I was very excited," she recalled.

Like many young people, Liang used to live a hectic life with her boyfriend, who worked as a photographer. Their mornings were a blur of coffee shots and commuter trains, and their evenings a whirlwind of networking events. They often stayed up late at night finishing work projects.

The turning point came in 2022 when they were confined at home during the COVID-19 epidemic and decided to grow tomatoes in their yard.

"We lived with three roommates and we all felt bored and frustrated back then. We started experimenting with planting tomato seeds in our small yard as a way to kill time," said Liang.

"None of us had any knowledge about growing tomatoes and my boyfriend started educating himself by reading instructions online. He would get up early in the morning to observe the tomatoes. We spent much of our time in the small yard.

"I can still recall vividly when we harvested our first tomato, we divided it into five parts for each of us. It was so fresh and natural," said Liang.

She said something stirred in the couple — a longing for authenticity, a connection to nature, and a desire for a simpler way of life.

Liang and Wang made a decision that would surprise their families and friends, and invested their savings in the farm. She still works part time as model and photographer to support the farm operations.

The duo spend a lot of time in the village managing the farm. They have gained more knowledge about seeds, learned about new farming technology and picked the farmers' brains for ideas.

"There are over 10,000 tomato varieties. We've experimented with about 400. Now, 90 percent of our daily food is grown by ourselves," Liang said.

Wang said: "Observing and witnessing the growth of vegetables brings us a sense of achievement, which we could not get from our other jobs. Farming has taught us to slow down and expand our knowledge in areas such as farming technology, business management, and marketing. It's a process that is very inspiring."

Seasonal variety

During harvest season, their days start at 3 am and end at 11 pm. They have learned to cope with different situations, especially dealing with unfavorable weather conditions, which have a huge impact on the vegetables.

Working on the farm has also given them a different perspective about the rhythm of life in rural communities, which follows the planting and harvesting seasons.

Liang and Wang are among a growing number of young Chinese people living in villages and becoming "new farmers."

The concept of rural revitalization was introduced by the government in 2017 and is a key part of the national development policy to stimulate local economies and guarantee food supplies, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

By 2025, more than 15 million people are expected to return to their home villages and start businesses, according to a ministry report.

On social media platform Xiaohongshu the hashtag "recording my life in the village" has garnered more than 2.5 billion views. Hashtags for "new peasant" have been viewed about 100 million times.

Liang and her boyfriend also use social media platforms to record and share their life on the farm, which has gained them a large fan following.

"Many people have left us messages. Some ask about the farming experience while others express their wish to return to the villages," she said.

"Nowadays, we young people want to break away from the traditional roles given to us by society, and choose jobs that are not considered mainstream, such as a new farmer."

Liang's father is an entrepreneur who understands and supports his daughter's decision to become a farmer. However, Liang's mother



Farming: Exodus from cities to villages

Liang Yu takes photos of vegetables produced on her farm in suburban Shanghai. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Liang checks potatoes grown at her Shanghai farm.



Wang Kairui, Liang's partner, checks vegetables at the couple's farm.

was initially cool on the idea.

"She works in government so she wants me to have a stable job like her. But gradually, by watching my videos she understood what I want to do," said Liang. "Though our farm is still not able to grow enough to cover our rent and other bills, we are optimistic about what we do and will keep on doing it."

Son of the soil

Like Liang and her boyfriend, 28-year-old Shao Qiankuan quit his job as an aviation security officer in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, and now works on a 300-mu (20 hectare) farm in the suburbs of Hangzhou.

Unlike the couple, Shao is familiar with agricultural life as his family has a farm in Jiamusi, Heilongjiang province.

"My former job, which I did for about six years, was very stable and paid me well," he said.

"However, I gained nothing new. I had considered quitting for a long time and discussed it with my parents. Thankfully, they supported me."

He worked for free for experienced farmers to acquire their agricultural knowledge. After

learning the basics of farming, he rented land with a few like-minded friends where they mainly grow rice and corn.

"Each day is different and I feel that every day over the past two years I have made progress," said Shao, adding that farm work has helped him to master other skills, such as tractor repairs and fighting floods during the rainy season.

"My day starts early in the morning with sowing seeds and tending to crops. After working on the farm for the whole day I edit my videos, which I share on social media platforms. My life has been enriched," he said.

Shao said he has met many young people like himself who receive an education in a big city, but give up on urban life and return to the village. "It's a trend," he said.

One of his new friends is Ren Yin, 27, who owns a coffee shop in Hongcun village located near Jingshan Temple. The temple was built during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and is located about 60 kilometers from Hangzhou.

As village entrepreneurs, the pair exchange ideas, help each other out and navigate challenges together.



Ren Yin poses in front of her coffee shop in Hongcun, Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.



Shao Qiankuan on his farm in the suburbs of Hangzhou.



Shao sorts corn harvested from his farm in Hangzhou.

Better latte, than never

Ren was born in Hongcun and left her hometown to study in Hangzhou. She graduated from Hangzhou Normal University in 2019 with a major in teaching Chinese as a second language. Ren later furthered her studies at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, where she obtained her master's degree in 2021.

However, as the pressure of looking for a job increased, she turned her back on the rat race in the city and returned to the village, which is nestled in rolling hills and fields, where she was born and raised.

In early 2023, she opened the coffee shop, which is named Lai Yin. The move was not without its challenges. Her decision was initially met with skepticism by her parents who couldn't understand why she would willingly trade the comforts and opportunities of the city for country life.

She discussed her proposal of opening a coffee shop with the village leaders, who supported her and invested about 300,000 yuan (\$41,300) in the business. The first six months of rent was waived.

About 40 square meters in size, the coffee shop, designed by Ren, is a two-floor building constructed from two shipping containers.

The majority of Ren's customers are tourists, cyclists and motorcycle riders who are attracted by beautiful winding mountain roads that stretch for about 20 kilometers. The coffee shop has a parking lot to cater for them.

As Ren has settled back into a bucolic lifestyle, her once-racing mind has gradually attuned itself to the gentle rhythms of rural life. The buzz of traffic has been replaced by the symphony of birdsong at dawn, and the chirps of crickets at dusk.

"I have found joy in the simplicity of life, which allows me to be close to nature and discover a profound sense of belonging," she said.

"Urban life can be fast-paced, stressful, and expensive. Returning to rural areas offers a quieter, more affordable lifestyle with cleaner air, closer family ties, and a slower pace of life, which can be appealing for those seeking better overall quality of life."

Utilizing resources

Shen Junming, 44, once worked in architectural design. In 2015, he began managing rural homestays, but due to the pandemic he returned to his hometown of Hangzhou.

There he applied for the job of rural operations manager in Hongcun, a position established in 2017 with the support of the government.

Shen said at first he didn't fully understand what the job entailed. "Over the years, I developed my own understanding of it," said Shen, adding that the job is mainly about being responsible for planning, coordinating, and supervising all operational aspects of the village, as well as using idle resources, and boosting employment.

"The idle resources are not only about vacant spaces such as houses, land and ponds, but also idle human resources. Some elderly people stay at home with not much to do. However, through the introduction of certain industries, these individuals can engage in production and activities in their village, or even start businesses, thereby increasing their income," said Shen.

Hongcun covers an area of approximately 10.97 square kilometers with nearly 2,000 residents living in 608 households, making it quite large in size. Besides the major attraction of Jingshan Temple, the village is also known for *heng fan dofu gan* (heng fan dried tofu), and *sanheyuan* bamboo salt.

Shen said over the past four years, the village has not only seen tangible economic benefits but also changed villagers' mindsets so they can see the opportunities created by new industries and more visitors.

"Originally, Hongcun faced challenges due to poor road links and being a remote village. At that time, there were no businesses, not even convenience stores. Over the past four years, things have changed, with more and more young people coming here and running their own businesses," Shen said, adding that the village provides support such as facilitating the establishment of new businesses and reducing barriers for young entrepreneurs.

This has resulted in the population growing with the arrival of new settlers, more village cooperative enterprises, and a twofold increase in the village's collective economy from 2021 to 2022, said Shen.

TOP NEWS

Volleyball victory



China's women's volleyball team narrowly defeated defending champions the United States 3-2 in a thrilling group stage match at the Paris Olympics on Monday. LAI XIANGDONG / XINHUA

Another gold in diving keeps clean sweep dream alive

By SUN XIAOCHEN in Paris
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As the undisputed favorite in all diving events, China is once again reigning supreme at the Olympic Games with two gold medals already secured in Paris, leaving the rest of the world impressed by its focus, consistency and collective strength.

Chinese men's pair Yang Hao and Lian Junjie held their nerve and executed six perfect dives, despite mounting pressure from formidable rivals, to win the synchronized 10-meter platform final on Monday, keeping Team China's hopes of an eight-medal clean sweep in diving alive.

Leading from the first round, Yang and Lian kept their dives complete and clean to score a total of 490.35 points and win their first Olympic title in the synchronized event, after having collected three world championship trophies together.

Thomas Daley and Noah Williams of Britain executed near-flawless routines, but had to settle for silver after scoring 463.44 points. Canada's

Rylan Wiens and Nathan Zsombor-Murray won bronze with 422.13 points.

After reclaiming the men's synchronized platform title from Daley and his former partner, Matty Lee, who won it at Tokyo 2020, the Chinese pair attributed their golden Olympic debut to their mental resilience and solid training before the Paris Games.

"There are no always-victorious athletes, or teams, in competitive sports. We just prepared the best we could and performed well on the day," said Yang, 26, a five-time world champion.

"Consistent performance comes from hard work on a daily basis. Overall, I think we just outworked most of our rivals in training, so that we could deliver when it matters," he added.

Daley, who made his Olympic debut at Beijing 2008, fell short of upsetting his mighty rivals again, after having almost single-handedly spearheaded the rest of the world's charge against the Chinese team in the past four editions of the Games.

The 30-year-old diving celebrity,

however, took pride in having at least proved that even China's "dream team" wasn't invincible.

"I am so incredibly happy to come away with another medal this time with Noah; the achievement is coming back to competition readiness within a year," said Daley, who reversed his retirement plan last year to go for a fifth Olympics, and has only trained with Williams in synchronized platform diving since November.

"China dived absolutely incredibly today. Every single one of their divers is almost flawless. We were applying the pressure every single round, yet they didn't fall to it," he said, adding, "What's interesting is being able to have the hope and the belief that it's possible to beat the Chinese divers... they know how to perform the best in competitions."

Team China got its ambition of claiming all eight diving titles up for grabs in Paris off to a flying start on Saturday after women's duo Chang Yani and Chen Yiwen secured the first one in the 3-meter synchronized springboard event at the Paris Aquatics Centre in Saint-Denis.

Sarah Bacon and Cassidy Cook of

the United States won silver, while British duo Yasmin Harper and Scarlett Mew Jensen won bronze.

Performing five routines, the same as the Chinese women, in the final, the pair from the US tried to match their world champion opponents in execution, quality and synchronization. It turned out that Team China has dominated the same event six times in a row at the Olympics for a reason.

"The Chinese have been the gold standard in diving for decades," Cook said. "We studied a lot of their films, and we love watching them to learn from their dives. But we are also peers with them. Our goal is to beat them one day."

Cook added: "Following them in the competition helps us do better. They are obviously putting the pressure on us, hitting the dives. They are kind of setting the standard. In a competition, I want to see good quality, and China forced us to have good quality to follow them up like that."

Inside

See more, pages 15, 16

DRIVING REFORM

Plenary session stresses reform, modernization

US experts: Efforts seen as crucial to driving China's productivity, long-term prospects

By MINLU ZHANG in New York
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Reform and modernization were key takeaways from the communique issued at the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, experts from a think tank in the United States said.

They also see reform and modernization as crucial to boosting productivity and long-term growth through technological innovation.

Guoguang Wu, a senior fellow on Chinese politics at the Asia Society Policy Institute's Center for China Analysis, said the Party is sending a "very strong signal to Chinese people and the international society that we will have reform."

Wu offered his observations on Friday at a webinar held by Asia Society, a think tank and nonprofit organization, titled "The Third Plenum: What is Xi Jinping's Plan for China?"

Lizzi Lee, a fellow on Chinese economy at the ASPI's Center for China Analysis, noted that the emphasis of the third plenary session was on "Chinese-style modernization", including emphasis on technology innovation and the "new quality productive forces".

The plenary session also highlighted challenges such as income inequality, trade tensions and fiscal issues and noted strategies to address those issues through supply chain policies, market roles and financial reforms.

Lee noted two other points: self-sufficiency and major breakthroughs, especially in frontier science, which is "no surprise given the rising geopolitical tensions, particularly with the US".

She said the plan also emphasizes a dual role of State guidance and intense competition among private sector companies and entrepreneurs.

In its original text, the communique said that "we must better leverage the role of the market, foster a fairer and more dynamic market environment, and make resource allocation as efficient and productive as possible. We will lift restrictions on the market while ensuring effective regulation, striving to better maintain order in the market and remedy market failures."

The government "will continue to provide guidance and support for industry supply chains, while the private sector drives growth and innovation". That strategy has already been successful in the electric vehicle and battery sectors, and China plans to extend it to key areas such as semiconductors, medical equipment and machine tools, Lee said.

China has a major economic goal to lift per capita GDP to that of a mid-level developed country by 2035, and to reach that target, China's economy would need to grow at about 4.5 to 5 percent annually, she said.

According to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics on July

It's clear to me from the third plenum document that the Chinese leadership has decided that to sustain this level of growth, China needs systemic upgrading along the global value chain, not just short-term stimuli."

Lizzi Lee, fellow at the ASPI's Center for China Analysis

15, China's economy grew by 4.7 percent in the second quarter of the year after 5.3 percent growth in the first quarter.

"It's clear to me from the third plenum document that the Chinese leadership has decided that to sustain this level of growth, China needs systemic upgrading along the global value chain, not just short-term stimuli," Lee said.

Bert Hofman, an honorary senior fellow on Chinese economy at the ASPI's Center for China Analysis, said the document is "about high-quality development, the high-standard socialist market economy as being the tool for this Chinese modernization".

Hofman saw a consistent policy on the supply side. He said that the policy is about significantly increasing investment in science and technology and integrating it with industrial policy. The goal is to use various tools to link current and future technologies with high-quality productive forces.

Hofman also said that one of the most important points of the third plenum is the reaffirmation of a key principle acknowledged by the third plenary session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 2013: that the market plays a decisive role in allocating resources.

He said that he believes that the government-market balance is now even stronger than in 2013. Although this principle wasn't mentioned in the communique, it is reiterated in the resolution, emphasizing the need to leverage the market's role, he noted.

The plenum clearly recognizes the fiscal problems in China, particularly at the local level due to issues in the real estate sector, he said.

There are promises of tax and transfer reforms, centralizing expenditures and improving budget management. The resolution provides a clearer framework and direction for addressing those issues, he added.

Inside

• Comment, page 12
• See more, page 13

Ties: Broad space seen for countries to deepen cooperation

From page 1

Sun Yanhong, a senior research fellow at the Institute of European Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that Meloni's China trip seeks to repair and stabilize the relationship strained by Italy's unilateral decision to not renew its participation in the Belt and Road Initiative.

With integrated economic interests and a strong desire for cooperation, there is broad space for the two countries to deepen mutually beneficial cooperation, Sun said.

Strengthening pragmatic cooperation between the two countries is also conducive to stabilizing China-EU relations, she said.

Italy's policy toward China will need to balance trans-Atlantic interests and operate within the EU framework, which will bring more challenges to China-Italy cooperation.

What is needed now is for both sides to engage in thorough communication to find new paths and forms for strengthening cooperation under the new circumstances, in order to achieve win-win outcomes, she said.

Climate: Green shift emerges as new paradigm in place of quantitative growth

From page 1

As you know, we have been experiencing an unprecedented rise in global temperatures and the warming of ocean basins. These changes are profoundly altering climate and have already begun to unleash catastrophic consequences from rising sea levels to extreme weather events. Therefore, putting the world on track to net zero is a monumental task that requires not only good policy frameworks, investments or technological innovations, but also strong partnership, as well as leadership.

We have long been used to the paradigm of quantitative growth which helped national economies grow at the expense of environmental sustainability. That is why the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development ministerial council meeting unanimously passed a resolution — "Toward Green Growth" — in June 2010 and based on that resolution, the OECD Secretariat produced a monumental document on green growth in 2012 on the occasion of its 50th anniversary.

Now I am glad to note that we are trying to move away from the traditional quantitative growth paradigm to the new paradigm of growth, the green growth.

It is needless to say that to promote sustainability, or to achieve the UN sustainable development goals, one of the core challenges is global finance, particularly green finance.

Finance plays a critical role in

sustainable development by mobilizing and allocating to the projects that promote environmental, social and economic sustainability. Green finance is the financing of investments that provide environmental benefits in the broader context of environmentally sustainable development. This includes financing for initiatives aimed at reducing carbon emissions, increasing energy efficiency and enhancing natural resource conservation.

Energy is at the heart of climate change solutions and the transition to green growth. China, as the second-largest economy in the world, has a clear roadmap for green and energy transition and achieving carbon neutrality, and has already done a great job.

In 2020, the country announced its dual carbon goals — achieving peak carbon before 2030 and carbon neutrality before 2060. Once done, it will significantly contribute to global actions against climate change. Chinese companies have emerged as global leaders in renewable energy innovation and investment, leading advancements in solar, wind and hydroelectric technologies. In 2023, renewable energy accounted for over 50 percent of the country's total installed capacity. China is also spearheading global efforts in electric vehicles, lithium batteries and photovoltaic products, which are all part of the country's commitment to its dual carbon goals and outstanding achievement in energy transition.

There are some important experiences that the world can learn

from China's success, including the key instruments of green finance. For example, green bonds that are specifically earmarked for funding projects with environmental benefits, green loans that are granted to projects which contribute to environment sustainability often with favorable terms, and green investment funds that pool capital from multiple investors to finance a diversified portfolio of environmentally sustainable projects and companies.

In this connection, I am very pleased that recognizing the importance of the role that green finance plays in sustainable development and in order to reward innovative green finance solutions worldwide, the International Finance Forum launched the IFF Global Green Finance Award in 2020. The award leverages IFF's global resources and aims to support to achieve the sustainable development goals.

As we are already a team in the fight against climate change, let us embrace the spirit of partnership and innovation. Let us commit ourselves to advancing sustainable energy solutions that are key to our survival. Let us dedicate ourselves to making our planet more sustainable for future generations.

The author is cochairman of the International Finance Forum, chair of the Council of Presidents of the United Nations General Assembly and former prime minister of the Republic of Korea. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Flower power



People participate in a parade during the Battle of Flowers event on Sunday at the Paseo de la Alameda in Valencia, Spain. During the parade, which has been held since 1891, spectators throw carnations of different hues at the passing floats. ROBER SOLSONA / EUROPA PRESS VIA AP

CHINA

PATHWAY TO PROGRESS

Editor's note: The third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China focuses closely on taking further steps that will advance Chinese modernization. Starting today, China Daily will publish a series of articles to interpret the implementation of reform plans and measures that are meant to contribute to socioeconomic development at the community and grassroots levels outlined at the third plenary session in various fields.

Patent boom signals robust innovation

Country's AI invention growth outruns global average, fueling digital economy

By CAO YIN

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China's invention patents related to core industries of the digital economy continued to grow last year, especially in the field of artificial intelligence, an official from the country's top intellectual property regulator said on Monday.

"As a hot area of technological creativity, innovation in the digital economy was very active in 2023, becoming an important engine of economic growth," Ge Shu, head of the China Intellectual Property Administration's Strategic Planning Department, told a news conference.

He revealed that China's authorized invention patents in the core industries of the digital economy reached 406,000 in 2023, with an average annual growth rate of 21 percent in the past five years.

By the end of last year, a total of 150,000 domestic enterprises had invention patents regarding the digital economy, an increase of 31,000 over the previous year, he said, noting "innovation in the AI field in particular is more robust".

Specifically, the number of valid AI-related invention patents in China rose to 378,000 last year, year-on-year growth of more than 40 percent and also 1.4 times the global average growth rate, he said.

To meet requirements in a recently released resolution of the central leadership, he added that the administration will strengthen cooperation with other authorities to play the IP role in stimulating innovation, so as to better support digital economic development.

Promoting the digital economy and establishing an efficient system for the comprehensive management of IP rights were written into the resolution adopted at the third plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee, which concluded in Beijing on July 18.

Stressing that protecting IP rights protects innovation, Shen Changyu, head of the administration, called for deepening IP reforms by incentivizing innovation.

With a focus more on patent reviews regarding key and core technologies, he said that IP transformation and application should

be boosted to help the country achieve self-reliance in science and technology at a higher level.

In addition, he urged greater efforts to serve high-level opening-up by deepening IP management and reforms, with stronger participation in IP global governance and formulation of relevant rules.

"We must continuously uphold the principle of equally protecting every enterprise, regardless of whether it's domestic or foreign, so as to attract more global resources by creating a market-oriented, law-based and internationalized business environment," he added.

378,000 invention patents

related to AI were registered in China as of last year, with a year-on-year growth of more than 40 percent and also 1.4 times the global average rate.

According to the data, over 5,000 foreign and joint-venture companies have registered at 115 national-level IP protection centers across China as of last year, "which means they can enjoy the same IP-related services as domestic innovators through quick channels," said Hu Wenhui, deputy head of the administration.

To learn more about the difficulties and needs of foreign enterprises, the administration has also established a system to increase communication with them and endeavored to help them deal with IP-related disputes in China, he said.

"For instance, since the beginning of last year, we've helped innovators from many countries, including the United States, Germany, France, Italy, Thailand and Denmark successfully solve IP-related lawsuits, receiving their praise," he added.

He said that by the end of June, the number of valid foreign invention patents in China had reached 919,000, while valid trademarks were up 2.13 million, representing increases of 3.9 percent and 3.8 percent respectively year-on-year.

"These figures demonstrate that foreign enterprises have attached great importance to the Chinese market, and have full confidence in our IP protection," he said.

Briefly

Internet conference to open next month

The 2024 China Internet Civilization Conference will be held in Chengdu, Sichuan province, from Aug 28 to 29. Yang Jianwen, deputy head of the Cyberspace Administration of China, said at a news conference in Beijing on Monday that the conference will be themed "Promoting the Spirit of the Times, Building a Civilized Cyberspace Together", and will feature an opening ceremony, a main forum and 11 sub-forums. The main forum will invite officials, experts, scholars, influencers and representatives from various social media platforms to deliver keynote speeches, he said. The 11 sub-forums will focus on topics including protecting minors in cyberspace, debunking online rumors, artificial intelligence, and internet law enforcement actions in optimizing the business environment, Yang added.

Senior adviser probed for severe violations

Li Weiwei, a senior political adviser, is being investigated for suspected severe violations of Party disciplines and national laws, the country's top anti-corruption watchdogs have said. The Communist Party of China Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and the National Commission of Supervision announced the investigation online on Monday, with no more details about the case. Public information shows that Li, 66, a native of Hunan province, started her career in 1975 and joined the Party in 1976. She worked in Hunan for decades. In March 2023, she became deputy head of the Committee on Population, Resources and Environment of the National Committee of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body.

CHINA DAILY

Three times the fun



Chimelong Safari Park in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, holds a birthday celebration for the world's only giant panda triplets Meng Meng and its cub (left); Ku Ku (middle); and Shuai Shuai (right). They turned 10 on Monday. CHEN JIMIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Nation makes strides improving rural environment, water quality

By HOU LIQIANG

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The country has made significant strides in improving the rural living environment, successfully eliminating the majority of large-scale black and odorous water bodies in rural China, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment announced.

As of the end of July, over 3,400 such dirty water bodies have been cleaned up, accomplishing 80 percent of the tasks set for the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25), Zhao Shixin, head of the ministry's department of soil ecology and environment, said at a news conference on Monday.

According to a 2021-25 action plan for rural pollution control, which was published by the ministry and another four national government bodies in early 2022, China aims to essentially eradicate all of the large-scale black and odorous water bodies by 2025.

The achievement happened thanks to a series of measures the ministry rolled out, which prioritize these heavily polluted water bodies that are on people's doorsteps, he noted.

The ministry compiled a detailed list of all black and odorous water bodies in rural China. To

ensure they can be adequately treated as scheduled, the ministry brought under its priority supervision about 4,000 of them, he said.

Another almost 10,000 were brought under the priority supervision of provincial-level authorities, he added.

He said the ministry also organizes dynamic inspections of black and odorous water bodies that local governments claim to have cleaned up to make sure that they have been adequately treated as reported.

Satellite remote sensing has been applied to facilitate the inspection, and water quality monitoring is carried out regularly, he added.

Water quality monitoring carried out since 2022 in 2,612 water bodies that are no longer black and odorous shows that 97 percent of them have been adequately treated, he said.

"In addition to analyzing the factors to blame for the reoccurrence of heavy pollution, the ministry will also urge and guide local authorities to rectify problems in a timely manner and establish long-term mechanisms to keep them clean," he said.

Zhao also highlighted remarkable progress in the treatment of rural domestic sewage.

He said that as of June, about 45 percent of such waste water in rural China has been collected for treatment, compared with 28 percent in 2021.

Under the ministry's organization, over 2,700 county-level areas across the country have formulated plans dedicated to rural domestic sewage treatment, he said.

Pei Xiaofei, the ministry's spokesman, said the country has seen the quality of its surface water generally improve in the first half this year.

About 88.8 percent of national monitoring sections across the country reported fairly good water quality from January to June, up by 1 percentage point year-on-year, he said. Only 0.8 percent of these sections registered water quality below Grade V, down by 0.2 percentage point from the same period last year.

China has a five-tier quality system for surface water, with Grade I the best. The quality can be considered as being fairly good if it reaches Grade III and above.

According to the ministry, 83.4 percent of the country's surface water in 2020 was found to be fairly good quality, and the proportion of those with quality of below Grade V stood at 0.6 percent.



Planting season

Farmers plant late rice in the paddy fields in Lujiang county, Anhui province, on Sunday. As a major double-cropping rice producing area in China, the county has equipped more than 80 percent of its rice planting areas with advanced technologies, increasing efficiency and farmers' incomes. ZUO XUEZHANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Wild tiger population on the rebound

By YAN DONGJIE

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The wild tiger population in China has shown recovery in recent years, with the number of Siberian tigers, or Northeast tigers, increasing from around 27 six years ago to about 70, the National Forestry and Grassland Administration announced on Monday, the 14th World Tiger Day.

According to data from the Northeast Tiger and Leopard National Park, last year eight breeding families and over 20 cubs were recorded in the park, covering a distribution area of over 11,000 square kilometers, with the abundance of tiger prey more than doubling.

China began piloting the construction of the Northeast Tiger

and Leopard National Park in the southern part of Laoyeling, at the border of Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces, in 2017.

Through ecological protection, field patrols, establishment of management stations and monitoring systems, favorable conditions have been provided for the survival and reproduction of wild tigers, leading to growth in the populations of wild Siberian tigers and leopards. The number of Northeast leopards has also increased from 42 six years ago to 80, the administration said.

Both the Siberian tiger and leopard are national first-level protected wild animals and are respectively classified as endangered and critically endangered species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature due to

their extremely low population numbers.

The Northeast Tiger and Leopard National Park, covering 14,100 square kilometers, is the largest habitat for tiger populations in China and the only tiger habitat with stable breeding families.

Its eastern part borders the Land of the Leopard National Park in Russia and is the only national park in China tasked with cross-border protection cooperation.

Along with the protection of Siberian tigers and leopards within the national park, populations of wild animals such as brown bears, sika deer, roe deer, as well as wild plant species like ginseng, matsutake mushrooms and Chinese yew, have all shown signs of recovery, according to the administration.

Paddleboard creating a big splash in Beijing

By DU JUAN

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Many parks and scenic spots in Beijing have introduced stand-up paddleboarding this summer, sparking a surge in the sport's popularity that reflects the city's successful water system management.

On a sunny Thursday afternoon in central Beijing's Shichahai Scenic Area, visitors flocked to the shores and boats glided across the lake. Rows of paddleboards lined the dock, with people lined up waiting to try the water sport. Several professional clubs now offer lessons.

Tian Lili, 26, was trying paddleboarding for the third time, having initially been introduced to it by a friend at Chaoyang Park.

"Paddleboarding is a summer sport that is perfect for young people," she said. "It allows you to bask in the sun, cool off on the water and have fun."

"It's quite easy for beginners to pick up. Once you grasp the basics and maintain balance, you can paddle around effortlessly."

She praised Shichahai for providing comprehensive safety measures for paddleboarders.

"The authority has designated specific water areas for paddleboarding activities to avoid collisions with boats," Tian said. "The staff also recommends purchasing accident insurance."

"Additionally, there are rescue boats stationed around the area, ensuring swift assistance within two minutes of an incident."

"I believe it will boost consumption. I came here specifically today because I knew there were paddleboarding activities. After paddling, I plan to have a meal here and hang out a bit. I believe most people, like me, will spend money here."

Paddleboarding has gained popularity as a leisure activity in China in recent years, appealing to individuals of all ages, said a paddleboarding instructor surnamed Wang who is working at Shichahai.

She said participants range from age 7 to 65, with the area accommodating 200 to 300 people a day.

Having taught paddleboarding for two years, Wang emphasized that the paddleboarding instructors at Shichahai are trained professionals certified by the General Administration of Sport.

The park said paddleboarding trials have been offered since the beginning of this month, with four sessions daily lasting two hours each.

Shichahai has been implementing standardized management of paddleboarding activities since early this month, delineating separate water areas for paddleboarding and boating activities, which will be operated and managed collectively by boat companies.

Paddleboarding enthusiasts can now be found across the city, from the suburban Jinhai Lake and Chaobai River to the urban Liangma River and Kunyu River. Professional clubs formed by paddleboarding enthusiasts are emerging, offering services such as rentals and lessons to lower the entry barrier.

In recent years, Beijing's water system management has shown significant progress, turning public water bodies in the city into summer activity spaces for residents and unleashing substantial consumer potential. However, alongside the rise of new consumer activities, challenges have emerged.

A 72-year-old resident of Shichahai surnamed Wang said he has been swimming in the area since childhood and had noticed a slight decline in water quality, primarily due to the influx of boats and visitors.

"Expanding the activity area, enhancing safety measures and enabling public water bodies to better serve residents will foster the better development of emerging leisure formats," said Wu Liyun, a professor focusing on culture and tourism at Beijing International Studies University. "The development of emerging sports, to a certain extent, requires standardized management, with professional qualifications for activity organizers."

Li Boyu and Zhu Sidi contributed to this story.

BUSINESS

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Experts: EU's new tariff move will harm ties

Provisional duties on biodiesel imports from China to hamper bloc's green shift

By WANG KEJU
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China's trade tensions with the European Union, which have been fueled due to a string of tariff increases and protectionist actions by Brussels against Chinese enterprises, could intensify further as the bloc is set to levy provisional duties of up to 36.4 percent on biodiesel imports from the nation.

The provisional tariffs will come into effect from Aug 16, but its investigation will continue until February, when definitive duties for five years could be set.

The EU's tariff measures are at risk of facing a backlash, as they can escalate costs for relevant products, ultimately causing harm to the interests of both industries and consumers within the bloc, officials and analysts said.

China has raised deep concerns regarding the EU's protectionist actions in the biodiesel sector, said He Yongqian, a spokeswoman for the Ministry of Commerce, at a recent news conference in Beijing. Biodiesel is a renewable, biodegradable fuel manufactured domestically from vegetable oils, animal fats or recycled restaurant grease.

The EU, as the largest consumer of biodiesel globally, imports biodiesel from China to meet its immense consumption needs, hastening its own green transformation and energy efficiency objectives, He added.

The EU market for biodiesel is worth 31 billion euros (\$33.7 billion) annually, providing a renewable alternative to fossil fuels in the EU's transport sector and improving the bloc's energy security, the commission said in a statement in December.

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, proposed setting provisional tariffs of between 12.8 percent and 36.4 percent, on July 19. This comes in the wake of its recent action to slap hefty tariffs on Chinese-made electric vehicles.

The proposed duties for biodiesel are 12.8 percent for EcoCeres Group products, 36.4 percent for Jiaao Group, including Zhejiang Jiaao Enproenergy, and 25.4 percent for exports by Zhuoyue Group, including Longyan Zhuoyue New Energy Co.

The European Biodiesel Board, which lodged the complaint, said earlier this month that a flood of biodiesel from China was having a devastating effect on EU production.

China's biodiesel industry has thrived due to its unique domestic conditions, particularly its vast food service market. The large-scale col-

lection of restaurant grease underpins China's capabilities in biodiesel production and provides pricing advantages, said Dong Yifan, an assistant research fellow at the Institute of European Studies at the Beijing-based China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations.

The EU's reliance on trade protectionism is a direct response to the insufficient competitiveness of its domestic industries. Driven by influential industry interest groups, Brussels has opted for protective measures that fail to address the core challenges facing its sectors, Dong said.

Such approaches are unlikely to enhance the competitiveness of EU industries in the long run. Instead, they may disrupt the stability of global supply chains and negatively impact China-EU economic relations, Dong added.

Zhejiang Jiaao Enproenergy said in a statement late on Thursday that the EU's decision to impose provisional tariffs on biodiesel imports has had a noticeable, yet limited, effect on its exports to the EU market.

In response to the tariffs, the company is proactively implementing strategies to mitigate potential losses, shifting its focus to developing domestic applications for biodiesel and expanding its domestic sales market, the company added.

The EU's biodiesel industry, due to its significant economic impact, remains a frequent source of trade disputes with its partners, analysts said.

Since 2008, the EU has repeatedly resorted to a variety of trade remedy measures, including anti-dumping, countervailing and anti-circumvention duties, against biodiesel products from various trade partners such as the United States, Canada, Indonesia and Argentina, said Cui Fan, a professor at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing.

This pattern of alleged discriminatory practices has drawn the ire of affected members, who have sought recourse through the World Trade Organization's dispute settlement mechanism on multiple occasions, Cui said.

China has consistently advocated for the prudent and reasonable use of trade remedy measures, urging the EU to refrain from hastily adopting protectionist policies, Commerce Ministry spokeswoman He said, emphasizing the importance of dialogue and negotiation to address mutual concerns.



A view of Merck's booth during an expo in Shanghai last month. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Merck to invest more in country, sharpen focus on R&D, local tie-ups

By LIU ZHIHUA
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Merck will continue to invest in China, which is not only the second-largest consumer market in the world but also has rising innovation capability, said a senior executive of the German science and technology company.

"China is a significant market for us, for looking at innovation to bring it outside China and bringing our innovation into China," said Peter Guenter, a member of the executive board and CEO of Healthcare at Merck.

"We have done a lot of investments in China. Our commitment to China is clear. We will continue to grow, and we will continue to invest in the country."

The executive is deeply impressed by the remarkable changes in China's pharmaceutical market as it has "developed incredibly over the last 10 to 20 years, transforming from a generic industry focused on small molecules to one driven by innovation."

China has become very strong in technological innovation, as reflected by its rapid progress and innovation in the field of antibody-drug conjugates, he said.

China's huge potential as a major innovation hub holds great promise for Merck to collaborate with local partners, including startups, biotech and biopharma firms, and research institutes, to drive innovation forward, said Guenter.

"At a certain point in time, China could be the country from which innovation comes, truly first. I think that's the next frontier for the Chinese R&D ecosystem, to continue being very, very good at perfecting technologies,



Peter Guenter

but also going upstream to find a new molecule for a new disease."

Citing various dynamics behind China's growing innovation drive that include well-educated talent and enabling regulatory environment, the executive spoke particularly highly of the clinical development pace in China.

"The speed, agility and quality of the Chinese investigators who conduct clinical trials are remarkable, he said, adding the massive number of patients with unmet medical needs also contributes to the speedy drug development pace in the country.

"We are very active in China, having been in China for more than 90 years. We are conducting our own R&D in China, and also look at all these local partners for collaborations. We have done a lot of local collaborations with Chinese biotech companies, and hopefully, we can do even more of that in the future," he said.

China is the second-biggest pharmaceutical market in the world, but still has a large growth potential. Within Merck, the China business takes up a double-digit share of the global contribution and is of great strategic significance.

There are three sectors where the company operates — life science, electronics and healthcare. In the past 10 years, Merck has invested around 6 billion yuan (\$820 million) in China. Since last year, the company has closed two licensing deals with Chinese companies, one with

Hengrui Pharmaceuticals and the other one with Abbisko Therapeutics, bringing Chinese innovations to the global stage and to benefit patients worldwide.

The executive, however, said concentration of efforts on certain known targets in new drug R&D, which tends to cause unhealthy competition, is a challenge facing the Chinese pharmaceutical industry.

He further said Merck is always ready to help China to build a multilayered reimbursement or insurance system, so as to expand insurance coverage for drugs and treatments, thereby providing more rewards for innovations.

In light of the complexities and geopolitical tensions in the world, Guenter called for more collaboration among countries, and among industries.

"Only through partnerships and working together will we be able to solve the big challenges of mankind. If you think about climate change or new treatments for patients, collaboration is the right recipe and the right answer," he said.

China will improve the mechanisms for supporting the development of innovative drugs and medical equipment, according to the resolution on further deepening reform in a comprehensive fashion to advance Chinese modernization, which was adopted at the recently concluded third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

The country will also further reform medical insurance payment models and improve major disease insurance and medical assistance schemes, the resolution said.

Big-ticket SOE buying boon for foreign firms

By ZHONG NAN
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Big-ticket investments in new equipment by China's centrally administered State-owned enterprises will create fresh growth points for both domestic private firms and foreign companies alike, said experts and business leaders, stressing that all participants share entwined interests and great economic cooperation potential.

Aiming to stay at the forefront of the latest technological and industrial advances, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council announced last week that central SOEs will invest over 3 trillion yuan (\$413.55 billion) into large-scale equipment upgrades over the next five years.

Central SOEs will implement a series of intelligent transformation, digital transition and network connectivity-themed projects to promote the integration of new technologies such as artificial intelligence with all aspects of the manufacturing process, SASAC said.

Chen Jianwei, a researcher at the Beijing-based University of International Business and Economics' Academy of China Open Economy Studies, said this move will help attract both foreign and domestic companies from the private sector to increase their investments in these fields in China.

"They are likely to increase spending on promoting technological innovation, green and sustainable development, digital transformation and the circular economy within the country," said Chen. "After all, it is rare to find such big growth opportunities worldwide."

Through enhanced integration into China's industrial supply chain, foreign companies can leverage the scale and efficiency of the Chinese market to optimize their global supply chains, he added.

Chinese SOEs are no strangers to purchasing high-end equipment from foreign enterprises. For example, GE Vernova Inc, a US-based energy equipment manufacturer, said in early July that two of its hydrogen-ready combined-cycle power generators were put into operation in a power plant in Huizhou, Guangdong province.

The power plant, owned by State-owned Guangdong Energy Group Co, is expected to inject up to 1.34 gigawatts of electricity into the grid and provide steam for industrial processes of a chemical complex in the city.

Xu Xin, president of China Gas Power Services at GE Vernova, said that China's medium and long-term plans for the development of the hydrogen energy industry proposes an accelerated conversion toward efficient hydrogen production from renewable energy.

The investment by central SOEs can also stimulate more involvement from the private sector, fostering a more dynamic and competitive industrial environment, said Hu Chi, a researcher at SASAC's research center.

The Ministry of Commerce emphasized in mid-July that it will continue to promote high-standard opening-up and improve the business environment, ensuring equal treatment for both domestic and foreign companies. This includes supporting large-scale equipment renewals, trade-in programs for consumer goods and relevant government procurement activities, said Ling Ji, vice-minister of commerce.

Liu Shaowei, head of the bureau of financial oversight and operational evaluation under SASAC, said that central SOEs will accelerate the replacement and upgrades of outdated production equipment having low efficiency and obsolete technologies.

The government will support central SOEs to develop and produce new types of equipment in various fields, such as industrial machinery, agriculture and healthcare, said Liu.

Since the beginning of the year, China has been promoting new industrialization, focusing on energy conservation and carbon reduction, digital transformation and intelligent upgrades, SASAC said.

Briefly

Central bank conducts reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 301.57 billion yuan (\$42.29 billion) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.7 percent on Monday. The move aims to keep liquidity reasonable and ample in the banking system at the end of the month, the People's Bank of China said. A reverse repo is a process by which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

Renminbi weakens against the greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, weakened 46 pips to 7.1316 against the US dollar on Monday, said the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. In China's spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

Chinese buy more gold bars, coins in H1

By ZHENG XIN
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China's gold consumption pattern shifted significantly in the first half of 2024, with overall demand dropping as record-high gold prices deterred jewelry buyers even as purchases of gold bars and coins showed an uptick.

As gold prices touched historic highs during the January-June period, sales of gold jewelry as well as gold bars and coins showed a divergent trend, with the consumption of gold jewelry, which has a higher premium, significantly declining, while those of gold bars and coins, which have relatively lower premiums, surging, according to the China Gold Association.

National gold consumption in China dropped 5.61 percent year-on-year during the first half of 2024 to 523.75 metric tons, with that for gold jewelry falling 26.68 percent year-on-year to 270.02 tons and purchases of gold bars and coins increasing

by 46.02 percent to 213.64 tons, the association said on Sunday.

High and volatile gold prices have increased operational risks for gold processing and sales companies, leading to a reduction in inventory by wholesale and retail businesses, and a significant decrease in processing volume for jewelry manufacturing companies, it said.

Gold was one of the best performing assets through the first half of 2024. The precious metal was up 12 percent in US dollar terms through the first half of the year.

According to the World Gold Council, gold's strong performance despite the absence of strong Western flows suggests that, unlike previous periods when gold set record highs, the market is still not saturated and could see another rally.

Zhao Xiangbin, chief strategist at Beijing Gold and Forex Fortune Investment Management, said the trend may continue if gold prices remain elevated.

The sharp increase in gold pri-



Shoppers buy gold ornaments at a jewelry store in Chongqing. SUN KAIFANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

ces has reshaped consumer behavior. While luxury jewelry has become less attractive due to its high premium, the appeal of gold bars and coins as a stable investment has grown, he said.

The soaring gold prices have led to a substantial decline in gold jewelry consumption, leading consumers, wary of the inflated costs, to curtail spending on luxury gold items, he said. In contrast, demand for gold bars and coins, seen as safer

investment assets with lower premiums, has surged as investors sought to hedge against economic uncertainty, he added.

According to the association, the volatility in gold prices has also impacted gold processing and sales companies.

Wholesale and retail enterprises have reduced their inventory purchases, and jewelry processing companies have seen a significant drop in their processing volumes, it said.

BUSINESS

Heat treat: Fill your ice cups, sip leisurely, cool!

Inexpensive, unique beverage combo gains traction, spells big bucks for firms

By WANG KEJU
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Amid a sweltering summer, China is witnessing a surge in people craving icy beverages, and along with that, a new trend — ice cups.

Simply put, an ice cup is a combination of edible ice cubes and a plastic cup into which consumers pour their favorite beverages and customize their own icy concoctions — a trend that has taken the country by storm.

In fact, a growing number of beverage makers such as Nongfu Spring and Pu Coffee are offering self-branded versions of these cups.

Priced between 3 yuan (\$0.41) and 6 yuan depending on the cup's capacity, these frozen treats are attracting young consumers seeking a refreshing drink to beat the heat.

These icy delights are easily found in the frozen food and beverage section of convenience stores such as 7-11, Lawson and FamilyMart, as well as Chinese grocery chain Freshippo.

"The decision to opt for ice cups became clear when I did the math," said Miao Yunlei, a 29-year-old who works for an internet company in Beijing.

A trip to the convenience store can provide him with a can of cola and an ice cup for just 7 yuan. In contrast, a single cup of iced cola at a popular fast-food chain like McDonald's would cost 10 yuan, Miao said, explaining why ice cups are a cost-effective alternative.

Bilita, an edible ice manufacturer located in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, has experienced a significant surge in annual sales of ice cups, with the sales volume skyrocketing from 1 to 2 million cups

"The decision to opt for ice cups became clear when I did the math."

Miao Yunlei, employee of an internet company in Beijing

before 2022 to 50 million cups in 2023.

The allure of ice cups goes beyond their pocket-friendly prices.

As living standards continue to improve, demand for beverages has transcended thirst-quenching to evolve into a quest for diverse and personalized taste experiences.

The popularity of ice cups aligns closely with this evolving consumer demand, offering a refreshing and customizable option that caters to individual preferences, said Jiang Han, a senior researcher at the Beijing-based think tank Pangoal Institution.

According to a report compiled by consultancy Oliver Wyman and e-commerce platform Meituan in April last year, over 40 percent of consumers in the country expressed a strong desire to be served alcoholic beverages, soft drinks or dairy products in a chilled state.

By 2026, the retail sales volume of frozen treats is expected to experience a fourfold increase, with the market size potentially surpassing 63 billion yuan.

As consumers seek more diverse and exciting beverage experiences, retailers and supermarkets are responding by offering an array of innovative flavors and presentations of ice cups. A range of new

options, including lemon juice, grape juice, passion fruit juice and coffee, are served in small ice ball-shaped cups.

As competition intensifies, ice cup products are constantly evolving, in not only exquisite and unique formats but also in a wide range of functionalities. Moreover, the role of social media in driving this trend cannot be overlooked, said Bai Wenxi, chief economist at IPIG China.

Social media platforms including Xiaohongshu are flooded with posts showing ice cup discoveries and innovative flavor combinations. Consumers, particularly the younger demographic, share their unique creations, ranging from classic soda mixes to daring fruit-infused fusions.

The ice cup industry has taken off in recent times, attracting the attention of an increasing number of businesses eager to grab a share of the market. With the entry of prominent players like Nongfu Spring, existing ice cup brands are set to face fiercer competition, experts said.

A search volume for keywords related to edible ice manufacturing plants reached 4,168 on database query platform TianYanCha.com as of mid-July.

Some 490 new companies have been established in this sector in the past three years, with an astonishing 144 of these being less than a year old.

Ice cup prices are trending downward as competition in the market heats up. Last year, the factory price for Bilita's products stood at 3 yuan per cup, said Si Dajin, general manager of the company.

However, this year, the prices have been slashed by almost half, with the current lowest price reaching 1.5 yuan per cup. With more companies entering the market, the factory prices of ice cups may further decrease to 1 yuan per cup, Si added.

Steady track



Construction employees of China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp lay tracks at the new Hefei West Railway Station in Anhui province. The State builder said on Friday it has completed relocating the lines of the Hefei-Fuzhou High-speed Railway, a move to expand the railway station, facilitating Hefei's efforts to build itself as a transportation hub in East China. ZHOU MU / XINHUA

Foreign investors applaud expedited services

By DU JUAN
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Foreign investors wishing to incorporate a company in Beijing are now able to complete its entire registration process online, making it the first Chinese city to offer this service.

The entire registration process has been shortened to just one day from between two and three months earlier for the fastest option, Yang Xiuling, director of the Beijing Municipal Development and Reform Commission, said at a recent news conference.

"In recent years, Beijing has carried out a series of measures to make it simpler and easier for foreigners to settle down in the capital or for multinational corporations to set up research centers," Yang said. "The service has been continuously improved and completed."

By the end of 2023, Beijing was home to 245 regional headquarters of MNCs and 149 foreign research and development centers, according to the commission.

Emilia Mpwo Bywaters from the United States became one of the

first beneficiaries of the new policy, which went into effect at the beginning of the year.

With the assistance of a staff member at the government service center of Fengtai district, Bywaters completed the registration of a cultural development company in less than 10 minutes. The process involved submitting the company's information and undergoing a facial scan through a WeChat mini program on her phone.

"The entire process for foreigners to get a business license used to take two to three months," said Liu Ruo of the market regulation bureau at Fengtai district.

Before the implementation of the facial recognition system, foreign nationals applying for the registration of foreign-funded enterprises in Beijing were required to furnish additional proof of identity issued by their home country or region. Alternatively, they could undergo real-name verification by acquiring a bank card in China, and the applicant had to be physically present for identity authentication, said Liu.

Beijing has also recognized 122 overseas professional qualifications

and has fully implemented a one-stop application process for both work permits and work-type residence permits in order to provide convenience to foreign professionals.

The processing time for these permits has been reduced from 17 working days to five working days.

Meanwhile, Beijing Capital International Airport and Beijing Daxing International Airport have established demonstration zones for foreign visitor payment services, handling 450,000 foreign card transactions in total.

In the realm of cross-border trade facilitation, Beijing has also introduced several reforms. For instance, the number of handover procedures for domestic export goods at ports has been reduced from four to one.

Over the past seven years, Beijing has implemented over 1,500 business environment reform measures.

The results are obvious — on average, 337 new science and tech companies are established daily in Beijing, equating to one new tech company being founded every five minutes.

Li Boyu contributed to this story.

Xizang's GDP up 6.1% in first half

By PALDEN NYIMA
and DAQJONG in Lhasa

The Xizang autonomous region witnessed steady economic growth in the first half, with its gross domestic product hitting 118 billion yuan (\$16 billion), up 6.1 percent year-on-year, said the regional bureau of statistics on Tuesday.

"The growth rates of key economic indicators in Xizang — per capita disposable income of urban residents, fixed-asset investment, and import and export volume — all ranked tops

in the country in the first half," said Wang Ping, deputy head of the region's bureau of statistics, at a news conference on the first-half economic performance of the region, which was held last week.

"In the first half, Xizang continuously strengthened its project guarantee system, accelerated the cultivation of distinctive advantageous industries and continuously optimized the business environment," said Wang.

Official statistics reflect that in the first six months, the added value of the region's primary sector sur-

passed 6.21 billion yuan, up 16.7 percent year-on-year, and that of the secondary sector rose 13 percent to over 46.8 billion yuan.

The added value of the region's tertiary sector grew 1.8 percent to 65.89 billion yuan.

In the January-June period, the agricultural economy in Xizang maintained rapid growth, with the total output value of agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fisheries reaching over 8.46 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 16.6 percent.

The industrial production of

enterprises above a designated size continued to accelerate, with added value increasing 19.7 percent year-on-year. The added value of manufacturing increased 8.6 percent.

The combined proportion of hydropower and solar power generation in the industrial electricity generation among enterprises above a designated size was 97.3 percent, and services sector firms above a designated size grew steadily, with transportation, warehousing and postal services growing by 22.4 percent from January to May, driving a 5.4 percentage point increase for services enterprises above a designated size.

Meanwhile, the region reported a total import and export value of 3.8

billion yuan in the first half, a year-on-year increase of 132.4 percent. Among the total, exports reached 3.21 billion yuan, marking a 122 percent year-on-year increase. Meanwhile, imports were 590 million yuan, up 202 percent year-on-year.

Wang said that during the first half, market demand has continued to expand and fixed-asset investment achieved rapid growth, with the region's fixed-asset investment surging 25.7 percent year-on-year, private investment growing 49.7 percent, and investment in high-tech industries increasing 33.6 percent.

"During the period, in terms of project scale, large projects provided strong support for economic

growth in the region, with 464 projects having construction value above 100 million yuan, an increase of 106 projects compared with the same period last year," said Wang.

He also said that completed investment grew 40.8 percent during the period, driving an increase of 21.1 percentage points in total investment.

"In the first half, the economy of Xizang continued to improve, production supply accelerated continuously, market demand kept warming up and factor support continued to strengthen."

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Future calling

As we move on to even greener pastures, more farmers are reaping the benefits of digital technology. Internet-connected infrastructure and a future blossoming with opportunities for green growth. With the digital world at their fingertips, they can unleash the power of innovation to welcome a more bounteous harvest than ever before.



BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE



Beating heat with red-hot leisure time

City folk consume summer fun via water parks, nighttime museum visits, theme resorts

By ZHU WENQIAN

zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

As summer mercury zooms up toward the 35-40+ C range, China's ocean parks, island destinations and water-based attractions are in hot demand, with online searches for such commercial leisure activities surging 55 percent in July from June, said Trip.com Group, China's largest online travel agency.

Even sales of park entry tickets and other activities have risen significantly nationwide. In fact, sales of ocean parks' admission tickets doubled in July from June as families traveled with their children, Trip.com found.

"Summer vacation is the peak period for 'parent-child consumption', and theme resorts such as ocean parks boast multiple attributes such as 'parent-child activities', study and research tours, and night tours, which are highly favored by 'parent-child families'," said Wang Yalei, a researcher at Trip.com.

"This summer, such resorts are expected to engage in fierce competition in the design of theme room types, service upgrades, prices and other dimensions to attract more parent-child visitors," Wang said.

For instance, Shanghai Haichang Ocean Park has upgraded park tours and interactive activities. Its night admission session has started operating daily in summer. From early July to late August, the park is organizing a water-splashing festival that will see various cartoon and game characters putting up performances and interacting with tourists.

On July 20, some 41,000 tourists visited the ocean park, up 65 percent year-on-year. The three major theme hotels that are affiliated

with the ocean park were fully booked for 10 consecutive days, with over 90 percent of the visitors coming from places other than Shanghai, it said.

This summer, nearly half of tourists traveling domestically have been families traveling with their children, and the booking volumes of related travel products and hotels in July have jumped significantly over June, Trip.com said.

The average level of spending has also exceeded that of last year. A number of major scenic spots have upgraded their services and are offering complimentary admission tickets to attract more family travelers this summer, the online travel agency said.

For instance, a resort affiliated to Shanghai Haichang Ocean Park has designed six kinds of theme rooms for children, including rooms whose decorations depict dolphins, penguins and coral.

Water parks such as Zhuhai Chimelong Ocean Kingdom in Zhuhai, Guangdong province, the water amusement park at Water Cube in Beijing, and Qingdao Polar Ocean World in Qingdao, Shandong province, have emerged as hot spots this summer, according to Tuniu Corp, a Nanjing, Jiangsu province-based online travel agency.

"Ocean parks and water parks combine the features of cooling and fun, making them great places for urban residents to cool off on weekends and relax with their children," said Cai Miao, East China product manager of Tuniu.

In addition, boating, river rafting, canoeing, kayaking and similar water-based activities have become popular this summer, especially at Gulong Gorge in Qingyuan, Guangdong province, the Wuyi Mountains in Fujian province and Thousand Islands



Top: Tourists enjoy their time at a water park in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province, on July 22. WU ZHENGXIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY Above: Visitors watch an underwater show at an ocean park in Guiyang, Guizhou province, on July 16. NING JIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

“The functions of cities have been gradually shifting from production to consumption, and the demand for services such as tourism, shopping and entertainment has been growing.”

Guan Lixin, researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation

Lake in Zhejiang province.

This year, the Luobei River in Guiding county, Guizhou province in Southwest China, officially restored its 12.5-kilometer-long whitewater rafting excursion area. The most thrilling river section has a drop of 10 meters, and it has attracted a large number of water enthusiasts, according to Guizhou Shanshui Qinghui Tourism Investment and Development Co Ltd.

In addition, some companies have organized drift-boating tours for their employees at such places to strengthen teamwork, Tuniu said.

Meanwhile, a number of domestic museums have announced extensions to their opening hours that now stretch into late evening. Nighttime visits to museums have become so popular among Chinese travelers this summer that secur-

ing admission tickets for some top-rated museums has become a bit of a challenge.

Extended opening hours will provide visitors with more choices and offer richer cultural services, industry experts observed.

This summer, the number of bookings for domestic museums has seen double-digit growth over last year, and booking volumes of admission tickets for museums have exceeded those of theme parks, ranking first among all types of scenic spots in China, said Trip.com.

From July to August next year, the Shanghai Museum will hold an exhibition of ancient Egyptian civilization. It is tipped to be the largest and highest-level exhibition of ancient Egyptian cultural relics outside Egypt.

As words spread about the coming bonanza, summer sales of admission tickets at other museums in Shanghai surged nearly 400 percent over last summer, Trip.com found.

Since July 19, the Shanghai Museum has been offering pet tickets, allowing travelers to bring along their cats for 10 special evening visits to the museum. Called "Meow Night", each of the 10 sessions will be on successive Saturdays from 6 pm to 9 pm. This initiative is the first of its kind among comprehensive museums globally.

All 10 sessions were sold out within one hour of the start of ticket sales, with many buyers hailing from places other than Shanghai. To facilitate travel of long-distance visitors and their pets, the Shanghai Museum has recommended a number of pet-friendly hotels within 10 kilometers of the museum.

A report on urban residents' summer consumption habits by the Ministry of Commerce showed that over 60 percent of consumption occurs after sunset. In summer, more domestic cities have been targeting the nighttime economy, launching diverse entertainment and other activities.

"The nighttime economy has helped enrich the appeal of cities and attracted a large number of visitors from other places, enhancing their competitiveness comprehensively," said Guan Lixin, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

"Given the fast pace of urban life, nighttime has become an important period for people to relax and socialize after work. Besides, the functions of cities have been gradually shifting from production to consumption, and the demand for services such as tourism, shopping and entertainment has been growing," Guan said.

As sales of ice makers surge, homes, hostels, offices across China chill out

By ZHU WENQIAN

Owing to soaring summer temperatures, household ice makers are selling like hotcakes in China as consumers, be it families, office workers or university scholars, have developed a habit of enjoying iced drinks, market players observed.

The idea of beating the summer heat with drinks enhanced by self-made ice cubes is fast catching on, with iced americano, iced Coke and iced beer emerging as the season's favorites.

From June 1 to July 10, sales of ice makers on Alibaba's e-commerce platform Tmall surged 315 percent year-on-year. Small-sized, portable and perfect for use at homes, offices and other places like party or get-together venues, ice makers take little space on table tops and desks. They retail in the range of 200 yuan (\$27.6) to 600 yuan, and can churn out ice cubes

within six to eight minutes. Their automatic self-cleaning feature is a big hit among consumers, market observers said.

"Drink delivery orders take time and cost money. A growing number of young Chinese consumers prefer to buy ice makers and make iced drinks themselves. Sales of ice makers have climbed for two straight years," said Yi Han, director of household ice maker segment at Tmall.

As adding ice to certain drinks has become popular, sales of ice makers in China have been growing rapidly, especially in summer, he said.

In the past, the business of ice-making in China was mainly supported by demand from commercial players. Now, sales of household ice makers account for more than 76 percent of the market share. The figure is expected to swell, according to China IRN, a consultancy based in

Shenzhen, Guangdong province.

Coca-Cola China's distributor said its small-sized home appliance products like ice makers, fans and mini-refrigerators have been much sought after among Chinese consumers.

This summer, the firm sold up to 30,000 ice makers. About 80 percent of the sales came from e-commerce platforms, and the rest from supermarket chains such as Sam's Club and Freshippo, Coca-Cola China said.

"Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese consumers' spending habits have changed to some extent. This year, we have witnessed a significant growth in the sales of ice makers and this is related to rising temperatures," said Du Wen, general manager of the distributor of small household appliances of Coca-Cola China's distributor.

Du said a large number of Chinese consumers who buy ice makers hail

from Guangdong and Zhejiang provinces as well as Shanghai, where summer temperatures tend to soar toward the 35-40+ C range.

Consumers aged above 35 have been a major group who buy household ice makers, as younger consumers and college students tend to buy soft drinks online for delivery to their homes or hostels. Some parents prefer to buy ice makers to make smoothies for their children at home as they believe homemade beverages would be better for health.

"Consumption of iced water and beverages calls for consumer education and awareness. To be sure, ice maker sales in China are still in their initial stage of development compared with the United States and Europe. The rapid growth of the milk tea beverage sector in China, which is strongly related to ice, has helped drive the popularity of iced drinks," Du said.



Iced drinks are favored by consumers in Huaian, Jiangsu province, in May. YANG BIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Editor's note: Amity between the people holds the key to sound state-to-state relations. China Daily will come out with a series of stories highlighting Chinese cities' special connections with sister cities, mutual understanding, trust and friendship between peoples of different countries and cultural backgrounds, and shining light on "city diplomacy".

JOINING HANDS ACROSS THE WATER

Two cities, one in China and one in the US, celebrate a friendship that knows no bounds

By YANG RAN and HU MEIDONG in Fuzhou and LINDA DENG in Tacoma, Washington

It's a relationship forged by history, geography and trade — among other things — and symbolized by a certain fragrance and the way it is produced. That fragrance emanates from the process of scenting jasmine tea, an intangible cultural heritage of China and a specialty of the city of Fuzhou, Fujian province.

Fuzhou's jasmine tea is a delicate blend of green tea leaves and jasmine blossoms, and scenting the tea involves mixing jasmine buds with tea leaves overnight. In the morning, the flowers are removed and the leaves dried. This process is repeated up to nine times to achieve a rich, fragrant jasmine tea.

When Victoria Woodards, mayor of the city of Tacoma in the US state of Washington, visited Fuzhou in June, she was invited to witness for herself part of this exquisite process.

"If you think about it, the scenting process symbolizes building a friendship again and again because you can't just do it once, as it doesn't last," Woodards said. "If you continue to do it over and over again, then the bond is stronger, just like the fragrance gets stronger."

This marriage of taste and fragrance in tea is as serendipitous as the Pacific Ocean currents that play a role in bringing Fuzhou and Tacoma together despite the 10,000 or so kilometers that separate them. In fact, so kindred are the two cities' spirits that 30 years ago the two decided to formalize their relationship by becoming sister cities.

One of those who contributed to establishing that relationship was Connie Bacon, a former commissioner for the Port of Tacoma and a former executive director of the World Trade Center Tacoma. And it was she who in October 1993 welcomed to the city a visiting delegation from Fuzhou.

One member of that delegation was then Fuzhou's Party Secretary Xi Jinping. Bacon invited him to her home for dinner.

That visit, including the close personal relationships it cultivated, bore fruit a year later when Bacon signed the sister-city agreement with Fuzhou on behalf of Tacoma. In the years since then the two cities have engaged closely with each other, with about 100 delegations sent to each other between the two sides. Their collaboration covers many areas, including culture, education, sports and trade.

It is the last of these that has been a cornerstone of the relationship, with both cities being important ports for their countries.

Trading partners

For Tacoma, a leading US seaport for international trade, China is a very important trading partner and has been our No. 1 trading partner by volume and value for many years," said Tong Zhu, chief commercial and strategy officer for the Port of Tacoma and Northwest Seaport Alliance.

Zhu had worked with Gary Locke, a former governor of Washington state, and US ambassador to China from 2011 to 2014, to develop trade with China. Locke himself embodies the close relationship between the state and China, having ancestral roots in Guangdong province, neighboring Fujian, and whose grandfather was among the early Chinese migrants to Washington in the late 1800s.

Trade ties between the two cities became stronger in 2008 with the establishment of a trade project aimed at helping Tacoma businesses attract Chinese investment and aiding Chinese companies in expanding to the US.

"Working in partnership with the city of Fuzhou and the city of Tacoma, we developed a program based on the sister-city relationship that ultimately led to an exchange of personnel to promote and drive tangible international trade transactions," Zhu said. "Activities later expanded into attracting inbound foreign direct investment from Fuzhou and China at large to the Tacoma area."

The Tacoma-Fuzhou Trade Office Exchange Program set up in 2008 lasted for 18 months, during which Fuzhou sent three representatives to Tacoma, each serving a



Teachers and students of the Affiliated High School of Fuzhou Institute of Education and students from Tacoma enjoy calligraphy on June 26. HU MEIDONG / CHINA DAILY



Teachers and students from the Affiliated High School of Fuzhou Institute of Education and visiting students from Tacoma learn paper-cutting on June 26. HU MEIDONG / CHINA DAILY

six-month term. The project resulted in direct bilateral trade worth \$450,000 and facilitated trade agreements totaling \$1.57 million, Fuzhou Evening News reported.

Commercial deals signed as a result of the program included exports of wine to Fuzhou and of industrial bags to Tacoma, Zhu said.

During the pandemic, based on an earlier agreement between the two cities, the World Trade Center Tacoma and the Administra-

tive Committee of Fuzhou Area of China (Fujian) Pilot Free Trade Zone held joint virtual trade conferences to match small and medium-sized companies together.

This year, the Asia Pacific Cultural Center in Tacoma signed an agreement with a tea company in Fuzhou to promote jasmine tea in the US, the type of collaboration that "offers an economic development opportunity for us," Tacoma Mayor Woodards said.



Students from the Affiliated High School of Fuzhou Institute of Education and Lincoln High School in Tacoma show their handmade paper-cutting artwork on June 26. WANG ZHENGXING / CHINA DAILY

"From an economic development standpoint, we are really focused on technological innovation and collaboration among cities to support more green jobs and low-carbon sustainable development in our communities." In this respect, she said, "I think we have a lot to learn from Fuzhou and from China."

Flourishing exchanges

In addition to trade, educational exchanges have flourished between the sister cities, fostering long-lasting connections among young people in China and the US.

On Sept. 23, 2015, during his first state visit to the US as China's president, Xi returned to Tacoma. Lincoln High School was selected as the venue, partly because of the sister-city ties and the sister-school relationship between the school and the Affiliated High School of Fuzhou Institute of Education. At the school, Xi spoke to students, brought a ping-pong table and books on China, and later sent a personal invitation for 100 students to visit China the following year.

"I feel incredibly lucky and grateful for being selected for that trip," said Rigel Adams, now 23, who was a member of the Lincoln High School group that traveled to China in 2016.

"We did so much in those days, meeting other Chinese students, visiting different schools and getting to truly experience Chinese culture. It was the experience of a lifetime. After I visited in 2016, I just fell in love with the people and the culture in China. Everyone here is caring and polite, and it's much more community-focused. It's very different from the US, and I like it."

Since that trip, Adams, who recently graduated from university with a bachelor's degree in science and economics, has been back to China six times and visited many Chinese cities.

"During those trips, I was able to build some personal as well as professional relationships. My hope is to continue expanding



Tacoma Mayor (second from left) sings with students from both Fuzhou and Tacoma on June 26. HU MEIDONG / CHINA DAILY



Teachers and students from the Affiliated High School of Fuzhou Institute of Education and visiting students from Tacoma enjoy a calligraphy activity on June 26. HU MEIDONG / CHINA DAILY

those relationships and maybe to one day (turn that) into a business relationship."

Since 2016, Lincoln High School has frequently arranged visits to China, and the Affiliated High School of Fuzhou Institute of Education has also sent students to attend summer camp exchange activities at Lincoln High School every year before the pandemic.

During the pandemic, the offline exchange programs between the two cities had to be put

on hold, but many initiatives demonstrated how close the cities had become to one another. Fuzhou and Tacoma began setting up relationships between schools, facilitating exchanges between Chinese students studying English and Tacoma students studying Chinese.

"From 2020 to 2024, our school exchanged letters with Lincoln High School over 50 times. In 2023, we relaunched our Pen Pal project with Lincoln High School, pairing 35 of our

high school freshmen and sophomores with 38 students from Lincoln High School studying Chinese," said Wei Jian, head of the Affiliated High School of Fuzhou Institute of Education.

The school hosted a Tacoma student group led by Mayor Woodards in June and another US student group in July.

"Through diverse activities such as traditional Chinese cultural classes including calligraphy and paper-cutting and friendly sports matches like basketball and rugby, such visits help to strengthen understanding and friendship between Chinese and American youth, laying a solid foundation for future relations," said Wei.

"So often our young people live in their communities and they don't know about the entire world," Woodards said. "I think when they get out of their surroundings and have an opportunity to travel across the world and meet other young people who are just like them, it makes not only our cities a better place, but it makes our world a better place."

The sister-cities program is about promoting peace through people, and the idea is that the more people know about communities worldwide, the more they understand that we are more alike than we are different, she said.

Striking similarities

At the end of her one-week Fuzhou trip in June, Woodards marveled at the similarities between the two cities. Fuzhou's green surroundings remind her a lot of Washington, which carries the moniker the Evergreen State, she said.

"I can see why 30 years ago the man who I called my father, Harold Moss, the mayor of Tacoma at the time, would make this sister-city relationship with Fuzhou, because we have so much in common. ... I hope that in 30 years from now someone from the city of Tacoma will be here in Fuzhou celebrating the 60th anniversary of our sister-city relationship."

On July 19, the sixth US-China Sister Cities Summit was held in Tacoma. During the summit, Chinese Ambassador to the United

States Xie Peng said that serving as bridges for mutual understanding and trust, the sister-city relationships have nurtured goodwill between the two peoples, and injected vigor into China-US relations.

"The closer subnational exchanges and cooperation are, the more solid the popular foundation for China-US relations will be, and the greater room we will have for taking this relationship forward," said Xie.

"The significance of sister-city relationships is often underreported and not well understood by people from both countries, said Wang Xiaofeng, director of international cooperation at the Center for China and Globalization, a Chinese think tank.

"Sister-city relationships have transcended symbolic gestures to deliver substantial benefits and created a dynamic and multifaceted connection between China and the US. These partnerships have facilitated economic growth through increased trade and investment opportunities and cultural exchanges that foster mutual understanding," she said.

"City-level exchanges through sister-city programs can help ease bilateral mistrust between China and the US by fostering direct, people-to-people interactions that build mutual understanding and respect," said Wang.

"By focusing on these tangible and positive interactions, sister cities can reduce stereotypes and misconceptions, paving the way for a more constructive bilateral relationship," she said.

Yang Jie in Fuzhou contributed to this story.

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Watch the video by scanning the code.

Journey to the West goes East and then back again

By YANG RAN in Fuzhou and LINDA DENG in Tacoma, Washington

For Greg Youtz, friendship between the East and West is of high importance to him.

"Many people in Tacoma and many people in Fuzhou value our friendship very strongly," Youtz, chairman of the Tacoma-Fuzhou Sister City Committee, said. "It's very important for individuals in both the US and China to remain positive and interested in each other."

Youtz's interest in China began in the 1960s when his parents returned on a seminar on China with books in hand. One of them was the classic Chinese tale *Journey to the West*, which Youtz read, leading to his lifelong fascination with Chinese philosophy and culture.

Youtz has visited many Chinese cities and said he considers China his second home. On his first trip to China in 1991, he was part of a faculty delegation from Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma to visit Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou.

In 2008, with support from an organiza-

tion called The Freeman Foundation, Youtz conducted educational projects and student exchanges, enriching teachers' understanding of China through visits to Beijing, Xi'an, Chengdu and Shanghai.

"It's essential for teachers to effectively share their experiences and knowledge about China with their students, fostering a deeper appreciation and understanding of the country," he said.

Since first serving as chairman of the Tacoma-Fuzhou Sister City Committee in 2008, he has hosted more than 40 delegations from Fuzhou and promoted the sister-city relationship by encouraging people in the United States to learn about China and facilitating exchanges.

Like Youtz, Michael Fowler's connection with China spans decades. "I first visited China in 1975," said Fowler, managing director of the World Trade Center Tacoma, who has worked on Sino-US economic collaboration for many years. "Since then, every time I come, I am surprised by the nation's development."

In 2008 under the Tacoma-Fuzhou Trade Office Exchange Program, Fowler worked with three Fuzhou representatives who traveled to Tacoma to help small and medium-sized enterprises from both cities to benefit from the thriving sister-city relationship.

The project ended 18 months later, but the connection between Fowler and his Fuzhou friends continued. In a trip to Fuzhou this June, Fowler managed to meet with all the three representatives, whose names he still remembers after 14 years.

"We send each other greetings every holiday and still help each other with various tasks," he said.

"One of the lasting successes of the project is our relationships. Just the number of people my Fuzhou friends asked me to go back and thank was so touching, and it shows that they clearly connected with many in Tacoma."

During his latest visit, Fowler signed a deal with the representative of the Administrative Committee of Fuzhou Area of China (Fujian) Pilot Free Trade Zone.

"With this agreement, we will collaborate again, focusing on helping to foster new business partnerships. I believe in peace and prosperity through trade and investment. Our focus should be looking for the win-wins, whether in city-to-city or nation-to-nation relations. The sister-city relationship between Fuzhou and Tacoma is exemplary," he said.

Rigel Adams, a graduate of Lincoln High School in Tacoma, has visited Fuzhou and other Chinese cities.

"I think that people-to-people exchange is the most important component of our bilateral ties. I find that most people that have an unfavorable view of China just don't know very much about China," Adams said of the China-US relationship.

"China and the US are the two major countries in the world, and the world will be better if we work together, cooperate and build strong personal relationships between our peoples. That starts small with a trip to China or with a Chinese person coming and visiting the US. It starts with friendship."



A teacher from the Tacoma visiting group showcases the Tacoma postcards she plans to gift to students in Fuzhou. QIN JIAHE / CHINA DAILY



The process of making jasmine tea is displayed at a tea house in Fuzhou. QIN JIAHE / CHINA DAILY



Students from Fuzhou's Affiliated High School and students from Tacoma write to each other on postcards on June 26. WANG ZHENGXING / CHINA DAILY

Decadeslong ties between Fuzhou, Tacoma yield rich dividends

By HU MEIDONG and YANG RAN in Fuzhou

Fuzhou and Tacoma's decadeslong sister-city relationship has yielded fruitful results, exemplifying a strong bond between the people of China and the United States, said Wu Xiande, the mayor of Fuzhou, expressing hope for continued deepening of mutual understanding and friendship.

The tale of friendship between Fuzhou and Tacoma began with the efforts of the Chinese city's then Party Secretary Xi Jinping, Wu told China Daily.

In late 1993, Xi, then secretary of the Communist Party of China Fuzhou Municipal Committee, visited Tacoma, advocating for the establishment of a sister-city relationship between Fuzhou and Tacoma.

This vision materialized in November 1994, when the signing ceremony of the sister-city relationship agreement between Fuzhou and Tacoma took place in Fuzhou,



Wu Xiande

initiating a new era in their sister-city exchanges. Since 1994, economic, trade, and people-to-people exchanges, notably youth interactions between the two cities, have flourished, bolstering mutual understanding and friendship among their people.

"Youth exchanges between China and the US are crucial for bilateral relations. We have been actively fostering sister-school relationships between schools in Fuzhou, like the Affiliated High School of Fuzhou Institute of Education, and schools in Tacoma," said Wu.

"We have conducted extensive educational collaboration in teaching, and student visits, and we use this bond to promote friendly exchanges among young people in both cities."

"I believe that through these friendly

exchanges, Chinese and American youth can enhance mutual understanding and recognition by engaging in dialogue, respecting each other's cultural differences, and injecting new energy into the development of Sino-US relations," Wu said.

Wu highlighted that economic and trade cooperation serves as the cornerstone of sister-city relationships. Fuzhou and Tacoma have recently organized many successful online matchmaking events, fostering mutually beneficial development.

"Fuzhou and Tacoma are boosting trade through their ports to enhance connectivity. We are also collaborating on developing intelligent and eco-friendly ports to improve ports' competitiveness together," said Wu.

As this year marks the 30th anniversary of the sister-city relationship between Fuzhou and Tacoma, Wu expressed anticipation for deepening the traditional friendship and

expanding exchanges and cooperation across various fields with Tacoma.

According to Wu, Fuzhou intends to utilize current sister-school partnerships to introduce more youth talent and student exchange programs, fostering new advocates for the cities' friendship. The two cities also plan to boost collaboration in cross-border-commerce, expanding markets for specialty items like jasmine tea and nuts.

"Amity between peoples holds the key to the relationship between countries. The interactions between the two cities will also facilitate economic and trade exchanges, establishing a foundation and providing impetus for the healthy, stable, and sustainable development of China-US relations," Wu said.

Yang Jie in Fuzhou contributed to this story.

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A dragon boat team from Tacoma participates in a dragon boat race in Fuzhou, on June 7. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Students from the Affiliated High School of Fuzhou Institute of Education attend the welcome ceremony for the Tacoma delegation on June 26. QIN JIAHE / CHINA DAILY

WORLD

Supply chains take center stage

Chinese business delegation goes to US in reciprocal trip after third plenary session

By MINLU/ZHANG in New York
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Supply chains were in the spotlight on the first day at a forum as a Chinese business delegation made a reciprocal visit to the United States after the conclusion of a major government session in Beijing.

The delegation was the first to visit the US after the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. An American business delegation visited China last week.

Lin Shunjie, chairman of the China International Exhibition Center Group Ltd, told China Daily that many foreign entrepreneurs have expressed a desire to restore and perfect their global supply chain layouts, which they believe "cannot be done without China", he said. "Only in China can they maximize supply chain efficiency, minimize costs, and optimize the structure."

He spoke to reporters at the US-China Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum in New York on Monday.

Last year, China hosted the world's first national exhibition focusing on supply chains, the China International Supply Chain Expo. About 515 companies from 55 countries, including more than 100 Fortune 500 companies, sent their CEOs to China. Lin said American companies had the highest presence among foreign enterprises attending the expo.

Many foreign companies were pleased to find that China has many innovative small and medium-sized enterprises that produce at low costs, significantly reducing their supply chain expenses, Lin said.

Jonathan Webb, CEO of Packable, formerly known as Pharmapacks, said the company is the largest seller on Amazon and Walmart in the US, shipping 60,000 to 100,000 orders a day.

"We're here to connect with people who can help us integrate into the Chinese infrastructure, such as Temu and TikTok," Webb told reporters on the forum.

China is crucial "because 90 percent of everything sold online comes from there", Webb said. He said that the US market has "a huge appetite" for Chinese-manufactured goods, from selfie sticks to EV charging stations.

All of those goods are being manufactured in China and brought to the



Ren Hongbin, chairman of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT), speaks at the US-China Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum in New York on Monday. MINLU ZHANG / CHINA DAILY

Strengthening supply chain cooperation between the two sides is conducive to keeping the global industrial and supply chains stable and unfettered ..."

Ren Hongbin, chairman of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade

US, but he said "everyone is nervous about the tariffs. We need to figure out how to mitigate these issues."

Continuous cooperation between the US and China is essential for maximizing global supply chain benefits, Webb said.

"Working with China creates jobs in the US" and stimulates the local economy, he said.

If tariffs are increased, many US innovators who manufacture in China might have to move to other countries, which could affect supply chains, Webb said.

A Chinese business delegation led by Ren Hongbin, chairman of the China Council for the Promotion of

International Trade (CCPIT), attended Monday's forum. The group included business leaders from provinces such as Guangdong and Zhejiang.

Attendees also included Huang Ping, consul general of the Chinese Consulate General in New York; Peter Tichansky, president and CEO of the Business Council for International Understanding; and Declan Daly, CEO of the American International Business Council. More than 300 representatives from Chinese and American businesses and trade communities also attended.

China's market potential offers huge cooperation opportunities, as it imports \$2.5 trillion of goods and services annually and ranks second in attracting foreign direct investment, said Huang.

He noted that the recent Party plenary session highlighted expanding market access in various sectors and promoting an open economic system to benefit global cooperation.

"Fighting against each other is not going to lead us anywhere. So I really hope that we can seize this opportunity of China's continued reform and opening policy," Huang said. "This momentum allows us to strengthen our relationship and do business together. Both countries, and the whole world, will benefit from this."

"Under current circumstances, the common interests between China

and the US are increasing instead of decreasing. Whether in traditional areas like trade and agriculture, or emerging areas like climate change and artificial intelligence, companies in both countries have shared interests and broad cooperation prospects," Ren said.

He said China and the US "enjoy strong economic complementarities and have highly interwoven interests."

"Strengthening supply chain cooperation between the two sides is conducive to keeping the global industrial and supply chains stable and unfettered and will contribute to economic growth of the two countries and beyond," Ren said.

A delegation from the board of directors of the US-China Business Council visited China last week after the plenary session concluded on July 18. The delegation included FedEx President and CEO Raj Subramaniam, United Family Healthcare founder Roberta Lipson, Boeing Global President Brendan Nelson, and Educational Testing Service CEO Amit Sevak.

"We aim to convey the important new openness measures established at the plenary session to the American business community and look forward to hearing their responses and demands," said Xiao Sun, secretary-general of the China Chamber of International Commerce.

Beijing decries Quad for bloc confrontation

By ZHANG YUNBI
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China said on Monday it firmly opposes the bloc confrontation tactics being employed by some countries in the name of opposing coercion, after a meeting of top diplomats from Australia, India, Japan and the United States raised concerns over the situation in the East China Sea and South China Sea.

Beijing objects to attempts by countries forming the Quad grouping exercising the rules of their cliques in the name of maintaining order, Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a daily news conference.

"We urge countries from outside the region to seriously respect the efforts of countries in the region in maintaining regional peace and stability, and refrain from fueling tension in the region," he said.

After the Quad meeting in Tokyo on Monday, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanya Jaisankar issued a joint statement.

They said they are "seriously concerned" over the tensions in Asia-Pacific and expressed "strong opposition" to unilateral changes to the status quo by coercion, The Associated Press reported.

In response, Lin said China has always believed that cooperation among countries and initiatives

intended for a region should be conducive to the region's peace, stability and prosperity, "rather than a collection of cliques and small circles that undermine mutual trust and cooperation among countries in the region".

He criticized the quadrilateral mechanism for chanting "building a free and open Indo-Pacific" while "deliberately creating tensions, inciting antagonism and confrontation, and blocking the development of other countries".

This "runs counter to the general trend of seeking peace, seeking development, promoting cooperation and seeking prosperity in the Asia-Pacific, and is doomed to be unpopular," he said.

Guarding maritime rights

On maritime issues, he said Beijing unswervingly safeguards its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, and is committed to handling bilateral maritime issues with the countries directly involved through dialogue and consultation.

He said some countries outside of the region have been frequently dispatching advanced military aircraft and warships to the South China Sea to show off their force and create tensions, as well as organizing various cliques to create divisions and stir up confrontation in the region.

That "has constituted the biggest threat and challenge to the region's peace and stability," he said.

Briefly

VENEZUELA
Maduro declared election winner

Venezuela's National Electoral Council said on Monday President Nicolas Maduro has won the presidential election and will govern the country from 2025 to 2031. The result indicated an irreversible trend in favor of Maduro and the voter turnout was 59 percent, said the electoral council's President Elvis Amoroso. The bulletin for Maduro's victory was issued after counting had been completed in 80 percent of the polling stations. In total, Maduro received 5,150,092 valid votes, representing 51.2 percent of the counted votes, the council said. China congratulated Maduro on his reelection, Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a regular briefing. "China stands ready to enrich our all-weather strategic partnership and better benefit the peoples of both countries," he said.

police had put the death toll at 42 with 183 wounded since Wednesday.

INDONESIA
Widodo starts work from new capital

Indonesia's President Joko Widodo started work on Monday from the new presidential palace in his country's ambitious new capital, where he intends to spend the last few months of his presidency. "Today I have started receiving officials for meetings here, in the president's office," Widodo told reporters, as authorities race to complete other key infrastructure projects before Independence Day celebrations next month. The capital is due to move from traffic-clogged and sinking Jakarta to the planned city of Nusantara in East Kalimantan Province, but the project is months, even years, behind schedule.

UNITED STATES
Progress made in battling wildfires

Firefighters made progress and were aided by improving weather on Sunday in the battle against wildfires covering massive areas and leaving a trail of damage in western United States, but further evacuations and resources have been necessary as thousands of personnel tackle the flames. The Park Fire, the largest wildfire in California this year, was one of more than 100 blazes burning in the US on Sunday, the National Interagency Fire Center said. It had scorched an area greater than the city of Los Angeles as of Sunday, darkening the sky with smoke and engaging thousands of firefighters.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Malaysia applies for BRICS membership

KUALALUMPUR—Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said on Sunday his country has sent an application to BRICS rotating chair Russia to join the group.

Malaysia's desire to join the organization, comprising Brazil, China, India, Russia and South Africa, was the main essence of discussions with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov as part of a two-day working visit, the prime minister's office said in a statement.

Besides Malaysia's application to BRICS, various aspects of bilateral cooperation were also discussed, including investment and trade, science and technology, agriculture, defense and military, education, as well as tourism and culture, the prime minister said.

"Our discussions primarily centered on Malaysia's recent application for membership in the BRICS alliance, which Russia currently chairs. This potential membership holds substantial promise for both nations and underscores our commitment to fostering robust international collaboration," he said.

For his part, Lavrov said Russia welcomes Malaysia's interest in BRICS and will help promote this interest.

XINHUA

Putin warns of Cold War-style missile crisis

By REN QI in Moscow
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Russia may deploy new strike weapons in response to the US' planned stationing of longer-range and hypersonic missiles in Germany, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Sunday.

Speaking at a naval parade in St. Petersburg, Putin vowed "mirror measures" after the United States announced earlier this month that it will start deploying the weapons, including SM-6 missiles, Tomahawk cruise missiles and "developmental hypersonic weapons", in 2026, to affirm its commitment to NATO and European defense after Moscow started its special military operation in Ukraine in 2022.

In a speech, Putin warned the US that it risked triggering a Cold War-style missile crisis.

"The flight time to targets on our territory of such missiles, which in the future may be equipped with nuclear warheads, will be about 10 minutes," he said.

"If the US implements such plans, we will consider ourselves free from the previously imposed unilateral moratorium on the deployment of intermediate and shorter-range strike weapons, including increasing the capability of the coastal forces of our navy," he said, adding that Moscow's development of suitable systems is "in its final stage".

Diplomats from both Russia and the US say bilateral relations are even worse than that during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, and both sides have urged de-escalation.

Putin accused the US of stoking tensions and transferring Typhoon missile systems to Denmark and the Philippines, and compared the US

plans to NATO's 1979 decision to deploy Pershing II launchers in Western Europe.

"This situation is reminiscent of the events of the Cold War related to the deployment of US medium-range Pershing missiles in Europe," Putin said.

He inspected the naval parade involving nearly 20 surface ships and gunboats, four sailing vessels and a submarine on the Neva River in St. Petersburg to celebrate Russia's Navy Day.

Greeting Chinese vessel

A Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy warship, *Jiaozeo*, also participated in the celebrations.

The Type 052D guided missile destroyer arrived in the city and sailed along the Neva River in a welcome ceremony hosted by a Russian military band, amid greetings from Russian representatives and local people at the dock. Since arrival on July 22, the warship has been open to the Russian public to visit.

This is not the first time the PLA Navy has sent a warship to participate in Russia's Navy Day celebrations in St. Petersburg. In 2019, its Type 052C guided missile destroyer *Xi'an* was a part of that year's event, Xinhua News Agency reported.

Compared with five years ago, this year China has sent a more advanced type of warship to Russia, reflecting the development of the PLA Navy as well as China-Russia military ties, observers said.

China and Russia just wrapped up a joint naval patrol that stretched from northern Pacific waters to the South China Sea and a joint naval exercise in waters off China's southern coast, which also featured China's Type 052D destroyers.



Russian President Vladimir Putin, flanked by defense and navy officials, attends the main naval parade marking the Russian Navy Day in St. Petersburg on Sunday. VYACHESLAV PROKOFYEV VIA AP

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COMMENT

Editorials

US demonstrates that it is the largest threat to peace in Asia-Pacific region

Speaking with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in the Laotian capital of Vientiane on Saturday, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi noted that although the United States and China had restored communication on many levels and people-to-people exchanges between the two countries had also increased, the US has not stopped its containment and suppression of China, and it has even intensified its efforts in that regard.

In yet another move that only serves to show the truth of Wang's words, the US announced on Sunday that it would revamp its military command in Japan to deepen coordination with its ally's forces, with US and Japanese officials falsely portraying China as the "greatest strategic challenge" facing the region.

US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, while trying to justify the upgrade to the US command in Japan, again resorted to lies about China "engaging in coercive behavior and trying to change the status quo in the East and South China seas, across the Taiwan Strait and throughout the region", with the US statement pointing to what Washington perceived as Beijing's "provocative" maritime actions.

Yet the criticism targeting China sounds more like self-exposure of Washington's own misdeeds in the Asia-Pacific region, as it is the US that has been seeking to build up its regional allies' ability to host nuclear weapons and engaging in provocative activities posing increasing threats to peace and stability in the region.

The US military has conducted multilateral anti-submarine war games in the Western Pacific, joint operations with the Philippine navy in the South China Sea, and trilateral drills with Japan and the Republic of Korea in the East China Sea. It has also held naval exercises in waters off the Philippines with Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force.

Such activities, in addition to the provocations on China's doorstep, which include "long-term, large-scale and frequent close-in reconnaissance" in the waters and airspace around the country, have greatly increased regional tensions.

That the defense chiefs of Japan, the US and the ROK also agreed to a landmark security cooperation framework on Sunday, with China in mind, adds to the risk of frictions in the region sparking a firestorm.

It is dissembling by the US, which has around 300 military bases dotted around China, to accuse the latter of posing the largest security threat to the region.

That China-US relations are facing accumulating risks and challenges is mainly due to Washington holding a wrong perception of the country based on its own hegemonic logic, as Foreign Minister Wang told Blinken during their meeting in Laos on Saturday.

With the risks and challenges facing China-US relations still accumulating, and the two sides still trying to stop the decline and stabilize their relationship, it is imperative that they work together to properly handle their differences, remove disturbances and manage risks, so they can advance their cooperation.

No matter how the US tries to distort reality, China does not seek hegemony or practice power politics, and as a major country, it has the best record on peace and security in the world. As such, the US should recalibrate its China strategy based on the clear position staked out in the just-concluded third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, which reaffirmed the country's commitment to the path of peaceful development and the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

The US should refrain from making any further moves to contain and suppress China so as to help maintain peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. It should recognize that there is no place for its Cold War mentality in the world today.

Bigger BRICS building a multipolar world

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim announced on Sunday that Malaysia has officially applied to join the greater BRICS grouping. In late May, Thailand's Cabinet approved a draft application to join the newly expanded BRICS.

If the two key regional players in Southeast Asia and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations are accepted as members of the grouping, which accepted Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Egypt and Ethiopia as new members earlier this year, it will have significant geopolitical ramifications, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. Their joining the group will further enlarge the platform, giving it greater representativeness of the Global South.

The total economy of the enlarged BRICS accounts for about 60 percent of that of the G7. The strong appeal the grouping has for emerging market economies and the great potential it has demonstrated to act as a responsible representative of the Global South make it a player on world stage that no party can afford to ignore.

While some in the West tend to increasingly view the swelling BRICS as an anti-West geopolitical tool, particularly against the backdrop of the Ukraine crisis and the United States' China-containment strategy, with Russia and China being members of the organization, they simply turn a blind eye to the fact that grouping is not a military alliance like NATO but largely an economic one that operates following the principles of mutual respect, sovereign equality, inclusiveness, consensus and strengthened collaboration.

It is the organization's openness and fairness, and the shared conviction of its members that the Global South deserves its due say in global affairs and the reform of global governance that have attracted new countries that recognize that the organization can provide them with a platform for strengthened coordination and cooperation to that end.

Unlike the G7, the expanding BRICS group is not a clique pursuing narrow interests. It provides a large space for countries to uphold their strategic autonomy and calls for resolving differences through dialogue and negotiations. Only those holding a zero-sum game Cold War mentality, or those thinking the rise of the Global South threatens to touch their cheese, would try to sow discord between the members of the augmented BRICS, or seek to misinterpret any country's application to join or display of interest in being an observer in the grouping. In the face of the contest between those countries seeking to build a multipolar world and those upholding the unipolar hegemony, and the clash between economic globalization and "de-globalization" tendencies, the growing BRICS grouping follows the trend of history, stands on the side of fairness and justice, and makes the right choices.

The accession of more countries to the enlarged BRICS can accelerate the process of building a multipolar world, and promote a more just and equitable international order. The organization should always stay committed to its original aspiration of openness, inclusiveness, and win-win cooperation to elevate the practical cooperation among its members to new heights.

Apart from pooling efforts to make unique contributions to resolving world hotspot issues, the grouping, in the face of the new technology revolution, should give full play to their strengths in terms of natural resources and market size, strengthen the supporting role of financial and trade cooperation, facilitate energy and food security cooperation, promote innovation cooperation, and act as a bridge for people-to-people and cultural exchanges so as to give meat to the bones of its principles.

Those claiming the expanded BRICS is nothing more than a "symbolic" troupe will have their eyes opened as what they regard as symbolism is materialized into results through down-to-earth actions that deliver real benefits to the people.

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Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Integrated rural-urban development will help ensure common prosperity

Since the launch of the reform and opening-up policy, China has significantly increased its urbanization rate through industrialization, with the rate reaching 66.16 percent by the end of 2023. However, data from the seventh national census indicates that about three-quarters of China's new urban population is actually an "amorphous population", who have permanent residence permits as they live and work in urban areas, but still hold on to their rural *hukou*, or household registration, and homes in the countryside. Therefore, accelerating the transformation of these people into real urban residents has become the primary task to promote the new-type urbanization.

The central authorities have vowed to improve the system that helps lubricate the new-type urbanization. Attracting rural people to settle in the cities requires

offering them stable employment. Therefore, the country should build a benign interactive mechanism for industrial upgrading, population agglomeration and urban development. New-type urbanization will depend on industries prospering in the cities and integrated development of urban and rural areas. At the same time, the system of providing basic public services based on the number of urban people with permanent residence permits should be established and all people with such permits should be able to enjoy the same rights in social insurance, housing guarantees and children's education as those with urban *hukou* do.

For a long time, *hukou* has been one of the obstacles affecting the transfer of rural people to cities, given that this involves cost sharing, benefit distribution and use of land. China should do more to protect the legitimate land rights

and interests of farmers who settle down in the cities, safeguard their land contract rights and the rights to use homesteads, gain incomes deriving from collective land, and explore ways to establish the exit of such rights based on a voluntary and compensatory principle.

The central authorities also said the country will deepen reform aimed at promoting the separation of ownership, contracting rights and management rights of rural contracted land, and improve the transfer mechanism of rural contracted land, to inflate farmers' property rights and interests, boost the rural economy, and promote agricultural modernization. This will also help release more workers from rural areas, improve the country's social wealth distribution, expand domestic demand, and narrow the gap between urban and rural areas, promoting common prosperity.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

Policy push can promote RMB's internationalization

The latest monthly report released by the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication shows that in June the renminbi accounted for 4.61 percent of global payments based on transaction volume, up 0.14 percentage points from May and nearly double the figure in November 2022, maintaining its position as the world's fourth most-used payment currency for the eighth consecutive month.

Among the many reasons for this are, undoubtedly, China's massive trade and investment volumes as the world's largest exporter and second-largest importer of goods, as well as China being a major user of foreign capital and a significant overseas investor. Besides, China's adherence to responsible macroeconomic policies has increased the credibility of the renminbi.

Since the beginning of 2024, the

demand for the renminbi in trade financing from overseas markets has increased. Data show that in June the total amount of all currency payments globally decreased by 3.23 percent compared to May, but that of RMB payments by only 0.22 percent, resulting in a corresponding rise in the renminbi's global payment share.

Analysts believe that influenced by the Federal Reserve maintaining higher interest rates, an increasing number of multinational corporations and enterprises from emerging market countries are trying to use the renminbi as a trade financing currency. Comparatively, the renminbi exchange rate fluctuations are relatively stable, and the financing rates are significantly lower than those of the dollar.

Although the renminbi continued to depreciate against the dollar in June, that did not stall the increasing use of the

renminbi in cross-border trade settlements. That is because, compared to other emerging market currencies and currencies of developed countries such as the Japanese yen, which have experienced significant depreciation, the renminbi has maintained strong resilience.

To continue advancing the internationalization of the renminbi, the policy system for cross-border use of the renminbi should be improved, financial markets further opened up, access levels enhanced, the liquidity of RMB financial assets improved, offshore liquidity supply mechanisms perfected, and monetary cooperation deepened, so that the renminbi can play an active role in bilateral local currency settlement and currency swaps, and seize opportunities in energy transition and payment innovation.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

What They Say

Second front would not be in Israel's interest

After what was claimed to be a Hezbollah rocket strike on the occupied Golan Heights on Saturday, which left 12 children dead, Israel retaliated on Sunday with strikes on some Hezbollah targets deep in Lebanon.

While it was claimed to be a stern warning to the Iran-backed militia that enough is enough, the world has every reason to worry that an all-out war between the two regional rivals would become imminent if Hezbollah opts for a tit-for-tat answer to Israel's strikes.

That's why the United Nations and many regional stakeholders, including the United States and the European Union, immediately urged Israel and Hezbollah, which denies

being behind the Saturday attack, to exercise due restraint and deescalate tensions.

Although the conflict between them has markedly intensified since Oct 8 — Hezbollah tries to use that to pressure Israel to cease fire in Gaza — neither side is intent on a major confrontation. The war between them in 2006 caused heavy losses on both sides.

With the Israeli government caught in a self-made dilemma at home and abroad because of its relentless military actions in Gaza, opening a second front with a much stronger opponent would only make the situation for Tel Aviv even worse.

While urging Hezbollah to implement the United Nations Resolution 1701, approved to end the 2006 war, which includes the withdrawal of armed groups from southern Lebanon, between the Lit-

ani river and the Blue Line, the unofficial frontier with Israel, Tel Aviv should also implement the series of UN resolutions on Gaza, particularly the US-proposed three-phase cease-fire UN Security Council resolution that Washington said it endorses, to put an overdue end to the Gaza conflict and withdraw from the Palestinian enclave, which the binding UNSC resolution demands.

If Israel, as it said, really prefers a diplomatic settlement that will strengthen its security, it should stop its military actions in Gaza which have gone far beyond the purpose of self-defense and retaliation, and join the international community to resolve the Palestine question under the framework of two-state solution in good faith.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Cheng Jie

Human capital dividend to propel modernization

The resolution of the third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, which concluded recently, said the country will further deepen reform comprehensively to advance Chinese modernization by, among other things, improving the education system, strengthening the science and technology sector, and cultivating talents.

According to the resolution, China will follow an innovation-driven development policy, and promote the integrated reform of institutions and mechanisms pertaining to education, science and technology.

The country will also expedite the development of human capital, and optimize capital and labor distribution in order to promote Chinese modernization and high-quality development. The expeditious development of human capital is necessary to facilitate the structural transformation of the economy.

China is losing some of its demographic dividends because of the decline in its working-age population and rapid increase in the aging population. And since China's demographic dividend of low labor cost is declining, the country has to pursue innovation-driven high-quality development to maintain its competitive edge in certain key sectors. Innovation-driven development, in essence, is people-driven development. That's why the new growth momentum mainly relies on human capital and innovation capability.

Compared with major economies at a similar stage of development, China enjoys three advantages.

First, the country has a massive pool of human capital. The gross enrollment rate in higher education rose from 1.55 percent in 1978, when reform and opening-up were launched, to 60.2 percent in 2023. The estimated number of university graduates in China in 2024 is expected to reach 11.79 million, compared with 1.14 million in 2001. Plus, the average years of education for the newly added workforce each year has reached 14 years.

Therefore, China is moving from being a just populous country to a country with strong human resources, which will propel Chinese modernization.

Second, China's rapidly aging population has led to a decline in the total workforce, but since the younger generation comprises a higher level of human capital, it will cushion the effects of a declining workforce. The new jobseekers entering the labor market have higher educational degrees and are more capable of leading innovation-driven high-quality development. Thus the replacement of the old with the new promotes economic growth.

And third, the promotion of gender equality in China is bolstering human capital. Chinese women have made progress in all key fields including educa-

Therefore, China should increase investment in the education sector, and make greater efforts to promote innovation and cultivate talents in the new era.

tion and health, and social and political participation, and continue to have a positive impact on society. In fact, women today outnumber men in college enrollment — according to a 2021 report by the National Bureau of Statistics, the percentage of women is higher than men in all forms of higher education.

However, the dividend of human capital, like the traditional demographic dividend, does not necessarily transform into productivity or lead to economic growth. It can only help promote Chinese modernization and break institutional barriers if it is gainfully applied to industry.

Reform and opening-up helped turn China's massive population into demographic dividends. So comprehensive

deepening of reform is the key to transforming China's massive human capital into development dividend despite the declining demographic dividends.

So, to strengthen the country's innovation capabilities and develop new quality productive forces, it is necessary to establish a high-level socialist market economic system, implement women-friendly policies, and increase the labor participation rate.

Also, since people with low education levels find it difficult to master new skills, efforts should be made to encourage middle-aged and elderly people to pursue adult education and upgrade their skills by joining special training programs, so they too can promote Chinese modernization.

The world is experiencing a new round of science and technology revolution, but China is at a disadvantage in international competition due to its weak basic innovation capability. Not to mention underemployment and structural contradictions are hindering the country's economic and industrial transformation, mainly because Chinese workers, in general, lack skills.

Therefore, China should increase investment in the education sector, and make greater efforts to promote innovation and cultivate talents in the new era. The country also needs to strengthen scientific research, and ensure that the research results are applied to industry, as well as integrate human resources with modern industries.

Efforts should also be made to build China into a major global center of professional talents and innovation, for which the authorities need to take measures to develop a learning-oriented society which emphasizes both professional and general education. And the authorities should grant more say to employers and create a more accommodating environment for talent development, and improve human resources allocation.

The author is an associate professor at the Institute of Population and Labor Economics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

Natalie Benelli

Reality debunks West's claims on Xinjiang

During a recent trip to China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, I had the opportunity to witness the first-hand large-scale socioeconomic and cultural development of the region. Xinjiang may be among the least-developed regions of China, but it has made remarkable progress in poverty alleviation and economic development thanks to the efforts of both the central and local governments.

Xinjiang is a core area of the Silk Road Economic Belt, which along with the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road makes up the Belt and Road Initiative, and China's door to Central Asia and Europe. Numerous examples in Xinjiang bear witness to the country's comprehensive approach to improving people's living standards, by mainly creating jobs and bolstering infrastructure.

The cotton industry is just one example of how effective China's efforts in creating new jobs have been. China has become the world leader in cotton production, with Xinjiang being the country's largest cotton-producing region. The establishment of farming cooperatives and large-scale mechanization of cotton farming, which covers everything from planting to harvesting, has increased the incomes of farmers by up to 40 percent.

Uygur farmers who previously engaged in labor-intensive cotton production on small family plots can now lease their land to the cooperatives. In addition to the payment for the leased land, they also get an annual dividend for the crop yield on their land. And if they wish, they can

seek employment in the cooperatives for a monthly salary or take any other job, for example, in one of Xinjiang's cotton processing or textile companies. Monthly wages start from 4,000 yuan (\$548) for a 40-hour working week. That the salary is good can be gauged from the fact that the cost of living for a family of three in Xinjiang's countryside is about 2,000 yuan per month.

Xinjiang's Yili Valley is home to China's largest lavender cultivation area, and produces 95 percent of China's lavender-related products. Lavender fields in the Yili Valley have turned the place into a national and international tourist destination, helping create employment for the local people.

The Shaya county photovoltaic power plant in the Taklamakan Desert, China's largest desert and the world's second-largest shifting desert, apart from generating renewable energy has also helped develop a people-friendly environment by preventing further desertification, and created innumerable jobs. About 100,000 saxaul trees, and rows and rows of straws have been planted to reduce the effects of sandstorms, while the afforestation drive has brought wild animals such as deer and foxes back to the area.

Xinjiang's economy is integrated with the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Urumqi International Land Port Area has developed into an important hub of China's international trade, with the com-

prehensive capability of other hubs, such as Khorgos Land Port, steadily increasing in terms of the number of freight trains plying between China and Europe.

More important, Khorgos Jinyi International Trade Group Co Ltd, which operates out of Khorgos Land Port, exports about 300,000 tons of fresh fruits and vegetables grown by more than 3,000 farmers in Xinjiang to countries in Central Asia, Europe and Russia.

So rapidly have China's relations and connections with Central Asia grown that the Xinjiang Branch of Beijing Children's Hospital is building an international medical service department, which will start providing top quality pediatric treatment for children from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and other neighboring countries by the end of this year.

As a matter of fact, through its remote diagnosis center, the Xinjiang Children's Hospital is in regular contact with over 100 hospitals and clinics across China. And an increasing number of children from neighboring countries received pediatric care in the Xinjiang Children's Hospital.

However, in collusion with Western mainstream media, governments in Europe and North America have baselessly accused China of using forced labor in Xinjiang's cotton fields and mills, and suppressing Uygur culture and the believers in Islam, in a bid to smear the Chinese government and debase Xinjiang's socioeconomic and cultural development. The reality I saw debunks these allegations.

Since the founding of the People's

Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese government has invested in the protection and promotion of ethnic minority groups, their culture, language and religion. It's because of such efforts that Muqam, a traditional Uygur musical and dance performance, was one of the first cultural practices to be recognized by UNESCO as intangible heritage of China.

Founded in 1987, the Xinjiang Islamic Institute serves as a center for religious and academic education for Muslims in China. In September 2017, a new campus funded by the government was inaugurated in downtown Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang, complete with a library with about 49,000 books, including translations of the Quran in Mandarin, the Uygur language and other ethnic minority languages.

Governments in the West have a lot to learn from China's sustainable socioeconomic and ecological civilization. Not only has China lifted about 800 million people out of poverty in the past more than four decades, but also it has boosted local economies, promoted ethnic cultures, created a people-friendly environment, and built international trade and people-to-people relations based on mutual respect and solidarity. People in Europe and North America have only to gain by learning from and cooperating with these endeavors.

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Kang Bing

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New regulation can help curb cyber-bullying

Amid increasing public complaints about cyber-bullying, internet platforms can no longer pretend that malpractices have nothing to do with them.

Four central government departments jointly issued a new regulation recently, asking internet platforms to strengthen their early warning system to more effectively deal with online bullying. The regulation makes it clear that cyber-bullying or harmful contents targeting individuals is illegal. Harmful contents and cyber-bullying include rumors; defamatory and discriminatory comments, invasion of privacy and intimidation.

Coming into effect on Aug 1, the regulation requires internet service providers to strengthen their early warning system against potential online bullying, and classify cyber-bullying contents and use technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data to verify the authenticity and legality of online contents.

I hope the new regulation will be more effective in curbing online bullying. I have come across many such cases while browsing online platforms for news and views. As a journalist, I was taught to be accurate and objective in the reports I filed. But I am appalled by the proliferation of rumors and defamatory contents on the internet today. I sometimes wonder if journalistic ethics and values have changed, and if online platforms even bother to edit the contents before uploading them.

More such punishments should be made public to deter rumormongers and cyber-bullies from defaming people.

There have been reports of online bullying victims committing suicides or losing their mind. If the targets of cyber-bullying have violated the law, there are the police to detain or arrest them, and there are courts to try, and if found guilty, to sentence them to jail terms. No one has the right to hold a "kangaroo court" online and condemn a person for an alleged violation of law.

Perhaps we cannot expect the more than 1 billion netizens in China to have an in-depth understanding of the law and respect the human rights of others. Many people forward something they find interesting to friends and relatives without checking their authenticity. But by doing so, they might be violating the law if the "interesting" stories or videos are fabricated by a person or group to target another person or group.

While punishing millions of minor "law offenders" is neither possible nor legally necessary, law-enforcement officers should take actions against those spreading rumors and fabricating stories to target other people.

Over the past few years, a number of such law violators have been compelled to publicly apologize for their deeds, or fined and/or detained by police. In a recent case, a cyber-bully was sentenced to six months' imprisonment. More such punishments should be made public to deter rumormongers and cyber-bullies from defaming people.

I believe the new regulation for internet service platforms has more teeth, because similar regulations in the past failed to curb online bullying.

First, the new regulation has been jointly issued by the Cyberspace Administration of China, Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and the National Administration of Radio and Television, which means they will together enforce the regulation and plug the legal loopholes to hold cyber-bullies and rumormongers accountable.

Second, the new regulation makes clear the mandatory requirements online platforms need to fulfill, and they include establishing a mechanism to monitor the parties involved in uploading rumors and defamatory contents and the frequency of the uploads, and warn the authorities of cyber-bullying risks.

An internet news service platform manager once told me that they hated rumors and online bullying as much as we did but found it difficult to separate the bad eggs from the good ones, because "unlike newspapers, radios and televisions, the online platforms have to deal with an ocean of information round the clock".

I believe he was telling the truth. But against the background of unfettered spreading of rumors and defamatory and discriminatory contents online, arguments such as the manager's appear invalid. I hope the new regulation will deter online bullying and help build a healthier internet environment.

GLOBAL VIEWS



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

HUSSEIN ASKARY

Global South is gravitating toward China

While Western powers pursue a hostile policy based on a zero-sum-game mentality and a false sense of superiority, China is seen as a leader among equals

In the just concluded third plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, certain aspects pertaining to the role of China in the world were discussed. China's development



has brought with it strategic opportunities, risks and challenges. On the one hand, China and the rest of the world are

in a symbiotic relationship where one's gain is the other's gain. At the same time, given the openly hostile attitude of some of China's largest trade partners in the West, namely the United States and the European Union, China has no choice but to be a pivot for the emerging Global South while keeping open the option of stabilizing relations with the West based on equality and respect.

To understand how China will respond to these challenges and opportunities, it is important to understand where China is in its long evolutionary journey toward modernization. China's economy accounted for over 17 percent of world GDP last year and is continuing to grow. China is the world's manufacturing superpower with an output of 35 percent of total global output. Chinese companies are the world leaders in almost all infrastructure engineering and construction machinery, in telecommunications, and soon in space-based navigation and aerospace and nuclear technology sectors.

But this is just the temporary tip of the iceberg. The third plenary session's emphasis was on accelerating science and technology development, innovation, talent development in every aspect of China's economy and cultural advancement, which will supercharge China's future development. When advancements in artificial intelligence, digitalization and robotics start permeating the whole industrial sector of China, productivity will increase by leaps and bounds. In addition, new scientific breakthroughs in areas that are under development, like fusion power, new materials, and biotechnology (including agriculture), will move the Chinese economy into a completely new platform of development. This will have an enormous impact on the world economy too. Another noteworthy takeaway

As reckoned at the beginning, China cannot prosper as an island in a sea of poverty and conflicts. China does not fear open competition, because its self-confidence is based on its hard work and clear vision of progress.

from the third plenary session is that China will be embarking on refining the mechanisms for high-quality cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative. While the details of this decision are not public yet, we already know about the evolving role of the BRI as one of the greatest development initiatives in history. The first decade of the BRI witnessed an unprecedented global infrastructure development process connecting nations, regions and continents. However, the ultimate goal was not simply the promotion of trade, but lifting the world economy, especially in the Global South, to a higher level.

A high-quality BRI means that Africa and other nations of the Global South will leverage their comparative advantages to achieve industrialization, eliminate poverty and raise the living standard for their people. China has responded by exporting capital, technology, and know-how to these nations. Therefore, we now see industrial parks built by Chinese companies and employing local workers popping up in different parts of Africa, such as in Egypt, Ethiopia and Uganda. Nations of the Global South are gradually abandoning the role assigned to them by the unipolar world order as exporters of cheap raw materials and importers of expensive finished goods. China is not just "offshoring" low-end production capacity to the Global South, but building the necessary infrastructure and developing the skilled labor necessary for these nations to reach industrialization. The China-backed industrial park in the Ugandan town of Mbale wouldn't have been possible without the construction of the Karuma hydropower plant and the 370 kilometer-long transmission lines, nor without train-

ing the local labor force.

Let's take one example to understand how China's rise contributed to the rise of the Global South. In education, especially in natural sciences, engineering, and agricultural science, in 2018 Chinese universities surpassed both US and UK universities in the number of African students they enrolled. Recent data show that among students from regions such as Africa and Southeast Asia, China is now seen as a preferred education destination, not just due to financial incentives but because of the quality of education. The number of self-funded international students has almost doubled in just 10 years, standing at almost 430,000 in 2018, as opposed to the 63,000 students receiving scholarships.

The economic rise of the Global South, with China leading the pack, is a factor to be reckoned with today. Not only BRICS, but many other nations in Asia, Africa and America are joining the ranks. What the nations of the Global South see in China is a peaceful and stable partner with a long-term vision of development. What is new is that China's rise, for example, becomes a tide that lifts all other boats, because China is sharing the fruits of its development with other nations. This is not only a show of compassion and respect, but a concrete translation of the scientific-economic principle of win-win cooperation, that China's prosperity depends on the prosperity of other nations.

As reckoned at the beginning, China cannot prosper as an island in a sea of poverty and conflicts. China does not fear open competition, because its self-confidence is based on its hard work and clear vision of progress. No matter whether the Western powers continue to pursue a hostile policy based on a zero-sum-game mentality and a false sense of superiority, China will continue and accelerate its cooperation with the Global South that is increasingly gravitating toward it as a leader among equals.

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LI XINLEI AND YU FENGZHU

Affirmative action

China and the EU should seize the opportunity for cooperation amid the restructuring of the EU's clean energy supply chain

Driven by the global energy transition, global clean energy investment has reached record highs in recent years, and is expected to hit \$2 trillion in 2024. Consequently, the clean energy supply chain has become the focus of competition

between the world's major powers. In recent years, the European Union has accelerated the restructuring of its clean energy supply chain, shifting from efficiency first to security first. The reshaping of the EU's clean energy supply chain not only poses a challenge to the development of China's clean energy-related industries, but also presents opportunities for China-EU clean energy cooperation.

Geopolitical factors are playing an increasingly important role in the reshaping of the EU's clean energy supply chain, and China's related industries will encounter more challenges in the European market.

To start with, the EU has strengthened its intervention in market access criteria for the clean energy technology market as well as technology outflows, and continuously reinforced constraints on the green standards and norms of China's clean energy industry.

The European Commission's Net-Zero Industry Act came into force on June 29. It aims to reach at least 40 percent of domestic manufacturing capacity in net-zero technologies to meet the EU's annual deployment needs by 2030. The law has strengthened the importance of geotechnology in the accomplishment of the EU's net-zero goals, which means that Chinese manufacturers entering the EU market will face more intense technological and market competition. In addition, the EU also uses ideology, particularly in human rights and labor standards as a major weapon, to exert pressure on China's clean energy industry, hindering normal green trade and investment exchanges between China and Europe.

Second, the EU has emphasized the geopolitical risks associated with its dependence on China's clean energy supply chain. It has attempted to bring in more "friendly countries" to establish a clean energy supply chain based on so-called democratic countries.

The European Commission's Critical Raw Materials Act, which came into force in May, sets out the goal of localizing the EU's critical raw materials supply chain. Additionally, the Act mandates that no more than 65 percent of any strategic raw material

should be sourced from a single third country, which is targeted at China. The EU is also committed to establishing clean energy supply chains dominated by Western countries and in line with so-called democratic values, such as the Minerals Security Partnership.

Finally, the EU is actively drawing in countries that play an important role in the clean energy supply chain, strengthening the expansion of and competition for the green market, and seizing opportunities and the initiative to cooperate with African countries in various fields such as energy and minerals.

For example, the EU regards Africa as a key region for cooperation in the clean energy supply chain. Its Global Gateway strategy proposes increasing investment in clean energy projects and sustainable infrastructure in Africa and building a sustainable value chain for mineral raw materials.

Despite the competition, China and Europe, both important actors for advancing the global energy transition, have a strong need for cooperation in the clean energy supply chain. The reshaping of the EU's clean energy supply chain has provided both sides with enormous room for cooperation.

First, the accomplishment of the EU's low-cost energy transition requires China's participation.

As the EU's top supplier of photovoltaic modules, electric vehicle batteries and rare earths, China has made significant contributions to the EU's low-cost energy transition. Taking PV modules as an example, about 90 percent of the PV modules imported by major EU member states come from China. Exports of Chinese PV modules to the EU countries totaled \$19.01 billion in 2023. Exports to Europe account for the vast majority of China's total exports.

Second, the green EU-Asia connectivity strategy provides a communication platform for building an inclusive and pragmatic China-Europe clean energy partnership network.

The China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway, which will soon begin construction, will become the shortest overland route for delivering goods from China to Middle Eastern and European markets, shortening freight journeys by 900 kilometers and saving seven to eight days in transit time. The opening of the railway will enable more convenient transportation of clean energy-related equipment and key minerals between China and Europe. It will also maintain the sustainability of China's rail trade with the EU.

Third, Africa is rich in clean energy resources and has great potential for development. China and Europe can strengthen cooperation in Africa in distributed clean energy, green transportation and green financing, among others.

China-EU-Africa trilateral cooperation in the clean energy supply chain is the integration and elevation of the traditional North-South cooperation and South-South cooperation modes. It will enable the integration between the green Belt and Road construction and the EU's Global Gateway strategy and accelerate Africa's clean energy transformation.

In the face of both challenges and opportunities brought by the reshaping of the EU's clean energy supply chain, China should seize the opportunities in Sino-European clean energy cooperation to eliminate the negative impacts exerted by the reshaping of the EU's clean energy supply chain.

First, China should continue to actively promote dialogue with the EU.

It should make the China-EU High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue and the China-EU High Level Dialogue on Environment and Climate institutionalized exchange and communication platforms for the two sides, and make use of its comparative advantages to promote Sino-European benign competition and coordination of standards on pivotal issues, so as to reduce green trade barriers and trade frictions.

Second, China should take the initiative in the formulation of standards and rules involved in the clean energy supply chain.

It can utilize its unique advantages to actively participate in and take the lead in developing international standards in such areas as photovoltaics, wind power and electric vehicles, and improve the level of mutual recognition.

Furthermore, China can invest in local clean energy enterprises in the EU and build factories overseas to circumvent the EU's potential restrictions on imports of clean energy products.

Third, China should strengthen cooperation with countries along the Belt and Road in the field of clean energy and expand China's green market. It should promote replicable and promotable clean energy development practices to countries along the Belt and Road. It should also align with the environmental, social and governance standards of the Belt and Road Initiative participating countries, so as to strengthen synergized green development with those countries.

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WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

LIFE

Carnegie dream comes true

Beijing Youth Symphony to take part in music festival at celebrated New York venue, **Chen Nan** reports.

In a celebration of musical talent, cultural exchange and educational enrichment, a Chinese symphony orchestra has been launched and is set to embark on a transformative journey to the United States.

The Beijing Youth Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of conductor Lyu Jia, will perform at the famed Carnegie Hall in New York on Aug 4.

On Friday and Saturday, they staged two concerts at Beijing's National Centre for the Performing Arts and the Beijing Performing Arts Centre, warming up for the US performance.

The upcoming concert will be part of the new summer concert festival — World Orchestra Week, which was launched by Carnegie Hall. In celebration of international youth orchestras, "the initiative brings five youth orchestras from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America to New York City for high-level music making with some of today's most internationally renowned artists plus cultural exchange activities among the orchestras over the course of one week", the hall's official website states.

Besides the Beijing Youth Symphony Orchestra, four other ensembles will be featured in the festival, including the National Children's Symphony of Venezuela, the Africa United Youth Orchestra, the European Union Youth Orchestra and the Afghan Youth Orchestra. These five orchestras, along with Carnegie Hall's National Youth Orchestra of the United States of America and NYO2, a free orchestra program that joins with the NYO, will perform at Carnegie Hall from Thursday to Aug 7.

In addition to public performances at Carnegie Hall, the community of more than 700 young musicians from around the globe will take part in cultural exchanges and communal music-making experiences throughout the week.

"This unique event not only showcases the vibrant musical prowess of China's youth but also underscores the power of music education in fostering global understanding and collaboration," says conductor Lyu, who is the artistic director of the Beijing Youth Symphony Orchestra and the music director of the NCPA in Beijing.

During the concert on Aug 4, Lyu will lead the Beijing Youth Symphony Orchestra to perform Chinese works, including *Selections from Chinese Sights and Sounds* by composer Bao Yuankai and *Pipa Concerto No 2* by composer Zhao Jiping. Veteran *pipa* (a traditional four-stringed Chinese lute) player Wu Man will join in the concert. The concert will also stage Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No 5 in E minor, Op 64*.

According to Lyu, the Beijing Youth Symphony Orchestra, co-launched by the Beijing Municipal Education Commission and the NCPA in June, consists of about 130 young people aged from 14 to 24.

It gathers students from three



Top: Under the baton of conductor Lyu Jia, the Beijing Youth Symphony Orchestra gives a concert at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing on July 26, offering a preview of their upcoming concert at Carnegie Hall in New York on Sunday. **Above left:** Cui Bingxuan, a student at the High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China, hones her skills on the violin during rehearsals at the NCPA in Beijing on July 19. **Above right:** Violinist Li Zheng coaches young members of the orchestra at rehearsal. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

schools in the capital: the Central Conservatory of Music, the High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China and Beijing 101 Middle School.

"These young people learned to play music as children and they represent the culmination of years of dedicated training and a passion for music," says Lyu, adding that the music pieces to be staged at Carnegie Hall will showcase Chinese musical traditions and the young musicians' ability to interpret Western classics.

"With our training and their hard work, they sound like a professional symphony orchestra," he adds.

During a recent rehearsal at the NCPA in Beijing, Lyu led the Beijing Youth Symphony Orchestra to perform Bao's *Selections from Chinese Sights and Sounds*, including *Dui*

Hua (Dialogue on Flowers), a piece combining symphonic music with Chinese folk elements. Under the guidance of the experienced conductor and principal musicians of the China NCPA Orchestra — the resident symphony orchestra of the NCPA — these young musicians have honed their skills, mastering classical compositions and contemporary pieces alike, preparing to showcase their talents on an international stage.

"The young people remind me of my experience of performing in a youth symphony orchestra when I was a student," says Li Zhe, the concertmaster of the China NCPA Orchestra. "Unlike professional musicians who spend hours every day together to do rehearsals and perform onstage, these young people face great challenges because they perform together as a new

symphony orchestra. What they need to do is to listen to one another and learn to work as a team.

"They practice hours at home alone, which may bring them great technique. But when they perform together, they need to follow the conductor and work with other musicians in their sections with one shared goal of producing harmonious sounds," says Li. "For this upcoming concert, they represent Chinese youth, which will broaden their perspective, enable them to meet new friends from around the world and nurture a lifelong appreciation for cultural diversity."

Tan Chai Suang, the associate principal French horn player with the China NCPA Orchestra, says, "Being part of a symphony orchestra teaches children the value of teamwork, collaboration and discipline. They learn to listen to others,

follow instructions from conductors and contribute to the collective effort of creating music, fostering empathy and social skills.

"The rehearsals also allow these young people to be exposed to music works that they may have never performed before."

Cui Bingxuan, 14, plays violin in the Beijing Youth Symphony Orchestra. The student at the High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China has experience playing with her school's symphony orchestra abroad but it will be the first time that she performs at Carnegie Hall.

"I watched lots of videos of musicians performing at Carnegie Hall and I cannot believe that I will perform there," says Bingxuan. "What makes us very proud is that we will perform Chinese music works there."

Su Qi, the concertmaster of the Beijing Youth Symphony Orchestra, who is in his first year of pursuing a master's degree as a violinist at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, says that, "rehearsals started in May and because we all have our school classes, we tried to make the best use of our spare time to make sure the rehearsals go well".

"Many of the members (of the Beijing Youth Symphony Orchestra) don't know one another and we became friends during the intensive training and rehearsals. We will make more friends during our days in the US."

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Online Watch the video by scanning the code.

Luck is not enough for success in soccer

Chinese culture is clearly incredibly rich in customs and traditions.

In the West we are aware of some Chinese "beliefs". A couple of notable examples are the "lucky number 8", due to the word (*ba*) sounding similar to the word for fortune or wealth (*fa*), or in contrast, the "number 4" is to be avoided due to its rather sinister sound like the word for death (*si*).

I have never been hugely superstitious, that is, unless it comes to soccer, although admittedly it is rather disconcerting that my Beijing apartment number is 404 on the

fourth floor.

How worried should I be? Well, fortunately not too much if my pre-match soccer routine is anything to go by.

While I think it is fair to say that

there are plenty of superstitions, myths or beliefs in the West, they are largely taken with a pinch of salt.

For instance, I don't put new shoes on a table, a belief originating from the once-booming British mining industry that when a miner lost his life down the pits, his boots would be left on the table to honor him. Hence, placing new shoes in the same fashion would therefore be tempting fate.

Another ritual I frequently follow is knocking on wood, a superstition dating back to ancient European pagan times, when people believed that gods resided in trees. Knocking on the trunk would rouse the spirits and offer protection.

When it comes to soccer, I have an almost irrational superstitious mindset that borders on Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. With England somehow stumbling through the Euro 2024 tournament and making the final where they faced Spain, my whole illogical pre-match ritual came into play, in the blind hope that such actions would guide my country to victory and end 58 years of hurt. For those with no interest in soccer, 58 years is not my age (just yet), but rather the amount of years England have gone without winning anything.

So, from the moment I woke up, match day was littered with absurd and nonsensical actions, such as eating a McDonald's breakfast, as once about 30 years ago I did so before a Sunday League game and we won and I scored a rare(ish) goal.

After showering and using my "lucky towel", I ventured to the local shop, ensuring I didn't step on the cracks of the pavement slabs (that's bad luck), while hoping a bird would poop on me. As revolting as it sounds, that is supposed to be incredibly lucky. Sadly, none of my feathered friends obliged.

The rest of the day was littered with other meaningless OCD routines until I left apartment 404, knocking on wood, to meet some friends for the game, wearing my "lucky pants" and "lucky polo shirt" that I had worn in each and every one of England's previous six triumphant matches en route to the final.

Needless to say, the game ended in massive disappointment as England once again lost and a realization that superstitions, at least to me, are just pointless and unfounded beliefs that lack any credibility. I should have already known that especially as the last time I got pooped on by a bird was before a soccer match I played in that ended with my team getting battered and me getting sent off. You live and learn, or not, perhaps. Now, where are those lucky pants?

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Dutch enthusiasts get a kick from martial arts

THE HAGUE — A Wing Chun kung fu master class held recently attracted more than a dozen martial arts enthusiasts. Some of them have developed a passion for this form of Chinese kung fu decades ago.

Erik Batstra, head instructor at the Wing-Chun Kung-Fu Association of the Netherlands, also attended the master class. On the sidelines of the event, he says that he began practicing Wing Chun when he was 18.

"When I came in contact with Wing Chun, it became my life's passion," Batstra says. Since 1981, the Dutch martial artist has dedicated himself to the study of Wing Chun, a martial art characterized by close-quarters hand-to-hand combat, rapid-fire punches and efficiency.

The Dutch association, founded in 1974, primarily studies the Wong Shun-Leung lineage of Wing Chun, which favors efficiency and directness. Wing Chun is on the list of China's national intangible

cultural heritage.

Attendees of the recent master class came to learn from Zheng Zujie, a Chinese Grand Master of Wing Chun. Zheng delved into the history and techniques of Wing Chun and elaborated on the Chinese philosophical and cultural principles underpinning the martial art. Participants had the opportunity to practice its techniques under his guidance.

Zheng noted the genuine passion for Wing Chun among the Dutch practitioners. He says that his visit to the Netherlands aimed to foster close interactions with local Wing Chun practitioners.

"They come from a wide range of ages, with some well into their 60s and 70s, yet all show remarkable dedication to practicing Wing Chun regardless of their age," he says.

The veteran martial artist also expresses hope for further exchanges to connect people and jointly promote Wing Chun, emphasizing its benefits for health, happiness and personal development.



Zheng Zujie (left), an inheritor of Wing Chun, instructs practitioners at the China Cultural Center in The Hague, Netherlands, in July. XINHUA

Expressing his enthusiasm for the Wing Chun master class, Batstra says he is looking forward to going to China for further exchanges.

Sebastian Kas, a 51-year-old dedicated Wing Chun practitioner, says he has been immersed in the art

form since 2006. His journey into Wing Chun was inspired by his childhood fascination with martial arts films of the 80s and 90s, featuring icons like Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan.

"Watching those films, I always

said, 'that's what I want to do,' he says.

Kas says it has profoundly changed his life. "Wing Chun has become a part of my life that gives me mental and physical strength."

The Dutch martial artist says the experience of practicing Wing Chun went beyond the physical movements.

The respect for each other and the close community is an important aspect of this art for Wing Chun practitioners, who share knowledge and practice the art through various movements, he says.

"You have people who train harder and work longer hours. Then boundaries are pushed and you actually experience what the human body is capable of," Kas says. This intense dedication, he believes, fuels the passion and love for Wing Chun.

During the master class, Kas shared a personal dream. "For me, being able to go to the South Shao-lin Temple in Fujian, China, the birthplace of Wing Chun, is like a dream for me. I'm really looking forward to going."

XINHUA

PARIS 2024

BEACH VOLLEYBALL

A towering success on social media

Iconic landmark provides an ideal backdrop, not just for sporting action, but also fans looking for the perfect selfie

Lena Von Schonlaub used Eiffel Tower Stadium as a backdrop for her own personal photo shoot.

Von Schonlaub shifted her head from side to side, smiling broadly while she held her phone in front of her face and clicked over and over. Paris' iconic Eiffel Tower hovered right behind her, overlooking the site where beach volleyball is being played at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

It has been one of the most popular attractions of the Olympics, drawing hundreds of people looking for the best photo to post on their social media pages. The perfect setting for a digital age.

"I think it's the most beautiful location you can have," said Von Schonlaub, who traveled to Paris from Munich, Germany. "It's so Instagrammable."

The sand and upbeat music, provided by a live DJ, always give beach volleyball a party atmosphere. The sport has been played at plenty of iconic sites, including Copacabana Beach at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, where beach volleyball is very popular.

But, for many athletes and visitors, Eiffel Tower Stadium offers an unparalleled backdrop.

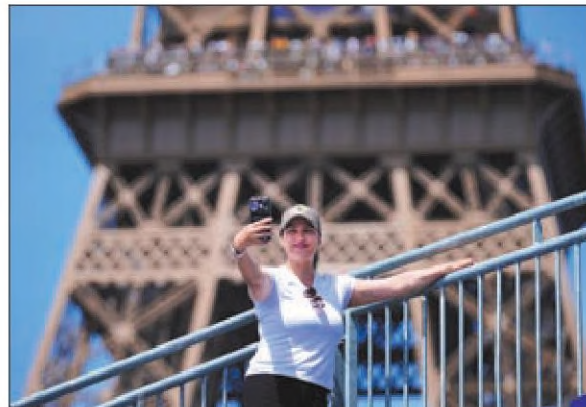
The 13,000-seat stadium was built specifically for the Olympics at Champ de Mars, a garden where Parisians and tourists typically sit on the grass for picnics or July 14 fireworks displays. The site draws hundreds of people on any regular day, but since the start of the Olympics, people are buying tickets to beach volleyball matches just to squeeze through crowds of people to get the perfect selfies and videos with the tower and sand in the background.

"We don't really follow beach volleyball, but we wanted to see the site with the Eiffel Tower," said Solene Naeye, a local who came to the spot to take pictures. She took in her surroundings and noted the beauty of the moment. "It's a way for us Parisians to rediscover our city, so that's really nice."

Matt Knigge, an alternate with the US men's indoor volleyball team, came to the stadium on his night off



Above: General view of the Eiffel Tower Stadium during the Paris Olympics women's beach volleyball group match between the US and Canada on Saturday. Below left: Locals Maeva Ratoanina and Pierre-Yves Massive enjoy a romantic moment while taking selfies at the venue during sunset. Below right: Katia Souza of Brazil takes a selfie at the Eiffel Tower Stadium. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY AND AP



from training Sunday. Knigge, from California, has traveled widely playing volleyball, but said he's never seen such an "emblematic" location.

"You're hard-pressed to find anything more beautiful than what we have right now," he said, pointing up at the tower. "The sun is setting in the background. I think if you were writing a fairy tale of beach volleyball at the Olympics, this is it."

He took photos of himself with his digital camera, and then asked a stadium attendant to get a photo of him, hoping for the best angle possible. Then he took a few more on his phone.

"In the day and age of social media, and people marketing based on social media, this is it," Knigge said while pointing around. "They've done it. They've achieved it."

TikTok said the Eiffel Tower location tag on its app had over 80,000 posts on Sunday, with the beach volleyball hashtag around 88,900.

Athletes from sports all across the Games have come over. French President Emmanuel Macron, who visited the stadium on Wednesday, posted a selfie video from the top row of the stands facing the Eiffel Tower.

American college gymnast and social media influencer Olivia Dunne was there Saturday night getting some shots for all her socials. She shared a video with her 8 million followers on TikTok, as well as photos on her Instagram stories. Her TikTok post, during which she was standing right in front of the Eiffel Tower, had 1.6 million views and more than 173,000 likes only 23 hours later.

Right around 10 pm Sunday, the lights at the stadium dimmed. The tower lit up. Orange streaks painted the blue sky. Suddenly, the tower began to glitter and everyone "ooh'd" and "ah'd" in harmony. They all raised their phones, the same image displayed thousands of times throughout the venue.

"I'll definitely be making a post on Instagram," said Kaden Augustine, of St. Louis, Missouri, standing next to his brother, Kanen, in matching overalls displaying the US flag. "Just because of how pretty it is here."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

RUGBY SEVENS

Rugby chief talks of 'tweaking calendar' to leverage Olympic sevens momentum

World Rugby needs to recalibrate its international calendar to enable more players like Antoine Dupont to switch between sevens and 15s, according to the federation's CEO, Alan Gilpin.

Dupont played a starring role, scoring two second-half tries and setting up another, as France claimed its first gold of the Paris Games by beating two-time defending champion Fiji in Saturday's final.

In front of another delirious capacity crowd of 69,000 at the Stade de France, Gilpin said the success of the men's competition had surpassed expectations.

"It's everything we could have hoped for," World Rugby's Gilpin told reporters.

"We always said this was a coming-of-age moment. We sold out eight sessions — 550,000 tickets — incredible!"

Gilpin added: "This has been everything we wanted it to be, which was to put rugby sevens on a big stage."

"Rugby sevens is great for the Games, and the Games is great for rugby sevens, and that's absolutely what we want."

He said the three-day women's tournament, which kicked off on Sunday, would also make history as the best-attended women's rugby event ever.

"Sixty-nine thousand people are going to be here watching women's rugby, which is incredible." The success of the "bold" decision to host the sevens at the Stade de France has raised eyebrows.

Gilpin said he had already held talks with organizers of the next two Olympics, Los Angeles 2028 and



Antoine Dupont of France races clear of Fiji's Waisea Nacuqu to score a try during the men's 2024 Paris Olympics rugby sevens gold-medal match at the Stade de France on Saturday. AP

Brisbane 2032, about potential stadium capacities.

While the player crossover in women's rugby between sevens and 15s is more common, Gilpin conceded that the challenge for World Rugby was the "incredibly congested" men's calendar.

"When we rewind to the Rugby World Cup here last year, the South Africans had six players in their squad that had played sevens. So they've found a way to make that pathway work," he said.

Gilpin suggested that World Rugby needed to work to "de-conflict some parts of the calendar", notably looking at the sevens calendar, and to "make sure that it works over a four-year period."

"Can we create a view of the calendar

that allows a player like Dupont to say, 'right, I'm going to play a year of 15s, but I'm going to pick these moments to build up to the Olympic Games and sevens, because it's the stage, it's a platform, that I otherwise wouldn't have?'"

In the past, the issue has been clouded by the release of players from their primary employers, their clubs, as well as scheduling clashes, with the sevens series currently a seven-month international season.

"France have done a great job with Antoine, enabling him to dip in and out, but is that possible for other unions? And how can we make that easier?" Gilpin asked.

"If we think forward to the Six Nations or the Rugby Championship that will precede the 2028 Los

Angeles Games, how can those players be playing in them, but also have the opportunities in that year to prepare in advance (of the Olympics)?"

"De-conflicting parts of the calendar to allow that to happen would be helpful."

Work post-Paris would entail negotiating with the numerous federations in the next four years "to find a way for sevens to be a more meaningful part of international rugby."

"We know it's got that opportunity to grow the game in a way that, in some markets, 15s probably certainly won't have in the short term," he said, citing China and Brazil as examples of countries with teams in the women's draw.

BMX

China's women ramp up freestyle medal charge

China may not be the first country that comes to mind when people think of BMX Freestyle, but coach Daniel Dhers says the country has identified the sport as an opportunity to boost its medals count, and has high hopes for its two entrants in the women's event.

Introduced to the Olympics at Tokyo 2020, freestyle has one of the smallest athlete quotas in Paris — 12 men and 12 women — and China has two female riders in the mix, both coached by Venezuelan Tokyo silver medalist Dhers.

"Freestyle is really new in the Olympic world, and China saw the opportunity," Dhers, 39, told reporters.

China's freestyle drive originated from its "119 project", launched ahead of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, to focus on sports in which China was not traditionally strong and which — at the time — accounted for 119 medals.

Dhers, who narrowly missed qualifying for Paris, said China had wanted to send freestylers to Tokyo, but the COVID-19 pandemic got in the way.

In April last year, China turned to Dhers, a BMX veteran whose North Carolina skatepark has long been a training ground for riders — including Swiss cyclist Nikita Ducarroz, who trained there ahead of winning bronze in Tokyo.

Chinese female BMX riders took three podium spots at the Shanghai Olympics qualifier in May, and

two qualified for Paris.

"I help them funnel their energy into what needs to be done to win medals," said Dhers.

China has a men's team, too, but Dhers said they may still be a decade away from being capable of winning an Olympic medal in the more competitive world of men's freestyle.

Dhers said the days when BMX was the domain of defiant city youths were long gone. Riders are much more serious about their sport now.

"In my time, we would party until 5 am and show up hungover for competition. All that changed in the early 2000s," he said.

Dhers believes that his charges can win gold.

Sun Jiaqi, 20, finished fourth in Tokyo and Deng Yawen, 18, topped the podium at the 2023 UCI BMX Freestyle Park World Cup.

Staying out until 5 am is the last thing on their minds.

Deng told Olympics.com that BMX is her sole focus.

"Most of my life is taken up by BMX," she said.

For Dhers, America's Hannah Roberts — a five-time world champion and Tokyo silver medalist — is the one to beat.

"Hannah is very strong. Realistically, we have a good chance of silver and bronze," he said.

Qualifiers start on Tuesday and finals are on Wednesday.

REUTERS

PARIS 2024

Enjoying the grind

By SUN XIAOCHEN in Paris
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From skating for fun at a square near her home, to riding to stardom in Paris, skateboarding prodigy Cui Chenxi has been an ambassador for her sport, giving skateboarding's rise in China a major boost with her Olympic breakthrough.

Always a fearless, sporty type since she was little, Cui sent an inspirational message to all her peers about the power of passion on Sunday, by riding her beloved skateboard — a pastime she picked just four years ago — all the way to a historic fourth-place finish in women's street final at the Olympic Games in Paris.

Despite narrowly missing out on a podium finish, Cui has enjoyed every bit of her Olympic journey, which came with crashes, slip-ups, scratches and broken teeth, before eventually landing her on the world's highest stage.

"A little bit, just that, no more," Cui, a 14-year-old middle school girl, said of her disappointing defeat at the hands of Brazil's Rayssa Leal at Paris' iconic Place de la Concorde.

"Overall, I feel satisfied with my performance today, and I enjoyed competing in the sport that I love so much all the way to the Olympics," said Cui, who, aged just 13, won the same discipline at last year's Asian Games, making her the country's youngest gold medalist at the continental event.

Boasting two clean executions out of five trick attempts, Cui held off a group of higher-profile opponents, all teenagers, to settle for fourth place with a total of 241.56 points in the street discipline final on Sunday. It marks a major step up in performance for Chinese athletes, with Cui finishing two spots better off than her senior teammate, Zeng Wenhui, at the sport's Olympic debut at Tokyo 2020.

Skateboarding powerhouse Japan still reigned supreme in the event, with world No 1 rider Coco Yoshizawa and No 2 Liz Akama enjoying a one-two finish on the podium after going neck-and-neck in their own Olympic debut.

Brazilian Leal, silver medalist in Tokyo three years ago, came back from behind to claim a bronze by stomping her second successful trick on her last attempt to leapfrog Cui, who had held third place before Leal's final attempt.

Skateboarding street at the Olympics is competed over two sections, where each skater takes two 45-second runs on a course

Teen skater relishes Olympic journey, despite last-gasp loss

Cui Chenxi's (top) successful Olympic debut is likely to inspire more youngsters back home to pick up skateboarding. XINHUA / PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



in knowing that she's made a good example and helped draw more attention to the sport.

"Of course I'd like to see more young people my age, or even younger, pick up a skateboard, but I want them to do it only for fun, not to push too hard for results, or whatever," said Cui, who, at the age of 9, picked skateboarding from among many other sports, including soccer and table tennis, as her favorite.

"The pure joy of landing a hard trick, after trying and failing so many times, is so satisfying that I hope more young skaters can feel it and fall in love with it."

Thanks to the Olympic exposure, skateboarding is gaining traction across China, highlighted by the bustling scenes at Shanghai's dockland park, where parents and their kids joined long queues to sign up for entry-level junior courses during the sport's Olympic qualifier series earlier this year.

The trendy urban sport, which used to be among the least promoted sports activities due to its rebellious nature, has now grown in popularity with Chinese parents, with the soaring businesses of junior training clubs in major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, providing proof of the changing perception.

The governing body will, for sure, aim to capitalize on the trend, according to Wei Yong, secretary-general of the Chinese Roller Sports Association.

"Since last year, we've been developing a national reserve team and have organized a winter camp for all talented youngsters aged between 9 and 14 to be identified, promoted and developed at the same time," Wei told China Sports Daily.

"Kids learn and grow together, making future prospects for the 2028 Olympics quite bright," he said.

a few pins and fist-bumped with journalists after the final.

"I executed my first two tricks the way I wanted, but failed to step up a gear when I needed a higher-difficulty move to beat the Brazilian girl's fifth trick.

"I can live with that, though, because I haven't quite yet grasped that difficult trick well enough in training.

"I kind of feel happy for her (Leal) because she's such a good skater who deserved the place on the podium, while I will definitely keep going, perfect my own tricks and get better next time."

Entering the Olympic race as a newcomer, Cui said she got along well with all the girls, Australia's Chloe Covell in particular, and apparently has won over some new fans. On her way to her post-final interview, a young boy approached her from the stands, asking for an autograph and, even more boldly, for her skateboard.

Cui waved to him, gently refused to give up her board, but took pride

featuring stairs, ledges, curbs and handrails in the first phase, before each performing five tricks in the second.

A skater's final score is aggregated from their best run and two most successful tricks, requiring a versatile repertoire imbued with quality, creativity and style to prevail.

Despite getting knocked off the podium, Cui remains upbeat, relishing how far the sport has taken her and the frenemy relationship she has with her teen rivals.

"I am just so happy to be here and to have fun with all the girls as more of a group of friends than opponents," said a jubilant Cui, who greeted spectators, exchanged

By LI YINGXUE
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Amid thunderous cheers from teammates and spectators, South Korea clinched its 10th consecutive Olympic gold in women's team archery, defeating China 5-4 in a gripping final on Sunday in Paris.

However, amidst the celebrations, one Korean stood wiping away in tears of a different kind. Kwon Yong-hak, coach of the China women's archery team, was visibly emotional as his charges narrowly lost their tense shoot-off.

Despite China finishing just one step away from the title, the South Korean trio had to overcome a stout challenge, after leading in the first two rounds. Chinese archers Yang Xiaolei, Li Jiaman, and An Qixuan managed to close the gap, tying the score at 4-4 and forcing the match to a three-arrow shoot-off. In the decisive round, each athlete from both teams shoots one arrow.

South Korea started strong, with the first arrow just shaving the ring of the target for a 10, while Chinese archer Li shot an eight. Korea's second was a nine, but up stepped 24-year-old Yang, and casually, seemingly with ice in her veins, fired it straight down the middle to hit dead center.

But, after An shot a nine and the final Korean arrow, again, grazed

the 10-point line — so closely it had to be checked with a magnifying glass — China ultimately fell agonizingly short, losing 27-29.

Yang thought that the Koreans were more comprehensive, "but we keep focusing on what we do. We have already proved a lot by taking the match to 4-4 and forcing the shoot-off. So, we already feel good about it."

"Our coach told us to be ourselves. It doesn't matter what score our

opponent shot, and it doesn't matter who the opponent is, we have to really bring our best game and to put up the best score we can," Yang said.

Archers from South Korea have shown unwavering dominance in the event since it was introduced to the Olympics at Seoul 1988. They have now won 18 of 19 gold medals in women's archery since competing as host at that Games.

The only exception was when China's Zhang Juanjuan won the indi-

vidual event at Beijing 2008.

China stands second in the overall medal table for women's team archery, having secured silver medals in 1992, 2004, 2008, and 2012. The runner-up finish in Paris adds another silver to that impressive tally, and marks the closest China has come yet to dethroning its Asian neighbor and clinching gold.

At the Tokyo Olympics, the Chinese women's archery team struggled, losing to Belarus in the round of

16 and missing out on the quarterfinals. However, in the Paris cycle, new coach Kwon joined the team and revitalized it with innovative training methods and strategies, significantly enhancing its performance.

Kwon, a former national archery champion in South Korea, transitioned to coaching after retiring from competition. Since 2006, he has spent his summers in China, coaching the Jiangsu archery team, later working with teams in Xinji-

ang, Shandong and Shanghai. To better communicate with his athletes, Kwon taught himself Chinese.

Before the Paris Olympics, Kwon shared with Beijing Youth Daily: "If I were coaching in South Korea, leading a team to the Olympics would be impossible. I am very grateful for this opportunity and cherish it deeply."

Kwon often reminds his athletes that "overall, the South Korean team is undoubtedly stronger; that's an objective reality. But, it doesn't mean they are invincible. Each time you compete against them, you learn something and become stronger. When the opportunity to win comes, we will seize it."

Under Kwon's guidance, the Chinese women's archery team has made remarkable progress during the current Olympic cycle. It secured victories against South Korea in this year's World Cup events in Shanghai and Yecheon, South Korea.

Among the three team members, only Yang has prior Olympic experience. In June, she clinched the individual gold medal at World Cup event in Antalya, Turkey.

"The team played hard and showed a tenacious spirit during the competition," Kwon said. "We will not give up. Let's keep pushing forward. Next Olympics, we must strive to defeat them."



Left: Chinese archers compete during the women's team final against South Korea on Sunday in Paris. Right: Team China's South Korean coach Kwon Yong-hak, who has played a pivotal role in lifting China's archery to a world-class level, watches on. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

