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Team China hailed worldwide for victories, morale

By SUN XIAOCHEN in Paris and LI YINGXUE in Beijing

Sun Yingsha, China's 23-year-old table tennis player who won two gold medals and one silver at the Paris Olympics, was again in the global limelight when she, as the representative of Asia, ceremoniously extinguished the Olympic flame on Sunday night, along with athletes from other continents, the International Olympic Committee Refugee Olympic Team, host nation France, and IOC President Thomas Bach.

Thanks to her vigor, self-confidence and lovely smiles on and off the court, Sun, who won gold medals in the mixed doubles and women's team event, as well as a silver in the women's singles, has become one of the representatives of China's rising generation of athletes at the Games. On the international stage, these athletes exemplified the spirit of contemporary Chinese sports — open-minded, confident, composed and graceful. Their conduct reflected a deep respect for both teammates and opponents, embodying the Olympic motto of "Faster, Higher, Stronger — Together".

Off the field, Chinese fans and online communities have moved beyond the fixation on gold medals, offering enthusiastic applause and cheers for every athlete's effort. They celebrated victories, consoled those who fell short, and recognized the dedication of all Olympians.

Chinese athletes' sincere off-field performances have caught the attention of the international media. AFP highlighted a touching moment from the mixed doubles table tennis award ceremony — players from China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea took a podium selfie. ROK broadcasters repeatedly aired the footage, noting the significance of this rare show of unity.

At the women's singles badminton medal ceremony, Chinese silver medalist He Bingjiao held a Spanish team pin on the podium, honoring Carolina Marin, who withdrew from the semifinals due to a knee injury. The Olympic Instagram account, with 13 million followers, praised the gesture: "That's what Olympic values are all about!"

On Aug 9, three-time Olympian Shi Zhiyong missed the podium after



Athletes from Cuba, Kenya, the International Olympic Committee Refugee Olympic Team, China, Australia and France (from left to right), together with IOC President Thomas Bach (fourth from left) and Paris 2024 President Tony Estanguet (fourth from right), create heart symbols with their hands as they pose during the closing ceremony of the Paris Games on Sunday. ESA ALEXANDER / REUTERS

an injury in the men's 73kg weightlifting event. After the Chinese weightlifting team concluded its Paris campaign with five gold medals, all the gold medalists draped their medals around Shi's neck for a post-competition photo.

Shi expressed his thanks on social media platform Weibo, saying: "I'm proud to be part of such a supportive team. Thank you all. I might have the most gold medals this time."

Weibo users also offered him encouragement. One comment said, "We're no longer just about gold medals. Simply competing for the country is impressive."

During the Paris Games, one touching moment was Zhang Boheng's reaction in the men's all-around gymnastics final, where he narrowly missed gold by 0.233 points and took silver. Upon seeing the results, Zhang smiled briefly, sighed deeply and lowered his gaze, showing complex emotions.

The 24-year-old gymnastics captain competed in six events over 10 days, completing 21 routines and



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finishing with two silver medals and one bronze. Despite not reaching the top podium, Zhang's efforts were widely recognized.

Similarly, the Chinese women's hockey team, which won silver, and the women's rugby sevens team, which finished sixth, achieved historic milestones and received wide acclaim for their performances.

"Today's Chinese audience values the process over just the results," said sports commentator Yang Yi. "Viewers still want to see wins, but they no longer focus solely on gold medals or judge athletes by their success or failure. There's a deeper appreciation for the challenges athletes face and the essence of sports."

Room for improvement

In the final days of the Olympics, all eyes were on whether China could surpass the United States in the gold medal tally. The suspense ended when the US won the last gold in women's basketball, leaving both nations tied with 40 golds.

The US stood out with its strong performance in the three major ball team events — soccer, basketball and volleyball — securing gold in men's and women's basketball and women's soccer, and also winning silver in women's volleyball and bronze in men's volleyball.

In contrast, China's team sports performances were underwhelming. The women's volleyball team finished fifth and the women's basketball team ninth, while four other teams didn't even qualify for Paris.

Zhou Jinqiang, deputy head of the Chinese delegation, said at a news conference on Sunday that the performance in major ball team sports was disappointing and some events face a gap in emerging talent. He emphasized that they will promptly conduct a thorough analysis and focus on continuous improvement.

As the Olympic flag was passed to Los Angeles for the 2028 Games, preparations for the next Olympics have already begun. Team China is expected to intensify its efforts and maintain a strategic focus to enhance its team sports performance.

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VISITS OF VISION

Cambodia still benefits from Xi's 2016 visit

Relations, cooperation between two nations strengthened in all sectors and at all levels

By YANG HAN in Hong Kong kelly@chinadailyupac.com

When President Xi Jinping arrived in Phnom Penh for a state visit to Cambodia on Oct 13, 2016, Chea Mounyryth, then director of the Confucius Institute of the Royal Academy of Cambodia, remembered that the institute's teachers and students were among the welcoming crowds.

"President Xi's visit was celebrated across the country," recalled Chea, who is now president of the Cambodian Chinese Evolution Researcher Association.

During his state visit, Xi held talks with Cambodian King Norodom Sihamoni and then prime minister Hun Sen, agreeing that the two countries should continue to be "highly trusted friends, loyal partners, and a community of shared future," said Chea, who has worked on the translation of the Khmer-language edition of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*.

While the two sides signed 31 cooperation documents, Xi's visit also demonstrated closer people-to-people ties.

As planning and project director of Cambodia's Civil Society Alliance Forum, Chea has been working with Chinese nongovernmental organizations for years on projects to improve people's livelihood in Cambodia's rural areas.

He cited the two countries' collaboration on poverty alleviation and healthcare such as the Cambodia-China Friendship Village Project for Poverty Alleviation, the Cambodia-China Friendship Preah Kossamak Hospital, and the China-Cambodia Love Heart Journey — a program that provides free surgery for Cambodian children with congenital heart disease.

China's support for Cambodia with advanced equipment to clear all landmines and achieve the mine-free goal by 2025 helped ease people's safety concerns, Chea added.

Cambodia is among the nations worst affected by landmines, with an estimated 4 million to 6 million mines and other unexploded munitions left behind by three decades of war and internal conflicts that ended in 1998.

Since 2018, China has helped Cambodia clear more than 100 square kilometers of minefields and about 78,000 pieces of landmines and explosive remnants of wars. This has benefited over 1.5 million Cambodian people, according to Xinhua News Agency.

Kin Phea, director-general of the

International Relations Institute of Cambodia, an arm of the Royal Academy of Cambodia, said that nearly a decade since President Xi's visit to Cambodia, "the relations and cooperation between Cambodia and China have broadened and strengthened in all sectors and at all levels".

In a joint communique issued during Xi's visit, China and Cambodia agreed to raise bilateral trade to \$5 billion by 2017.

In 2023, a year after the China-Cambodia free trade agreement and the Regional Economic Partnership Agreement took effect, the total imports and exports between China and Cambodia exceeded \$14.82 billion, according to China's General Administration of Customs.

China has been Cambodia's biggest trading partner for 12 consecutive years. It is also the largest source of foreign direct investment for Cambodia, accounting for two-thirds of the total FDI in 2023, according to the Council for the Development of Cambodia.

Neak Chandarith, director of the Cambodia 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Research Center, said that Cambodia has been supportive of China-proposed initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, because it sees the BRI as a catalyst for sustaining high economic growth.

In 2019, Cambodia became the first country to sign an action plan to build a community of shared future with China.

Last year, when China and Cambodia celebrated the 65th anniversary of diplomatic relations, the two countries agreed to deepen partnership under the "diamond hexagon" cooperation framework that focuses on six priority areas — politics, production capacity, agriculture, energy, security, and people-to-people and cultural exchanges.

The Morodok Techo National Stadium, an arena with a seating capacity of 60,000, was opened in 2021 just in time to be the main venue for the 32nd Southeast Asian Games and 12th ASEAN Para Games last year.

"Cambodia's participation in China-proposed initiatives has facilitated its integration into regional frameworks such as the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation and the ASEAN-China cooperation," Neak said, noting that this integration enhances Cambodia's regional influence and promotes economic cooperation.

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Hollywood's glory fades due to US prejudice

WORLD WATCH
By Sun Jiashan

ing conservatism in US society.

On the other hand, Chinese movies have experienced exponential growth since the second decade of this century, breaking through the billion-yuan box office barrier and continuing their upward trajectory. After weathering the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese film industry now stands at a new historical starting point. In recent years, the Chinese film market has quietly undergone a transformation, with US movies gradually ceding their box office dominance to domestic films.

The major changes in the internal and external environment of Chinese cinema will have long-term, complex implications not just for the film industry but also for the development of China's cultural sector.

Since the market-oriented and industrial reform of China's film industry in the late 20th century, the challenge of facing external competition, particularly from Hollywood, has always been a major issue. Chinese movies struggled to find effective strategies to counter the influence of films like *Jurassic Park* and *Titanic* and *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Mission: Impossible*, and *Fast & Furious* series.

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DECAYING WEDDING CANDY SALES A SIGN OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Matrimonial tradition fades in face of healthier, sugar-free lifestyles, declining nuptials

By ZHAO RUINAN in Nanchang zhaoruinan@chinadaily.com.cn

Candy shop owners on Nanchang's Zigou Road are more worried than the parents of young couples about the growing number of young people being in no hurry to get married.

"We sell candies for all kinds of celebrations, but mainly for weddings," said Liu Xiaojun, one of the candy shop owners. "This year's May Day holiday brought almost no business for us. It's been a tough year."

Zigou Road is an old street in



Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi province, named after the famous Song Dynasty (960-1279) writer Zeng Gong, whose courtesy name was Zigou.

In the 1990s, there were more than 20 candy shops lining the road, and Nanchang families enjoyed its sweet treats, especially the popular White Rabbit candies, a household brand from Shanghai.

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Fierce blaze



A woman reacts after being rescued on Sunday from a wildfire in the village of Varnava, north of Athens, Greece. Residents living in the vicinity have been asked to move to safety. A children's hospital, a military hospital, two monasteries and a children's home were evacuated early Monday. COSTAS BALTAZ / ANADOLU VIA GETTY IMAGES See more, page 6

PAGE TWO

Candies:

Sweet industry sours amid habit changes, online rivals



From page 1

The street is less than a kilometer from Tengwang Pavilion, a well-known tourist spot. However, in stark contrast to the bustling tourist area, nowadays few pedestrians are seen in front of the wedding candy shops.

The declining marriage rate, competition from online sales, and the younger generation's preference for sugar-free products are all eroding the revenue of these small shops.

Traditional treats

It's late July, and Nanchang is still very hot and humid, even at dusk. One of Liu's customers, Qiu, arrives in a white car and enters the Zigu Road candy shop.

She recently got married and needs wedding sweets for the banquet. Qiu points at some fancy candy boxes and asks Liu — "how much are these?"

A short while later, she returns to her car carrying a large red plastic bag.

Candy plays a small but essential role in any traditional Chinese wedding. It is often handed out at the reception feast or offered as a wedding favor to guests.

Typically, candy is also exchanged between families as a traditional symbol of happiness and to invoke good luck for having many children.

"A single wedding candy order usually costs around 1,000 (\$140) to 2,000 yuan. However, with fewer people getting married, our profit margins have decreased," Liu said.

Her husband, Xu Wei, pulls out a calculator and says, "We just received an order totaling 1,340 yuan. After all expenses, our profit is less than 100 yuan, and we also need to pack the candies for the customer."

Each small wedding pack usually contains 8 to 20 different types of candies.

"When business was booming, we would be up packing candies until one or two in the morning," Xu said. "Now, we don't have those busy nights."

Daily sales are often less than a few hundred yuan. "This year is particularly tough," he said.

"They say that young people in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai are not getting married, but even here in Nanchang, few people are tying the knot."

Lately, their shop's main customers have been families hosting graduation banquets, which generates business that is slightly better than in the off-season.

Wedding candy culture in East China is popular, particularly in provinces like Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Anhui and Jiangxi, which together account for nearly 80 percent of the market, according to China Candy magazine.

In Nanchang, whether it's to celebrate a wedding, birth, housewarming or birthday, residents like to give out candy.

The wedding candy business is also seasonal.



A bride gives sweets to a child at her wedding ceremony in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Saturday during Qixi Festival, or Chinese Valentine's Day. DING LEI / XINHUA

“When business was booming, we would be up packing candies until one or two in the morning. Now, we don't have those busy nights.”

Xu Wei, candy shop owner in Zigu Road, Nanchang

After the Chinese New Year, business picks up in April, peaks during the May Day holiday, and slows down until the graduation banquets in July and August. It picks up once more during the National Day holiday in October before falling off again.

No sugarcoating

Lin Yiwei lived on Zigu Road during her elementary school years in the late 1990s, and fondly remembers the rows of candy shops filled with all sorts of confectionery. They were her favorite places in the city.

"During those days, my mom used to take me to the shop downstairs to buy candies on weekends, which was the happiest moment for me. Later in the 2010s, these shops moved to the middle section of the street, and we moved out of the district," Lin said.

Now, there are only eight candy

shops remaining on Zigu Road. The street is a microcosm of China's wedding candy industry. In recent years, the declining number of marriages has had an impact on various aspects of economic life, including the candy industry.

The number of marriages in China dropped from 13 million in 2013 to below 7 million in 2022, reaching the lowest level since records began in 1986.

It was only last year that the number of marriages started to pick up again.

From 2013 to 2016, China's marriage rate hit new highs, leading to a resurgence in the Chinese wedding candy market.

During this period, the market expanded from 30 billion yuan to about 40 billion yuan, with an annual growth rate of over 10 percent, surpassing the growth rate of the traditional candy market.

However, a report by market research company Mintel indicates that China's candy industry experienced a turning point in 2014 and has been declining ever since.

Furthermore, the marriage rate in Jiangxi is notably low.

According to the China Statistical Yearbook 2023, Jiangxi's marriage rate stood at 4.65 percent, ranking among the lowest in the country. Last year, only 210,000 couples registered their marriages in Jiangxi.

It's also uncertain whether those intending to get married will buy candies from brick-and-mortar

shops or purchase them online.

Lin said most of her married friends either buy candies online or entrust the entire wedding ceremony to a matrimonial agency. "None of my friends go to brick-and-mortar candy shops," she said.

Yoyou, who married in May, spent an afternoon comparing prices on e-commerce platforms like Taobao and Pinduoduo while preparing for her wedding. She finally decided to buy 700 boxes of wedding candies online.

"Each box of candies costs about 1.9 yuan, and I bought what I like to eat. Weddings are expensive, so I try to save where I can," she said.

The quality of wedding candies bought online can vary, but the variety is greater, and products are updated quickly. Offline shops also have to follow online trends.

E-commerce deals

On social media platform Xiaohongshu users share detailed shopping guides, including how to assemble candy boxes using different candies and chocolates wrapped in colorful paper.

Savvy young people compare prices and products, making online shopping more attractive and fun. Even those who go to brick-and-mortar shops use their phones to check prices and negotiate with the shopkeepers.

However, online shopping is not always cheaper. For example, WoWo milk candies cost about 19 to 21 yuan per 500 grams on Taobao. Liu sells them for 18 yuan in her

shop, with possible discounts for bulk purchases.

"Online shopping does impact us because they offer more variety, and it's more convenient to shop directly on your smartphone with a quick delivery," Liu said.

To compete with e-commerce, candy shops are offering better services, such as promising "10 times the compensation for any fake product", free candy box packaging, and free home delivery. Refunds were even offered for postponed weddings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nonetheless, competition is fierce.

Some shop owners, who once charged less than 1 yuan for the boxes the candy comes in, are now giving them away. Once one shop starts giving away the boxes, others are forced to follow. The loss is recouped by slightly increasing the price of the candies.

Qiu is one of those who prefers buying candy in a store.

"Many online gift boxes look flashy but don't have as many varieties as they seem. It's more reliable to buy offline, where I can see and touch the products," she said.

Healthy lifestyle

A major reason the candy market is in decline is that candies are not as popular with young people as they once were. They have been replaced with sweet alternatives such as fruit and tea-flavored beverages, while there are also sugar-free, and low-sugar options for

health-conscious consumers.

Many celebrities and online influencers across the world are also advocating sugar-free lifestyles, often scrutinizing the sugar content of various drinks and foods.

Urban residents' per capita sugar consumption has been decreasing annually over the past decade, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

To address the decline, food manufacturers in recent years have come up with the concept of "functional candy" — the addition of vitamins to products to give them purported health benefits.

According to Market Research.com, global functional confectionery market reached \$2.30 billion in 2022 and is expected to reach \$3.98 billion by 2030.

The 2022 financial report of White Rabbit candy also highlights "functional and health-oriented" as future development trends.

In the past, it was common for families to buy substantial amounts of candy for the Chinese New Year. Today, even a small amount of 500 grams is considered "too much".

"Five or six years ago, our family still bought candy for the traditional Chinese New Year holiday. But later we found that the candy bought in February wasn't finished by the Mid-Autumn Festival," Lin said.

"Over the past two years, my parents haven't bought any candy during the Spring Festival — they only bought some chocolates that I like."

Hu Jiaying, who is getting married in Nanchang in October, delegated the task of buying wedding candy to her elders.

"Buying wedding candy is just a formality now. We don't eat it ourselves. It's too sweet and unhealthy," Hu said.

At the 2023 China Candy Forum, Wang Qi, vice president of the China Food Industry Association, said that since 2015, the total output of large-scale candy enterprises in China has been declining.

"Food consumption is shifting from survival to health and enjoyment," Wang said. "But compared to developed countries, China's candy industry lacks innovation, product variety, brand presence, and has an outdated research and development structure, resulting in a low market share."

To survive financially after the pandemic, Liu has started another business in her shop. Half the shop displays candy, while the other half has rows of women's clothes.

"We open the shop at 8 am and close at 9 in the evening. Just selling wedding candy can hardly make ends meet. We have two kids to support," Liu said.

Liu's son is in eighth grade and her eldest daughter is a high school senior. During the summer vacation, they do their homework and play games in the candy shop.

"We have no other way to make a living. We just hope more people get married so we can make some money during the upcoming National Day holiday," said Xu.



Left: Sweet boxes are seen at the China Wedding Expo in Shanghai on June 1. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Middle: A man walks past a candy shop in Zigu Road in Nanchang, Jiangxi province. Right: Shop owner Xu Wei sorts candy at his store in Zigu Road, Nanchang. PHOTOS BY ZHAO RUINAN / CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

Key US economic data raises global concerns

By SHAO XINYING
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Data showing the national debt of the United States at a record high of \$35 trillion and an unemployment rate that is surging have sparked worries about the health of the US economy. Experts said the large federal debt reflects inadequate policy responses and failure of governance, and carries wide ramifications for the world.

The gross federal debt of the US surpassed \$35 trillion at the end of July, Treasury Department data showed. This translates into a per capita debt of \$104,000, according to the Peter G. Peterson Foundation, a nonpartisan organization that focuses on addressing long-term fiscal challenges in the US.

Chen Weidong, general manager of the Research Institute of the Bank of China, said the large US federal debt is the result of the continued accumulation of fiscal imbalances. Government spending has been rising rapidly to support social security and the economy, he said, noting that military spending has climbed, particularly after the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The gross national debt grew rapidly from \$20 trillion in September 2017 to \$30 trillion in early 2022 to \$34 trillion in late 2023.

According to Tian Lihui, dean of the Institute of Finance and Development at Nankai University, during the pandemic, the US government adopted large-scale fiscal stimulus measures and purchased securities from the market to boost liquidity, leading to soaring federal debt.

In addition, US debts are globally deemed as a safe haven, which allows the US government to borrow more money at a lower cost, Tian said.

"The high debt level can cause significant problems if economic conditions worsen," Ke Jing, associate research professor at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of International Relations, said.

The record debt figures were revealed as the US Bureau of Labor Statistics said in early August that unemployment rate had risen to 4.3 percent, the highest since October 2021, beating the projection of 4.1 percent. The nonfarm payrolls — a key employment index — increased only by 114,000 in July, a slowing from 179,000 jobs added in June.

Financial news site MarketWatch reported that a closely tracked recession indicator, the Sahm rule, had been triggered. The rule says a recession is imminent when the unemployment rate, based on a three-month average, is half a percentage point above its lowest point over the previous 12 months.

Economists from the Goldman Sachs Group have hiked the probability of a US recession in the next year to 25 percent from 15 percent, Bloomberg reported.

Worries about an imminent recession in the US have led to stock price fluctuations in major stock markets around the world.

The situation has prompted further speculations on whether the Federal Reserve will cut interest rates in September.

The Fed kept its benchmark policy interest rate unchanged in July at a two-decade high of 5.25 to 5.50 percent. The budget office predicts annual interest costs will rise to \$1.7 trillion in 2034 from \$892 billion this year, the New York Times reported.

"The interest spending is too high for the government to sustain," Ke

from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of International Relations said.

With high interest rates, the US national debt will continue to soar. This would increase borrowing costs for businesses, discouraging investment and consumption, Ke added.

Chen of the Research Institute of the Bank of China said the Fed is likely to initiate a rate cut in September and perhaps another in the fourth quarter to better balance inflation and economic growth.

The consumer price index rose 3 percent in June from a year earlier, according to the US Labor Department, below the 3.1 percent market expectation.

"There is not necessarily a need to cut interest rates at the moment, but the Fed might lower its rate to influence the financial market and balance politics," Tian of the Institute of Finance and Development at Nankai University said.

Rating agency Moody's in November lowered its outlook on the US credit rating to "negative" from "stable", citing large fiscal deficits and a decline in debt affordability, several months after Fitch downgraded US credit rating to AA+ from AAA.

"There is a contradiction between the escalating US debt and its role as a global safe asset," Chen said. On one hand, to strengthen its reserve asset status, the US must continually increase fiscal deficits to produce these safe assets. On the other hand, expanding fiscal deficits heighten the risk of default, which undermines its status as "safe assets", he added.

The US abuse of financial sanctions due to dollar hegemony and the high national debt are eroding the credibility of the dollar, diminishing international investors' confidence, Chen said.

Tian attributed the downgrades to governance failure and the shortsightedness of bipartisan politics.

Despite the considerable amount of federal debt, it is not getting much attention from the contenders for the White House, US media reported.

"National debt primarily functions as a financial tool rather than being shouldered directly by households, making it less of a focus for US voters," Tian said.

"Hardly can both parties find a solution as debt is not a problem that can be fixed in one or two administrations," Ke said. It is an "elephant in the room" as the two parties diverge on how to reduce debt, she added.

According to her, the US political system, with its frequent changes in administration, makes it challenging to maintain a consistent long-term goal.

Chen said to effectively address the debt problem, the US government could either raise taxes or cut social welfare spending. However, higher taxes might dampen business sentiments, while cutting welfare could result in social discontent, making both options difficult to implement.

Tian warned of the potential risks brought by the surge in national debt as it could push up borrowing costs and increase risks to global financial stability, putting pressure on the economic growth of developing countries.

If the US debt problem leads to a global reassessment of the dollar's status, it could profoundly impact the international trade system that relies on the dollar, Ke added.

Fight for a fitting cause



Two boys kick each other on Sunday during the Sisebar ritual that is observed at thanksgiving feasts for a good harvest, in Tikala, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. HARIANDI HAFID / AFP

China boosts service trade

Robust momentum seen in the first half of the year, crucial for new avenues of growth

By WANG KEJU
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As China charts its course through the intricacies and uncertainties of the global trade climate, the emphasis on expanding trade in services is gaining increasing importance, particularly in harnessing the immense potential of knowledge-intensive services and digital transformation, analysts said on Monday.

However, the sector still faces a host of challenges stemming from structural imbalances, discrepancies between some regulatory standards and established international norms, and further fine-tuning of foreign investment access, they added, calling for greater efforts to strengthen weak links.

In the first half of the year, China's trade in services maintained robust growth momentum, with the total volume of service imports and exports reaching about 3.6 trillion yuan (\$501 billion), up 14 percent year-on-year, the Ministry of Commerce said on Friday.

Of the total service trade volume, exports accounted for 1.47 trillion yuan, an increase of 10.7 percent compared with the same period last year, while imports climbed 16.4 percent year-on-year to 2.13 trillion yuan, according to the ministry.

In contrast to goods trade, trade in services refers to the sale and

delivery of intangible services like transportation, tourism, telecommunications, warehousing, advertising, computing and accounting.

Zhou Nianli, a professor of foreign trade at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said that despite notable progress, the representation of services in global trade metrics falls far short of their domestic significance.

The tertiary sector, another term for the service sector, accounted for 56.7 percent of China's total GDP in the first half of the year, according to the National Bureau of Statistics, while cross-border services trade, as shown by data from the ministry, only accounted for 22 percent of total global trade volume last year.

Zhou said that recognizing and harnessing the latent potential of service trade is crucial for unlocking new avenues of growth in the international trade landscape, especially as economies worldwide pivot toward knowledge-intensive and digitally driven models.

During the January-June period, the exports and imports of knowledge-intensive services totaled 1.42 trillion yuan in China, registering 3.7 percent year-on-year growth, according to the ministry.

Xie Yiqing, an associate researcher at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of China Studies, said that knowl-

edge-intensive services, which represent around 40 percent of China's total service trade volume, still fall below the levels commonly observed in developed economies.

Most of the knowledge-intensive services are digital deliverable services, Xie said, emphasizing that the country should leverage digital technologies to strengthen its foothold in knowledge-intensive services, and nurture new growth drivers and advantages within the sector.

Meanwhile, the application of digital technologies in traditional service sectors such as travel, transportation and construction could also elevate the overall volume and quality of service trade offerings, Xie added.

Efforts to bridge the gap between regulatory frameworks and international standards are essential to enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of China's service trade offerings on the global stage, analysts said.

Bai Ming, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said that China's pursuit of accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement serves as a pivotal opportunity for the country to align with best practices and enhance its digital trade policies.

In addition, China should continue its drive toward greater openness in the service sector, in order to further relax restrictions on foreign investment in the sector, Bai said.

Ties: Young generation key to two sides' links

From page 1

With this year being designated as the China-Cambodia People-to-People Exchange Year, Um Vuty, founder and chairman of the Association of Cambodian Students in China, said he believes the younger generation will play a key role in deepening bilateral cooperation and mutual trust.

When Xi visited Cambodia in 2016, Um Vuty was pursuing a master's program at the China University of Geosciences in Beijing. Witnessing the close exchanges between Cambodia and China, he founded his association in 2017 to help young people from Cambodia study and work in China.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the association selected 95 Cambodian students who studied medicine in China to form a volunteer team to administer over 100,000 vaccines to Phnom Penh residents, including 5,000 Chinese nationals.

Um Vuty is now a government employee and also president of the Cambodia-China Youth Relations Association. "The things I learned in China have laid a solid foundation for my career and supported me in many tasks," he said.

Following President Xi's visit, "there are now more Confucius Institutes and Chinese language schools in Cambodia, so young Cambodians can learn Chinese and use it for research, communication, and even in their own businesses", Um Vuty said.

He added that he hopes to create more opportunities for Cambodian and Chinese students to communicate with each other.

Anheng Sokpheak, president of the Siem Reap-based Cambodia Chinese Tour Guide Association, said that more Chinese tourists have come to Cambodia since Xi's visit, which has contributed to the development of Cambodia's tourism industry and the local economy, and increased employment opportunities.

Before Xi's visit, China was Cambodia's second largest source of tourists after Vietnam, with around 694,712 Chinese nationals visiting the kingdom in 2015.

In 2019, before the pandemic hit global travels, China rose to the top spot with the number of Chinese visitors to Cambodia reaching 2.36 million, accounting for 35.7 percent of international tourist arrivals and generating about \$1.8 billion in revenue, according to the Cambodian Ministry of Tourism.

The number of Chinese tourists to Cambodia increased 41.5 percent year-on-year in the first four months of 2024, according to the ministry, Xinhua reported.

"The cooperation in infrastructure projects such as the Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway and the Siem Reap-Angkor International Airport also helped improve transportation efficiency and support the local tourism industry," Anheng said.

"As the two countries promote cooperation in tourism, we wish to see more Chinese tourists visiting Cambodia," he said, adding that his association's more than 700 tour guides are always ready to help Chinese tourists.

In May, in a clear sign of the strengthening bilateral bond, Phnom Penh's third ring road was renamed Xi Jinping Boulevard. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet said the move expressed gratitude for the historic contribution Xi has made to promoting Cambodia's development.

Chea, from the Cambodian Chinese Evolution Researcher Association, said the renaming of the road was an important milestone symbolizing the growing bilateral friendship.

Cambodia-China ties are special, unbreakable, and a "unique role model" of interstate relations that can be replicated both regionally and globally, said Kin Phea, from the Royal Academy.

The two countries' relationship will continue to grow stronger and diversify into all areas of common interest, he said, emphasizing that it will guide the "two iron brothers" toward greater achievements.

Movies: Nation tells stories through cinema

From page 1

But since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, the Chinese film industry has increasingly focused on realistic themes and the rich traditional culture of China. The innovative use of genres and themes that resonate with the Chinese people, as well as with reality and tradition, has gradually changed the situation. As a result, Chinese movies are no longer at a competitive disadvantage against Hollywood productions.

For instance, last summer's *Chang'an* revived Chinese people's interest in Tang Dynasty (618-907) poetry, sparking diverse cultural and tourism developments centered on the theme. Similarly, this year's *White Snake* achieved both critical and commercial success. This gradual integration of film and cultural tourism has not only boosted domestic consumption but also taken China's cultural and tourism integration to new levels.

On this foundation, the task of telling Chinese stories and disseminating China's voice through cinema has become even more significant. A richer commercial ecosystem has naturally helped in developing new growth models tailored to the unique conditions and characteristics of Chinese cinema, especially as Hollywood's global influence wanes.

Despite the widespread impact of the pandemic on the global film industry, with some in Hollywood believing that their market will

never return to its 2019 peak, the Chinese film industry has continued to innovate itself. Movies such as *The Wandering Earth 2* illustrate that China's cultural industry has not stalled due to the pandemic; instead, it has reached new heights. Building on the success of *The Wandering Earth* and *Crazy Alien* during the 2019 Spring Festival, followed by *A Writer's Odyssey* and *Moon Man*, the industry has continued its steady advance.

New film techniques like virtual production used in *The Wandering Earth 2* represent the next phase of cinema's development worldwide, following the earlier widespread use of green screen technology. Given the barriers of technology, talents and industry scale, this new production technique has been mastered by filmmakers of only a few countries, including the US, and represents the future of global cinema. Thus, the success of *The Wandering Earth* series not only marks a milestone for Chinese sci-fi movies but also highlights the painstaking progress of Chinese cinema and the cultural industry.

Contemporary Chinese culture, represented by Chinese cinema, must create new values and offer a narrative distinct from the US, if it is to have greater appeal worldwide. Only by popularizing the Chinese way of life, traditional Chinese culture and the underlying values across the world can China better match its international discourse power with its comprehensive national strength.

Looking to the future, Chinese cinema still faces many complex challenges, and inevitably has to engage in direct competition with American culture represented by films and gaming. For example, from the *Three-Body Problem* series to *The Wandering Earth*, Chinese sci-fi movies have been increasingly influencing the global cultural landscape, forcing Hollywood and emerging streaming platforms to respond to maintain their influence.

While adapting Chinese sci-fi novels such as *The Three-Body Problem* and *The Dark Forest*, US filmmakers not only insert American values into the productions but also distort China's image, falsely attributing global climate change and ecological crises to the country. This is done to divert American people's attention from the US' domestic problems while pursuing the broader political goal of "America First" and suppressing technological development in other countries.

This reality necessitates that China's cultural creations, including movies, address global issues such as climate change and ecological crises, offering Chinese solutions for them in order to promote the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind and facilitate exchanges among societies.

The author is an associate researcher at the Central Academy of Culture and Tourism Administration. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

Uncertain times



A woman cooks on Sunday at a makeshift campsite where people already displaced by conflict were evacuated to following deadly floods in the eastern city of Kassala in Sudan. Millions of displaced people have been forced to seek shelter in flood-prone areas. AFP

CHINA

By XIN DINGDING in Hukou, Jiangxi
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In Jiangxi province's Hukou county, the waters of the Yangtze River converge with the Poyang Lake. Here, a patrol team, led by Shu Yin'an, is witnessing firsthand the resurgence of the elusive Yangtze finless porpoise.

Shu, 57, born to a family of fishers, has put down his net to take up the mantle of environmental protection and ecological restoration along Asia's longest river.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Yangtze finless porpoises were a relatively common sight, according to Shu. But by the early 2000s, predominantly due to human activities, their numbers started to dwindle.

"Weeks would pass without a single glimpse of these majestic creatures," he said. "But it wasn't just the porpoises, all fish populations were decreasing, leading to empty fishing trips sometimes."

Four years into a fishing ban on the Jiangxi section of the Yangtze River Basin, which includes Poyang Lake, along with other conservation efforts, Shu said he's starting to notice a significant increase in fish, as well as the porpoises.

"The sightings of porpoises have become more frequent, and we can sometimes spot a mother porpoise and its pup," he said.

The Yangtze finless porpoises are distributed in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River Basin. That includes Poyang — China's largest freshwater lake, as well as Dongting Lake and the mainstream of the Yangtze. Classified as critically endangered and listed as a national first-class protected wild animal, they are believed to be a vital indicator of the health of the Yangtze ecosystem due to their sensitivity to environmental changes.

According to surveys conducted every five years by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, between 2006 and 2017, the porpoise population in the mainstream of the Yangtze plummeted from 1,225 to 445, a drop of 64 percent.

As for the whole Yangtze River Basin, the situation was similarly severe. Hao Yujiang, a researcher at the Institute of Hydrobiology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, wrote in an article published last year that the porpoise population shrank in the early 1990s from 3,600 to 1,800 by 2006, and further dropped to about 1,040 in 2012. The ministry's survey shows the porpoise population in the whole Yangtze River Basin in 2017 stood at 1,012.

"The porpoise population was experiencing an accelerating decline at that time and the species faced a serious risk of extinction," Hao said in the article.

Experts agreed that the fast decline of the porpoise population was due to the deteriorating ecosystem in the Yangtze River Basin. By 2018, the degradation of its ecosystem functions was so serious that Poyang and Dongting lakes were becoming frequently hit by droughts, and the biological integrity index of the Yangtze River in some areas stated there were even "no fish".

Hao said the Yangtze River once boasted a rich and diverse ecosystem, and was one of only two rivers in the world home to two kinds of cetaceans, with the other being the Amazon River in South America.

The massive fall in the Yangtze River's biodiversity has drawn attention from the top leadership in recent years. President Xi Jinping chaired two symposiums about the Yangtze River Economic Belt, in January 2016 and April 2018. At both conferences, he demanded concerted efforts to protect the Yangtze and to avoid excessive development.

The central government quickly adopted a series of measures in the following years.

In 2017, the agricultural ministry announced that all aquatic reserves in the Yangtze River Basin should ban fishing, starting from Jan 1, 2018.

In 2018, the State Council issued a notice on strengthening the protection of aquatic life in the Yangtze, which said emergency conservation actions would be implemented to protect endangered aquatic species like the Yangtze finless porpoise.

The measures included better protecting the porpoises' habitats, carrying out relocation, and establishing artificial breeding bases and science education wings in

Numbers of Yangtze finless porpoise increasing

Environmental efforts bringing endangered populations back to life



A Yangtze finless porpoise seen near Hukou, Jiangxi province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Shu Yin'an, head of a patrol team, shares his stories on conservation of finless porpoises. GUO JIEVEN / XINHUA



CHINA DAILY

adequate research institutions and aquariums.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs issued a notice in 2019 stipulating that a strict 10-year commercial fishing ban should be implemented in the entire Yangtze River Basin no later than Jan 1, 2021.

The efforts have yielded positive results. A survey by the national agricultural authority in 2022 showed that the porpoise population had rebounded to 1,249, marking a turnaround from the previous decline. Several cities in the Yangtze River Basin have reported the return of the mammal after its disappearance for decades. In Jiangxi's provincial capital Nanchang where the Ganjiang River, a tributary to the Yangtze, flows, porpoises have been reported in the downtown section for the first time in more than 40 years.

Gene pool

Poyang Lake in Jiangxi serves as a vital habitat for the porpoise. The 2022 survey showed there were 492 finless porpoises in the lake alone, which accounted for nearly 40 percent of the total population.

The provincial government established a 6,800-hectare reserve dedicated to porpoise conservation in 2004, emphasizing the protection of the species. When the fishing ban in the Yangtze basin was announced, Jiangxi acted faster than many other provinces — the moratori-

um began in 2020, a year earlier than the required date.

The national agricultural authority regards Jiangxi as "the key to the protection of the Yangtze finless porpoise", according to a 2022 report on Jiangxi provincial government website.

By this, it means that Jiangxi is a gene pool for the porpoise. In the past few years, Jiangxi has transported a number of porpoises from Poyang Lake to relocation protection bases in neighboring provinces such as Anhui and Hubei, in order to ensure genetic diversity there.

At present, the province is building its first relocation protection base for the porpoise. Designed to cover a total area of 800 hectares in Hukou, the base is expected to be able to accommodate up to 64 porpoises upon completion.

"The new base will be a necessary supplement to the existing on-site protection and keep porpoises safe from threats caused by fluctuating water levels and human interference," said Yu Xianhua, head of Hukou county's aquatic life protection center.

The fluctuation of the water level in Poyang Lake is so huge that the lake's surface area varies dramatically, and this can also cause problems for marine life. The lake experiences its highest water levels in July, with it gradually receding to the dry season from October to March. Previous reports show that depending on the water level, the

surface area of Poyang can range between 500 square kilometers and 4,000 sq km. At its most severe, most of the lake bed was covered by grass and wetland.

"In dry seasons, groups of porpoises would swim into the saucer-shaped lakes that form, which poses a big risk to their safety," he said. In addition, the extraction of sand and minerals from the Poyang Lake bed would leave deep pits that could strand the porpoises.

Yu said when porpoises are stranded in "plate lakes" — those separated from the lake's main body during the dry season — and deep pits, his protection team and similar organizations take emergency measures to rescue them, including feeding and relocating them.

In February last year, when Jiangxi was hit by a serious drought, more than 100 porpoises in Poyang Lake were driven from shallow waters into deeper waters before things got worse, and eight porpoises were transported safely to relocation bases in Anhui and Hubei as well as a temporary care site in Hukou.

The two porpoises that were moved to Hukou received much attention. "We assigned dedicated personnel to take care of them, and we release an average of 1,500 kilograms of fish fry each month to feed them," he said, adding that the two porpoises have grown bigger.

Despite these efforts, problems remain. An undercover investigation by central environmental inspection teams in March found that there were still several problems in Jiangxi that threaten the lives of porpoises, including illegal fishing and agricultural runoff pollution in some parts of Poyang Lake.

The investigation was carried out in the same month as the State Council issued a notice announcing more targeted measures in support of the decade-long fishing ban.

In a gesture showing Jiangxi's resolve to protect the Yangtze ecosystem, Yin Hong, Party secretary of the province, and Ye Jianchun, the provincial governor, made inspections to counties mentioned by the central environmental inspection report in May, urging local authorities to seriously reflect on their negligence of duty and act promptly.

"Efforts must be made without any compromise to ... strengthen the protection of the Yangtze finless porpoises," Yin said.

From fisher to protector

When Jiangxi took the lead in implementing the fishing ban in key waters, it meant the province's many fishermen could no longer rely on fishing to make a living and must find new jobs.

So far 68,200 fishermen have been resettled, according to the provincial agricultural department.

Local authorities have hosted job fairs and offered free skills training for them to become qualified for new jobs or start their own businesses.

In addition, the local governments are tracking these people's employment status in order to provide help whenever there is a need.

Some fishermen have been hired to take care of porpoises in Hukou's temporary care base.

Others have chosen to join local patrol teams that help authorities fight against illegal fishing and rescue stranded porpoises. Hukou county established the country's first patrol team with such a purpose in June 2017, and Shu was one of the first fishermen to join.

"At first I was reluctant to join, as the work means I might confront some acquaintances," he said. "But my daughter encouraged me, saying it would be beneficial for the environment."

In good weather, he and other team members patrol by boat. On rainy days, they drive a vehicle along the shore. "As we used to be experienced fishermen, we know where the fish are likely to gather and where illegal fishing is likely to happen," he said.

In the past seven years, the 16-member patrol team has covered over 160,000 km on patrol, observed and recorded at least 5,200 sightings of Yangtze finless porpoises, and removed more than 30,000 kg of abandoned fishing gear and shrimp cages.

"My current job does not pay as much as before. But this job is more meaningful," he said. "Only when the environment improves can life get better for all of us."



The Poyang Lake (right) converges with the Yangtze River in Hukou, Jiangxi province. Due to differences in silt, a division of color is often observed between the two water bodies. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Giant salamanders make a comeback in Jiangxi

By ZHAO RUINAN in Jing'an, Jiangxi
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On a cold night in 2018, Peng Yong spotted several wild Chinese giant salamanders.

"That night, as usual, I was wearing a headlamp and using a flashlight to observe along a stream. Suddenly, I saw something moving very fast in the water. Inspecting closer, I realized they were giant salamanders," Peng said. "I was so surprised and thrilled."

In 2016, Peng became the head of an ecological management station in Jiuling Mountain, Jing'an county in Jiangxi province. He patrols the area most nights, observing various aquatic and terrestrial plants.

Jing'an has a tradition of breeding giant salamanders, so the colleague accompanying Peng didn't think much of it at the time.

However, Peng recorded the location, took photos and sent them to experts. To his surprise, one expert responded, "This is very likely a wild Chinese giant salamander," he said.

Giant salamanders, known for their

impressive size, remain critically endangered in nature. They typically grow to about one meter in length and can weigh up to 50 kilograms. They eat fish, frogs, shrimp and aquatic insects in the water and have a life span of up to 120 years in the wild.

Wild giant salamanders are extremely rare and are mainly found in tributaries above 1,500 meters of the Yangtze River, Yellow River and Pearl River basins.

To confirm his discovery, Peng continued to observe at night and captured videos of more wild giant salamanders, including footage of them hunting.

This finding has attracted much attention. Soon, the Kunming Institute of Zoology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and the Jiangxi Academy of Sciences formed a special research team and went to Jing'an.

After two years of monitoring, the researchers published their findings in 2022, describing the population discovered in Jing'an as a new species — the Jiangxi giant salamander, or *Andrias jiangxiensis*.

"This is the only known species of Chinese giant salamanders today with a genetically pure, reproducing, in situ population," said the research paper published in the academic journal *Zoological Research* in May 2022.

This discovery is an "ecological echo" of the past two decades of wild giant salamander conservation efforts in Jing'an county.

Giant salamanders live in mountain streams. They usually hide behind rocks in the water during the day and swim out at night.

They are mysterious creatures known for their dog-like barking sound, hence the species was called "dog fish" in ancient China. They are the largest existing amphibians and are considered "living fossils" as they lived in the same era as dinosaurs.

Luo Xiaohong, deputy director of the county's agriculture and rural affairs bureau, said that giant salamanders prefer unique living environments, mainly distributed in clear, fast-flowing mountain streams.

She said that the interconnected streams and rocky crevices of Jing'an have been their



Giant salamanders in their namesake reserve in Jing'an, Jiangxi province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



natural habitat for ages.

In 1974, the county established China's first giant salamander research institute. Six years later, a giant salamander reserve was set up. In 1988, the giant salamander was listed as a national second-class protected wild animal.

The local government has implemented numerous measures to protect this ancient and mysterious species.

For giant salamanders to survive and thrive, the water quality in their environment needs to be good. To ensure this in the Jing'an giant salamander reserve, 15 small hydropower stations in the area have been dismantled.

Luo said that local authorities have strict-

ly enforced a ban on catching wild giant salamanders by combining river and lake chief systems with police oversight.

In addition, the county has been releasing young giant salamanders into the wild for 20 years to supplement the wild population.

"Infant giant salamanders are very small and fragile, and are easily attacked by river shrimp. We rescue them and raise them in breeding farms. Once they grow to over 200 centimeters, we release them back into nature," Peng said.

Luo added that, from 2005 to last year, "we have released a total of 20,000 giant salamanders, covering the three main water systems of our reserve."

SPORTS



The Paris Games have played host to some wonderful displays of friendship and camaraderie

Gold medalists Wang Liuyi and Wang Qianyi of China pose for a selfie on the podium with silver medalists Kate Shortman and Isabelle Thorpe of Britain and bronze medalists Bregje de Brouwer and Noortje de Brouwer of the Netherlands at victory ceremony for the Paris 2024 Olympics artistic swimming duet competition. REUTERS

A SNAPSHOT OF THE OLYMPIC SPIRIT

By JAMES MCCARTHY
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So, now that Tom Cruise has closed the show in spectacular style, carrying the Olympic flag off to Los Angeles on the back of his motorbike, and the curtain falls on another spectacular Summer Games, it's time to take a moment to reflect on the past two weeks, before the hard work of another Olympic cycle begins.

And what a fortnight it has been! Loaded with thrilling sporting action, feats of strength, skill and perseverance, and, of course, a bucketload of medals for Team China.

But, aside from the fierce competition, there were remarkable acts of sportsmanship, kindness and friendship, proving, again, that sports can conquer political, ideological and cultural divides like very little else.

Among the heartwarming highlights, the world heaped praise on He Bingjiao, who took silver in the women's singles badminton at the expense of Spain's Carolina Marin, who retired injured from their semifinal. In a show of empathy that won the hearts of millions, He carried a pin of the Spanish flag onto the podium with her in tribute to her fallen opponent, saying that she hoped to bring the spirit of Marin to the final. Lauded in the Spanish media, the country's NOC personally thanked He in Mandarin on social media.

Another wonderful — and literal — snapshot of the Games was that of China's mixed doubles table tennis gold medalist Sun Yingsha directing an impromptu podium photo shoot with teammate Wang Chuqin and the silver medalists from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ri Jong-sik and Kim Kum-yong, and the bronze medalists from the Republic of Korea, Shin Yu-bin and Lim Jong-hoon. The resulting pictures became a viral sensation, proving that, among athletes, there are no borders, only the crucible of competition.

Perhaps one of the most high-profile moments, though, came poolside at La Defense Arena. After breaking the United States' six-decade stranglehold on the 4x100m medley relay, and following a bitter, media-fueled spat between their respective anti-doping agencies, the American team rushing to congratulate the Chinese quartet of Xu Jiayu, Qin Haiyang, Sun Jiajun and Pan Zhanle, and then emphasizing China's dominance in the podium photos that followed, went a long way to bridging the rift. Pan burying the hatchet with Australian swimmer Kyle Chalmers after an earlier misunderstanding between the pair, and swapping swim caps and contact details, will stand as an example of the magnanimity that is forged by intense sporting competition, and is perhaps something we can all learn from. After all, we're only human, even if there are those that are, arguably, more superhuman.



Clockwise from above left: Gold medalist and world record holder Pan Zhanle of China is flanked by silver medalist Kyle Chalmers (left) of Australia and bronze medalist David Popovici of Romania on the podium of the men's 100m freestyle; women's badminton silver medalist He Bingjiao (left) of China holds a pin of the Spanish flag in tribute to Spaniard Carolina Marin, who was forced to withdraw due to injury, sending He into the final; women's diving 3m springboard winner Chen Yiwen (left) of China poses with runner-up Maddison Keeney of Australia (center) and third place Chang Yani of China; ROK's bronze medalist Lim Jong-hoon takes a selfie with gold medal winners from China and silver medalists from the DPRK. AFP / AP / REUTERS



Left: Li Wenwen of China (center), Park Hye-jeong from the Republic of Korea (left) and Emily Campbell of Britain celebrate during the medal ceremony for the women's +81kg weightlifting event. Right: Silver medalist Yang Liu of China (left) and bronze medalists Chen Nien-chin of Chinese Taipei and Janjaem Suwannapheng of Thailand are all smiles as Imane Khelif of Algeria kisses her boxing gold medal. AP / REUTERS

WORLD

Heat wave triggers wildfires in Greece

By JONATHAN POWELL
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Large wildfires raging near the Greek capital Athens have forced thousands to evacuate, with flames reaching heights of 25 meters, as much of Europe contends with extreme heat conditions.

Italy endured intense temperatures over the weekend and French authorities issued weather warnings for southern areas of the country. The United Kingdom was bracing for its hottest day of the year so far on Monday, with temperatures in some areas set to reach above 34 C.

High temperatures and strong winds fueled a massive wildfire north of Athens, where more than 400 firefighters, supported by aircraft, battled flames that burned trees, houses and cars and sent smoke clouds billowing over the capital, Reuters reported.

The fire brigade described attempts to combat the flames as "superhuman." Evacuation orders expanded on Monday, with at least five more communities instructed to leave, adding to the hundreds of people who had already fled from at least eight villages on Sunday, the BBC reported.

"The situation remains dangerous as the fire is spreading between residences," said fire brigade spokesperson Vassilios Vathrakogiannis, noting that the fire spread "like lightning" because of strong winds.

In Varnavas, a village of about 1,800 people that is 35 kilometers north of Athens, flames swallowed up trees and shrub land.

Civil Protection Minister Vassilis Kikilias cautioned that high temperatures, strong winds and drought conditions had put half of the country at significant risk for wildfires. Greece's Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis returned to Athens from his holiday to address the situation.

The historic town of Marathon, east of Athens, was among those evacuated on Sunday.

"Everything is burning," Giorgos Tsevas, a resident of nearby Polydendri village, said. "I have 200 olive trees there, but now they are gone."

Links to climate change

Climate experts attribute the current extreme temperatures primarily to human-caused global warming.

The World Health Organization has cautioned about the serious effects of increasing temperatures on European populations, noting that as the continent warms faster than any other, heat-related causes claim an estimated 175,000 lives annually.

Rome has been experiencing a continuing heat wave since the beginning of last month, with temperatures persistently above normal levels.

Cited by Euronews, meteorologist Lorenzo Tedici from Italy's Il Meteo weather forecasting service emphasized the link between fossil fuel use since 1850 and planetary heating.

"These 21st-century anomalous heat waves are unfortunately caused by the anthropogenic greenhouse effect," he said.

Bombing's devastation



A youth looks for salvageable items in the rubble of a building destroyed during Israeli bombardment in Gaza City's Sheikh Radwan neighborhood on Sunday, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas. OMAR AL-QATTAA / AFP

US, China officials to hold high-level talks

The meeting in Shanghai later this week will address economic, financial stability

By MAYZHOU in Houston
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A group of senior Biden administration officials departed on Monday for Shanghai for another round of high-level discussions with their Chinese counterparts to keep the economic and trade relationship between the two countries going, according to US media reports.

They are expected to meet with the People's Bank of China's deputy governor, Xuan Changneng, and other senior Chinese officials, The New York Times and Bloomberg reported.

The American delegation is led by Brent Neiman, the US Treasury Department's assistant secretary for international finance. Officials from the Federal Reserve and the Securities and Exchange Commission also will join the delegation.

The talks are expected to take place on Thursday and Friday through the platform of the US-China Financial Working Group, with discussions planned on maintaining economic and financial stability.

Charles Foster, vice-chairman of the George H.W. Bush Foundation for US-China Relations, welcomed the new talks.

"It should be self-evident to both US and China leadership

that dialogues between the US and China at a high level and under the auspices of the US-China Financial Working Group benefit the two countries with the largest economies in the world," Foster told China Daily.

"Working successfully together in areas where both countries have mutual interests can only be confidence-building measures that may allow the US and China to work together to resolve our differences in other areas where there are significant differences between our two countries," Foster said.

"We intend for this FWG meeting to include conversations on financial stability, issues related to cross-border data, lending and payments, private-sector efforts to advance transition finance, and concrete steps we can take to improve communication in the event of financial stress," Neiman was quoted in media outlets as saying.

He said that the gathering of US and Chinese economic officials builds on President Joe Biden and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's "guidance to establish durable lines of communication as we responsibly manage our relationship" with Beijing.

The FWG was created last year along with an Economic Working Group and directly reports to

Yellen and Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng. Four FWG meetings have been held, and the Shanghai meeting will be the second one in China.

Nicholas Tabor, deputy assistant secretary for international financial markets at the US Treasury, said at a symposium on the international financial system held in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in June that the two countries "have begun to establish new channels for communication on financial policy" in the past year.

The US and China are the two largest economies in the world and together account for some 40 percent of global banking assets. They are the home of 12 of the world's 30 global systemically important banks, Tabor said.

"The domestic financial stability of the US and China has significant implications for global financial stability, and our policies have an outsized effect on how financial risks evolve globally," Tabor said at the symposium.

He said the process of building new communication channels "has let FWG participants begin building the relationships necessary for a mutual understanding of policy, identify areas where cooperation can yield mutual benefits, and provide the space to communicate clearly about areas of disagreement. We have made progress, and there is still much work to be done."

Agencies contributed to this story.

IAEA allays fears over nuclear safety after fire

By REN QI in Moscow
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The United Nations' nuclear watchdog said on Sunday that a fire near the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant had "no impact" on the facility's safety.

"No impact has been reported for nuclear safety," the International Atomic Energy Agency said in a statement. Both Kyiv and Moscow said there had been no rise in radiation levels.

In a later statement, the IAEA said it had requested that its team get "immediate access to the cooling tower to assess the damage."

Russia and Ukraine blamed each other for the blaze at the cooling tower outside the plant's perimeter, and the IAEA chief said the conflict between the two sides continues to imperil the Zaporizhzhia facility, which is one of the 10 biggest nuclear plants in the world.

"These reckless attacks endanger nuclear safety at the plant and increase the risk of a nuclear accident. They must stop now," IAEA Director-General Rafael Mariano Grossi said in a statement, without attributing blame for the attack.

The Russian operator of the plant said Ukraine had caused the fire with a military strike but that the reactors were in cold shutdown.

Yevgeniy Balitsky, head of the plant, said the fire occurred "as a result of shelling of the city of Enerhodar by the Ukrainian Armed Forces."

Vladimir Rogov, a member of the Zaporizhzhia administration, said in a Telegram post on Monday the blaze has been "completely extinguished."

Russian nuclear corporation Rosatom said in a statement on Monday that the Ukrainian army's attack on the plant can be characterized as an act of nuclear terrorism.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova accused Ukraine of "nuclear terror" following the attack and urged the IAEA to respond.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky accused Russia of starting the fire.

He posted a video on Telegram on Sunday showing a large plume of smoke coming out of one of the towers on the plant's territory, saying radiation indicators were normal but blamed Russia for using the nuclear plant "to blackmail Ukraine, and all of Europe and the world."

'Dislodging' enemy

On Monday, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered his army to "dislodge" Ukrainian troops.

"One of the obvious goals of the enemy is to sow discord, strife, intimidate people, destroy the unity and cohesion of Russian society," Putin told a televised meeting with government officials.

Ukrainian forces rammed through the Russian border a week ago and swept across some western parts of Russia's Kursk region. Governor Alexei Smirnov said on Monday the civilian toll has risen to 12 dead and 121 injured.

In the neighboring Belgorod region to the south, Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said evacuations had begun from the Krasnaya Yaruga district because of "enemy activity on the border."

Responding to a question on Ukrainian troops crossing into Russian territory, China's Foreign Ministry said it has noted the development.

"China's position on the Ukraine issue is consistent and clear," a ministry spokesperson said on Monday. "The Chinese side calls on all parties to observe the three principles for de-escalating the situation, namely no expansion of the battlefield, no escalation of fighting and no fueling the flame by any party."

China will continue to maintain communication with the international community to play a constructive role for the political settlement of the crisis, the spokesperson said.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Water shortage threatens food security in Malaysia

By PRIME SARMIENTO
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The heat wave that has scorched Asia over the past few weeks has hit Malaysia hard, with a water shortage threatening national food security and hurting key industries.

Experts said the falling water reserves in the northern part of Peninsular Malaysia have shown the "broader impact" of climate change.

Malaysia's National Disaster Management Agency said that as of Aug 5, raw water reserves at the Muda Dam in Kedah, the Bukit Merah Dam in Perak and the Teluk Bahang Dam in Penang have dropped to a "dangerous level" of 74.4 percent, 16.43 percent and 28.20 percent, respectively.

Likewise, water reserves in five other dams in the states of Kedah, Penang and Perlis have reached a warning level of less than 59.99 percent.

Serina Abdul Rahman, a lecturer at the Department of Southeast Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore, said that while Malaysia goes through cycles of drought and flooding every year, this seasonal occurrence is happening more severely and frequently.

"Climate change has made extreme weather phenomena more frequent and this ranges from high temperatures to more severe storms," Serina said.

Extreme heat for prolonged periods, coupled with lack of rain, dries out the dams and reduces water availability, she said.

Mohamad Faiz Mohd Amin, an associate professor of earth science at the Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, said the current drought in Northern Malaysia is "a stark indication of the broader impacts of climate change."

Mohamad Faiz, who is also an invited researcher at the Water Resources Research Center at Kyoto University in Japan, said data showed that average temperatures have increased and rainfall patterns have become erratic in the past few years. These factors have reduced reservoir water availability, he said.

He cited Kedah and Perlis, which

are experiencing one of the driest periods in decades.

The low water reserves have dried up the paddy fields of Kedah and could potentially slash rice production by as much as 40 percent, he said. This could lead to higher food prices and a shortage of the national staple as Kedah is the country's rice bowl.

Reduced water levels are increasing the concentrations of pollutants and cutting oxygen levels, he said, which can kill fish populations and lead to a decline in biodiversity.

The effect could be felt beyond the food and agricultural sector. Other water-intensive industries may face production cuts and the tourism industry could suffer as natural attractions such as rivers and lakes dry up, Mohamad Faiz said.

The Malaysian Institute of Economic Research has estimated that water shortages could result in a 0.5 percent reduction in GDP growth, he said.

Health issues

Water rationing is being implemented in many areas and residents are experiencing intermittent water supply, which disrupts daily activities and increases the risk of waterborne diseases and other health issues, he said.

Citing data from the Malaysian Health Ministry, Mohamad Faiz said the incidence of waterborne diseases rises by 15 percent during prolonged dry periods as the dry spell usually compromises water quality.

Serina from the National University of Singapore said water shortage "makes life very difficult for citizens no matter where they are."

"The water shortages could happen anywhere, and people need to be more careful with water usage," she said.

Mohamad Faiz said the situation stresses the urgent need for national climate adaptation strategies.

There is a need for comprehensive policies on water management, infrastructure resilience and community preparedness, as well as investment in climate-resilient infrastructure and sustainable practices for long-term adaptation, he said.

Briefly

CHINA
Officials to attend dialogue in Indonesia

Chinese officials went to Jakarta on Monday for the first Senior Officials' Meeting of the China-Indonesia Joint Foreign and Defense Ministerial Dialogue, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson said. As agreed between China and Indonesia, Vice-Foreign Minister Sun Weidong and Zhang Baoqun, deputy director of the Office for International Military Cooperation of the Central Military Commission, would lead the delegation to Jakarta. During the meeting, the two sides are expected to exchange views on China-Indonesia relations and inter-

national and regional issues of mutual interest. Launched last year, the dialogue is the first 2+2 ministerial dialogue set up between China and other countries.

RWANDA
Kagame sworn in as president for 4th term

Rwanda's President-elect Paul Kagame was sworn in on Sunday as president for the fourth term, in a ceremony marked by pomp and color at the Amahoro Stadium in the capital Kigali. The oath was



administered by Chief Justice Faustin Ntezilyayo at an inauguration ceremony attended by thousands of Rwandans, as well as heads of state and government, heads of international and regional organizations, and dozens of senior government officials from across Africa. In his speech, Kagame described the ceremony as a day of renewal and gratitude. "I can only begin by thanking all Rwandans for putting your trust and confidence in me. It is an honor to serve as your president for another term," he said. Kagame won the July 15 election with 99.18 percent of the vote, according to the National Electoral Commission.

UNITED KINGDOM
Migrant arrivals hit new single-day high

More than 700 migrants in small boats crossed the English Channel to Britain on Sunday, the highest number on a single day since Prime Minister Keir Starmer took power vowing to tackle people smugglers. Two migrants who attempted the crossing died, French authorities said earlier, taking the number of people losing their lives on the dangerous sea journey to 25 since the start of the year. Some 703 people arrived on Sunday on 11 boats, the Interior Ministry said.

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BUSINESS

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Improved CIFTIS to showcase new forces

By ZHU WENQIAN
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The 2024 China International Fair for Trade in Services, or CIFTIS, to be held in Beijing from Sept 12 to 16, will showcase the achievements related to new quality productive forces and China's unwavering determination to further expand its opening-up policy, the fair's organizers said.

CIFTIS will be held at both the China National Convention Center (for comprehensive exhibitions) and the Shougang Park (for thematic exhibitions).

It has seen smooth preparations and significant results in inviting investments and exhibitions from different countries and regions. So far, 93 percent of the exhibition area has been completed.

The fair will highlight the integrated development of new quality productive forces with modern service industry, high-end manufacturing industry and modern agriculture.

It will also showcase the latest achievements in digital and intelligent fields, and the green development of China's trade in services, as well as the achievements of China's regional cooperation with the integrated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.

"The fair is set to invite more Fortune 500 companies, specialized and innovative enterprises, and unicorn firms compared with the fairs held in the past few years," said Ai Yinfang, deputy director of the China International Center for Economic and Technical Exchanges of the Ministry of Commerce.

"We will also hold the Beijing Fashion Week during CIFTIS, as we aim to create new consumer and tourism experiences and promote exhibitors to become investors, and thus inject new vitality into economic growth," Ai said.

In all, 72 countries and international organizations will set up offline booths. Among them, 12 countries and international organizations will independently hold offline exhibitions for the first time at CIFTIS, according to data from the organizers.

France will be the country of honor at this year's CIFTIS. It will set up a national pavilion to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of Sino-French diplomatic relations. The design of the French pavilion will incorporate elements such as the Arc de Triomphe, and France plans to hold a group of events related to fashion, sports and other sectors.

Sichuan and Hainan provinces will serve as the provinces of honor and showcase some of the latest technologies related to aerospace, information technology, pharmaceuticals and new policies of the Hainan Free Trade Port, according to the organizers.

In addition, it will become more convenient for foreigners to participate in this year's event, as the organizers have been focused on meeting the practical demand of exhibitors and participating companies by facilitating simpler entry and exit procedures.

"With an invitation letter from CIFTIS, foreign participants can apply for port visas at Beijing Capital International Airport and Beijing Daxing International Airport," said Zhou Ling, deputy director of the Beijing International Trade in Services Center.

"The fair will also set up an entry and exit service desk on-site and provide consultation services on visa replacement and reissuance," Zhou said.



A China-made large offshore oil and gas platform is officially delivered in Qingdao, Shandong province, on Monday. ZHANG JINGANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Nation achieves breakthrough in oil and gas platform construction

By ZHENG XIN
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China's heaviest international offshore oil and gas platform, built by China Offshore Oil Engineering Co Ltd and officially delivered in Qingdao, East China's Shandong province, on Monday, is a breakthrough in the construction technology of large-scale offshore oil and gas equipment in the country, said industry experts.

The platform, weighing 17,000 metric tons, will be transported by a large cargo ship to its installation site 6,400 nautical miles away in the waters off Saudi Arabia at the end of this month, according to the company, which is China's leading offshore contractor and a subsidiary of China National Offshore Oil Corp.

The successful delivery of the project, after 34 months of construction, not only demonstrates China's engineering and technical service capabilities in the offshore oil and gas sector, but also reflects

the deep advancement of China's comprehensive energy cooperation with countries and regions participating in the Belt and Road Initiative across the entire industry chain, said Wang Lining, director of the oil market department of the Economics and Technology Research Institute of China National Petroleum Corp.

It highlights China's ability, as a global manufacturing power-house, to continuously expand into new fields by leveraging its strong and complete industry chain advantages, Wang said.

Wang said China is currently a leader in global energy infrastructure development and the project underscores the country's commitment to fostering international cooperation in the energy sector by providing top-tier engineering solutions and services.

"The project is a testament to China's advanced manufacturing capabilities and its ability to execute large-scale, high-tech projects that meet international

standards," he said.

According to COOEC, the platform, which is mainly responsible for collecting extracted offshore oil and gas and transporting it to land for processing, consists of complex equipment such as large manifolds, pipeline cleaning, chemical treatment and operational control.

The deck area is equivalent to 15 standard basketball courts and the height of the platform is higher than that of a 24-story residential building. The massive structure can collect and transport 24 million tons of crude oil and 7.4 billion cubic meters of gas every year, with platform scale, pipeline types and sizes, and system complexity all setting records compared to similar international platforms, it said.

The platform will be installed in the waters off Saudi Arabia to help the Marjan oilfield increase its production capacity. After the Marjan oilfield is fully operational, the annual crude oil production will reach 24 million tons, it said.

Hebei ups biopharma bragging rights

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang
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Attracted by the innovation ecosystem and supportive industrial policies, a biopharmaceutical scientist from the United States came to Shijiazhuang, capital of North China's Hebei province, to launch a joint venture.

Gai Dahai, chairman of Shijiazhuang NeoGen Biotechnology Co, settled down in the city's Central Innovation Zone — Shijiazhuang International Biomedical Industry Park — in March.

NeoGen's main undertaking is developing an immunotherapy drug for cervical cancer treatment.

"When starting a business here, we just need to focus on research, without worrying about much else," Gai was quoted as saying by Hebei Daily.

"For example, the shared equipment in the park has saved us a lot of fixed asset investment, helping us to enter the field and concentrate limited resources on project advancement," he said.

Shijiazhuang has long been a proven pharmaceutical powerhouse in the country.

Last year, the total operating income of the city's biopharmaceutical sector reached 107.86 billion yuan (\$15.02 billion), exceeding the 100 billion yuan mark for the first time, with a year-on-year growth of 10.6 percent, according to the local government.

To promote the industry's high-quality development, the city launched the Central Innovation Zone in July last year to help meet



An employee works on a pharmaceutical production line in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province. LIANG ZIDONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

the needs of biopharmaceutical firms while reducing their cost of innovation.

The main function of the zone is to optimize and integrate various scientific and technological resources and build a full-chain innovation system from creative ideas, technological research and development, laboratory work, testing, pilot scale-ups, incubation and monetization, said Zhang Licai, deputy director of the city's biomedical industry park management committee.

"We must continue to build the low-cost park with strong support capabilities so as to attract and incubate more innovative biomedical enterprises," Zhang said.

The high-quality development of the biomedical industry in Shijiazhuang is a microcosm of the entire Hebei province, which is encouraging pharmaceutical companies to research and produce more "Chinese medicines" compatible with the genetic and constitutional features of the Chinese people.

To promote the high-quality development of the biopharmaceutical industry across the entire province, Hebei has established a dedicated team, with Ni Yuefeng, secretary of the Hebei Provincial Committee of the Communist Par-

ty of China, and Wang Zhengpu, governor of Hebei, serving as the group's leaders.

Under the group's leadership, the province has formulated a "1+3" policy system to inject strong impetus into the high-quality development of the biopharmaceutical sector, including specific measures to support the development of traditional Chinese medicines.

In addition to Shijiazhuang, Cangzhou in Hebei has a biomedical industry park featuring the coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region in the sector, with dozens of companies having transferred operations from Beijing and Tianjin.

Qinhuangdao, another city in Hebei, is home to the Beidaihe Life Health Industry Innovation Demonstration Zone — the only such national-level zone in North China.

At present, Qinhuangdao is accelerating its cultivation and expansion of its life health industry cluster, encompassing medicine, pharmaceuticals, healthcare, wellness and tourism.

It has already attracted a large number of companies in biomanufacturing, medical care, pharmaceutical equipment and health preservation to gather in the area.

Economists advocate direct support to consumers

Think tanks say \$139b backing via cash or vouchers can help boost demand

By ZHOU LANXU
and OUYANG SHIJI

China's central government should consider additional direct support to consumers worth at least 1 trillion yuan (\$139 billion) — either cash or vouchers — in the rest of the year to effectively address the pressing challenge of lackluster domestic demand, economists from government-backed think tanks said.

The likelihood of the Chinese government directly subsidizing consumers — a policy widely seen in developed economies — has significantly increased, they said, citing that a top-level meeting has decided to shift policy focus more toward boosting consumption.

Such a step, which would necessitate expanding this year's deficit ratio or approving additional special treasury bonds, can play a significant role in reviving the country's consumer sentiment and accelerating the transition of economic drivers in the face of trade tensions, they said.

"Compared with the past, it is true that the probability of the central government providing direct support to low and middle-income groups has increased notably," said Zhang Ming, deputy director of the Institute of Finance & Banking at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

"China is facing a rapid aging of the population and a change in the development trend of the real estate market. Using some new tools at this special stage would be a necessary and natural option," said Zhang, who is also deputy director of the National Institute for Finance & Development.

Zhang suggested that the central government issue consumption vouchers by increasing fiscal deficits or issuing special treasury bonds, with a size of no less than 1 trillion yuan — if the measures are to generate a notable effect.

Previous economic stimulus policies focused on supporting business operations so that improved business conditions can translate into growing household income. Yet, the policy transmission now seems to have met some difficulties, Zhang said.

"At this time, directly backing households can revitalize people's expectations and confidence and bolster household consumption," he said, adding that experiences from developed economies have proven that issuing consumption vouchers to households can bear good results.

The remarks came at a time when policymakers are placing more emphasis on boosting consumption. At a meeting of the Political Bureau of

the Communist Party of China Central Committee on July 30, it was stressed that the focus of economic policies should shift toward bringing real benefits to the people and promoting consumption while vowing to launch a batch of incremental policy measures in a timely manner.

China recently announced that it would allocate about 150 billion yuan in ultra-long-term special treasury bonds to support trade-in deals for consumer goods, such as appliances and autos, deemed by some analysts as a sign that the central government has turned more willing to directly subsidize consumers.

Consumption — which contributed to about 60 percent of China's economic growth in the first half of the year — is assuming even more importance for the world's second-largest economy as its exports could face downward risks amid a rise in protectionist trade policies, economists said.

Among exports, investment and consumption, the traditional "trio" powering China's economic development, spurring consumption will be the key driving force boosting China's economic growth, said Chen Wenling, chief economist at the China Center for International Economic Exchanges.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics on Friday pointed to a strengthening of consumer confidence and demand, as the country's consumer price index, a main gauge of inflation, grew 0.5 percent year-on-year in July, accelerating by 0.3 percentage point from June.

Analysts, however, debated whether the recovery in demand can be sustained as the core CPI growth — it excludes volatile food and energy prices and is seen as a better gauge of the demand-supply relationship — came in at 0.4 percent year-on-year last month, down from 0.6 percent in June.

Li Daokui, director of Tsinghua University's Academic Center for Chinese Economic Practice and Thinking, said it is advisable for the government to issue consumption coupons worth 1 trillion yuan during the weeklong National Day holiday in October this year, which will significantly boost consumer sentiment.

Zhang Yansheng, former secretary-general of the Academic Committee of the National Development and Reform Commission, said cash hand-outs are an immediate and effective way to boost spending. "That will significantly boost consumption and prop up economic growth."

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Briefly

Railway express freight volume up 11%

The China-Europe Railway Express operated 11,403 trains that transported nearly 1.23 million twenty-foot equivalent units of goods in the first seven months, up 12 percent and 11 percent year-on-year, respectively, said China State Railway Group Co Ltd. In July, 1,776 trains were operated, transporting 185,000 TEUs of goods, marking the third consecutive month with more than 1,700 trains being used. Since the beginning of the year, the company has continuously improved the quality and efficiency of China-Europe Railway Express services to ensure the stability and smoothness of global supply and industry chains.

Chinese yuan weakens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, weakened 9 pips to 7.1458 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. The central parity rate of the yuan against the greenback is based on a weighted average of prices offered by market makers before the opening of the interbank market each business day.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS

Accor basking in China's hospitality biz

Hotel chain's senior exec optimistic on country's economic trajectory

By OUYANG SHIJIA
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French hospitality company Accor is seeing increasing opportunities arising from China's flourishing tourism market amid the country's intensified efforts to further tap into the growth potential of domestic demand.

Gary Rosen, CEO of Accor Greater China, said the company remains optimistic about the country's economic trajectory and the potential it holds for its business operations. Rosen hailed China's stepped-up efforts to further prop up the economy and boost demand, particularly in the travel and tourism sector, which he believes remains resilient despite several headwinds and external uncertainties.

"The governments, both centrally and on the provincial level, are equally looking at multiple measures to stimulate the economy and demand," Rosen told China Daily in a recent exclusive interview.

"Looking at the travel industry, it's pretty resilient. We're fortunate that, one of the things that people don't necessarily sacrifice is making trips."

He said travel demand — both domestic and international — remains robust, positioning the industry well for future growth.

Rosen said the growing preference for outbound travel among Chinese tourists has been attributed to higher disposable incomes among those traveling abroad, while domestic travelers — especially the younger generation — are increasingly exploring smaller cities where travel costs are lower.

"I always remain optimistic about the Chinese market and especially about the Chinese traveler, who is one of the most sophisticated and educated in the world," Rosen said, adding that the ongoing evolution in travel preferences, particularly among the younger generation, presents new opportunities for growth and innovation in the industry.

Rosen reiterated that China remains a growth engine for Accor,



Gary Rosen

particularly in terms of the number of hotels and rooms in its portfolio. In the second quarter, Accor's hotel room revenue of its Premium, Midscale and Economy divisions in China accounted for 19 percent of revenue in Accor's Middle East, Africa and Asia Pacific.

"The next China is still China. There is no other China," he noted. "Although China's GDP (growth) for the last quarter didn't necessarily meet expectations, the reality is that it's still a heck of a lot higher than most GDPs around the world. The government is making a lot of efforts to address the challenges within the economy."

Accor said it is committed to integrating environmental, social and governance principles into its operations in China, aligning with China's pursuit of fostering green, sustainable and high-quality growth for the long run.

The company has been proactive in implementing stringent ESG measures across its hotels, including the elimination of all single-use wet amenities and dry amenities and the installation of systems to measure carbon output through energy.

For Rosen, Accor's commitment to ESG is seen as a critical component of its future success in China. He said the company is also focused on leveraging digital technology to enhance its service offerings and better cater to the evolving needs of Chinese consumers. Accor has developed a China-driven digital ecosystem and IT system to improve the guest experience and drive customer loyalty.

Looking ahead, Accor remains committed to expanding its presence in China, driven by strong partnerships.

"Last year, as an example, we signed about 150 new hotels that we added to our pipeline," he added. "I was optimistic that we would be signing on those same levels this year and we're tracking to be able to do that."



Technicians check equipment at a computing center in Guiyang, Guizhou province, in June. LIU XU / XINHUA

AI-led CO2 emissions affecting tech firms' green goals

By LIU YUKUN
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Big technology companies are facing major challenges including soaring energy demand and higher carbon emissions on the back of a rapid and widespread adoption of artificial intelligence.

Google's latest environmental report revealed a 48 percent surge in the US tech giant's emissions over the past five years, largely driven by its advancements in AI despite its ambitious green goals. Similar challenges are confronting other tech giants such as Microsoft and Amazon, as they struggle to balance the high energy consumption of AI with their low-carbon objectives.

AI's higher energy consumption has long been an area of concern.

Experts said AI requires vast amounts of energy, not only to power data centers for computing and operations but also for the production and transportation of large quantities of chips, servers and related equipment, all of which contribute significantly to carbon emissions.

"Until clean energy becomes the primary power source, large-scale AI deployment will inevitably lead to an increase in companies' short-term carbon emissions."

Zhou Wenwen, an expert committee member of the New-Type Power System Innovation Alliance

China's rapidly growing AI and other emerging industries are also grappling with significant energy consumption challenges.

In June, a green computing power index white paper released by energy group Envision, green data solution provider Hoyinn and the China Academy of Information

and Communications Technology projected that China's data center energy consumption will exceed 400 billion kilowatt-hours by 2030.

Without a substantial increase in renewable energy usage, carbon emissions from these data centers could surpass 200 million metric tons by 2030.

"Until clean energy becomes the primary power source, large-scale AI deployment will inevitably lead to an increase in companies' short-term carbon emissions — a cost that early adopters of AI technology must be prepared to bear," said Zhou Wenwen, an expert committee member of the New-Type Power System Innovation Alliance.

In July, the National Development and Reform Commission, along with other departments, issued a special action plan for green and low-carbon development of data centers.

The plan sets targets for 2025, including a more rational national data center layout, reducing power usage effectiveness (PUE) to below 1.5, and a 10 percent

annual growth in renewable energy utilization.

PUE is the ratio of the total amount of energy used by a computer data center facility to the energy delivered to computing equipment.

In recent years, major tech companies in China have taken proactive steps to promote green computing power, often venturing into the energy sector to secure stable and clean energy supplies.

Baidu has increased its procurement of renewable electricity and built its own renewable energy plants. Alibaba has consistently engaged in green power trading, constructed distributed photovoltaic systems, and signed long-term clean power purchase agreements.

Last year, Tencent's Tianjin high-tech cloud data center's distributed new energy microgrid project was officially connected to the grid, marking its fifth renewable energy project. It has a total installed capacity of 10.54 megawatts, and is aiming at further improving the data center's energy efficiency.

Power point



Employees (left, right) of State Grid Quzhou Electric Power Co address queries from a tea grower on the use of power facilities supporting Huangcha tea garden in Luojia town in Longyou county in Zhejiang province last week. MAO XIAOWEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

By ZHUANG QIANG and PANG BO

In Cangnan county under the prefecture-level city of Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, Wang Haipeng was jubilant about his company's booming business — finishing 400,000 orders related to the Paris Olympic Games.

Inside Jinxiang Badge Factory, newly produced badges were being packed and ready to be sent to the Paris Games.

Wang, assistant to the chairman of the factory in the town of Jinxiang, said they received the orders as early as the second half of last year, involving 12 types of products covering badges, key chains and refrigerator magnets, which have been sent to the Games on a consistent basis ever since.

Established in 1985, the factory has designed and produced various types of badges for national as well as foreign military and political organizations for decades with its technology.

Wang said they have also designed and made commemorative and mascot badges for key events such as the 1990 Asian Games, the return of Hong Kong and Macao to China, the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and the 2022 Hangzhou Asian Games.

During the 2022 Asian Games, more than 60 percent of badges came from Jinxiang Badge Factory, he said.

As a commemorative badge has to go through nearly 20 processes, including electroplating, painting and plastic application, and every process is reliant on stable electricity supply, the plant has to have a

trustworthy power source, Wang said.

"The production capacity of our factory has always been high, and the requirements for voltage stability in the badge production process are also very high," he said.

With the continuous innovation of production technology, industrial upgrading and transformation — and the steady expansion of production scale — the power transformer at the factory has expanded from the original 100 kilovolt-amperes to 315 KVA and now to 500 KVA, he said.

Miao Xiaojun with the Jinxiang Power Supply Substation under Cangnan County Power Supply Co of the State Grid said that as soon as State Grid Wenzhou Power Supply Co learned of the factory's orders for the Paris Games, it immediately designated special

employees to contact the plant.

He said the power workers took a three-pronged approach to aid the factory in its booming business, including a "green channel" to expand its power capacity, a one-to-one services provision through a WeChat service group to provide round-the-clock technical consultation, and on-site visits to check consumption at power facilities.

"Our sincere thanks to the power supplier, as it has always provided us with reliable electricity," said Wang.

Miao said they also felt very honored to do their part with their achievement, as ensuring the smooth production of badges is equivalent to making a power contribution to the Olympic Games.

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New checkpoints to boost exchanges between mainland, HK

By CHAI HUA
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Shenzhen in South China's Guangdong province is doubling down on efforts to smoothen the flow of people and cargo to and from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region by building and upgrading checkpoints.

Two new checkpoints in the pipeline are located in the Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industry Cooperation Zone and the Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Cooperation Zone.

Though Qianhai, designed by the State Council, or China's Cabinet, in 2010, is a 20-minute drive away

from the Shenzhen Bay checkpoint, a dedicated Customs station is expected to meet the rising demand for business exchanges, fueled by 9,000 companies and 10,000 residents attracted to the zone from the SAR.

A possible location of the new checkpoint is at the under-construction Qianhai Comprehensive Transport Hub — a building complex encompassing metros, buses and intercity railways. In addition, the governments of Shenzhen and the SAR are jointly studying a new rail link between Qianhai and the Northern Metropolis in Hong Kong, converging at the checkpoint.

In the Hetao zone, the two existing checkpoints already handle one of the largest cross-border passen-

ger and vehicle traffic flows between the two cities. However, an adviser believes the new port should focus on scientific and technology research exchanges.

Ouyang Huiyu, a member of the Shenzhen Municipal Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, has proposed to explore the possibilities of electronic visa and contactless clearance by leveraging the zone's unique advantages.

According to the development plan for Shenzhen Park of the Hetao zone issued by the State Council last year, the central government supports it to promote international scientific and technological innovation and build a first-class scientific and technological platform with Hong Kong.

So far, more than 2,000 people working in the area commute between Shenzhen and Hong Kong.

Liu Weixiang, director of the Office of Port Entry and Exit of the Shenzhen Municipal People's Government, underlined the importance of both Qianhai and Hetao checkpoints for supporting the development of the two pivotal collaboration projects.

They are also part of the city's overall strategy of upgrading old checkpoints and establishing new ones, he said.

Liu said that the old Huanggang Port and Sha Tau Kok Port are set to be rebuilt, getting rid of their cargo inspection functions and enhancing traveler inspection capabilities.

"The nation's first sea-air comprehensive port hub will be inserted into the Shekou Port with cross-border helicopter entry and exit services," he said.

The upgrade plan is projected to ease pressure from swelling travel demand between Shenzhen and Hong Kong. "Though Shenzhen has 16 first-class ports, the most in the country, they also serve the largest volume of cross-border traffic," he pointed out.

As of Aug 4, the number of inbound and outbound trips at Shenzhen ports this year exceeded 134 million, according to the office of Shenzhen Port. The day of Aug 10 witnessed record daily passenger volume since the full recovery of cross-border transportation.

The nation's first sea-air comprehensive port hub will be inserted into the Shekou Port with cross-border helicopter entry and exit services."

Liu Weixiang, director of the Office of Port Entry and Exit of the Shenzhen Municipal People's Government

Liu said travelers could check the real-time passenger flow at Shenzhen's land ports through the "iPort" WeChat mini-program, which updates every three seconds.

BUSINESSFOCUS

Editor's Note: These interviews with CEOs of major foreign firms gauge their outlook for the Chinese economy, their operations in China and their business plans for 2024 and beyond, in the wake of the momentous resolution adopted at the third plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee in mid-July.

Plenum reinforces MNCs' optimism on China



Elie Luskin
Managing Director of Mobilye China



Hui Chen
President of IKEA Supply Area East Asia



Xie Xue
President of Vale China



Ginger Cheng
CEO of DBS China

Q1 The third plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee in mid-July has rolled out the reform and opening-up roadmap for the Chinese economy in the coming years. What are your major takeaways from the plenum? What are the biggest opportunities you spot in China's new measures to deepen reform and further open up its economy? How do you plan to capitalize on these opportunities in your specific industry?

LUSKIN: The plenum's focus on international cooperation is encouraging for multinational corporations like Mobilye. As a leader in Advanced Driver Assistance Systems and autonomous driving technologies, Mobilye is particularly excited about the potential to contribute to the continuous evolution and development of China's automotive industry. The new measures signify a commitment to integrating global best practices and fostering innovation, which aligns perfectly with Mobilye's long-term mission and strategic focus. To capitalize on these opportunities, Mobilye will continue to enhance its deep collaboration with leading Chinese OEMs, China-based foreign joint ventures, tier-1 suppliers and industry partners across the supply chain. This collaboration ensures that Mobilye's safe, scalable, high-performance and cost-efficient solutions eventually benefit millions of Chinese consumers through deployment across a wider variety of car models.

CHEN: The plenum emphasized the crucial role of innovation in economic growth and proposed significant measures to increase investment in areas such as technological innovation and industrial upgrading. In the future, we will continue to optimize our supply chain through technological advancements, material innovation, and other initiatives, aiming to achieve greater success in the Chinese market.

The plenum underscored the importance of further deepening reforms and improving high-level systems and mechanisms for opening-up. China's open and welcoming attitude toward foreign investment will bring more business opportunities to various industries. We will continue to join hands with Chinese partners to explore potential business opportunities, contribute to the vigorous development of China's imports and exports, and achieve win-win outcomes.

XIE: The third plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Committee is an important window to further understand China's high-quality development and high-standard opening-up. The key message of the plenum is further deepening reform comprehensively to advance Chinese modernization, and it was clearly stated that: "Opening-up is a defining feature of Chinese modernization. We must remain committed to the basic State policy of opening to the outside world and continue to promote reform through opening-up." This is very encouraging for foreign companies like us doing business in China, especially for companies like Vale whose largest market lies in China.

In addition, we also see great opportunities in the reform measures of improving the institutions and mechanisms for modernizing infrastructure and for advancing new urbanization, as these measures will bring new demand for iron and steel, hence bringing new demand for iron ore.

CHENG: Reform and opening-up remained the key themes of the session. Key areas under close watch include new strategic industries, factor market reform, aging population, fiscal reform, capital and financial market reform, and property market reform. Since setting up operations in China 30 years ago, DBS Bank has benefited greatly from the opening-up policy of China's financial market, and DBS China is well positioned to participate deeply in the development of China's financial market, coordinating the resources and network of DBS Group in the global region to provide differentiated financial support for the development of China's new quality productive forces.

Q2 In your view, how will the reform and opening-up measures rolled out at the plenum help strengthen the Chinese economy and bolster its prospects of achieving modernization? Do you think China's new reform and opening-up blueprint will make fresh contributions to the global economy? If yes, how?

LUSKIN: China's new reform and opening-up blueprint is poised to make substantial contributions to the global economy. By expanding market access and promoting international collaboration, China will create new opportunities for both domestic and foreign players. This inclusive approach is expected to drive growth across various industries, including the autonomous driving sector, especially given that electric vehicles are among the "new three" of China's exports.

We at Mobilye believe these reforms will enhance China's ability to innovate, empowering Chinese automakers to lead in technological advancements on a global scale and contribute significantly to the global economy. Mobilye is excited to be part of this transformative journey.

CHEN: The recent plenum emphasized advancing high-level technological self-reliance and strength, accelerating the establishment of institutional mechanisms to promote the development of the digital economy, and improving the policy system to promote the industrialization of digital industries and the digitalization of industries.

One of the advantages of working closely with our Chinese partners is the remarkable innovation, speed, knowledge, experience and competence in digitalization. For instance, in manufacturing — where automation is increasingly essential — Chinese industry leaders stand out for their rapid adoption and high levels of automation in production. This is crucial for IKEA as it helps improve efficiency and lower costs.

China, as the world's second-largest economy and the largest manufacturing hub, has unique advantages due to its large population base, economic scale and robust industrial foundation. China's production capacity is designed not only to serve its domestic market, but also to meet global demand. This means any innovation in China benefits not only the country itself, but also the broader global economy.

XIE: The new reform and opening-up blueprint will definitely contribute to the global economy, as it has injected fresh growth momentum into the economy. According to an analysis made by the International Monetary Fund, a 1 percentage point increase in GDP growth in China leads to a 0.3 percentage point increase in growth in other Asian economies, on average.

It is noteworthy that in the country's new blueprint, China promises to unilaterally open its doors wider to the world's least developed countries. This once again demonstrates China's responsibility and commitment as the world's second-largest economy, which is very admirable and will definitely benefit the global economy.

We believe that with a solid foundation for industrial development and growing domestic demand, China will continue to be an important engine of global growth.

CHENG: Taking a long-term view, the Chinese government is trying to restructure and remodel the Chinese economy for high-quality, sustainable growth. For instance, one important discussion topic of the third plenum was about advancing the cultivation of "new strategic industries". According to International Data Corp, China's AI-related hardware, software and services markets are expected to grow by 15.1 percent, 32 percent and 28.5 percent from 2021 to 2026, respectively. Strategic emerging sectors like these are vital for powering China's innovation-driven growth.

China is a major driver of growth in Asia and the world. We will continue to support China's real economy and its high-quality growth. We will beef up our support for China's inbound and outbound flows and capitalize on existing and emerging opportunities.

Q3 How do you view China's new reform initiatives aimed at fostering new quality productive forces, such as those to encourage industrial upgrade and technological innovation? Do you see these as opportunities or challenges for foreign enterprises, and why?

LUSKIN: Mobilye's commitment to increasing safety and advancing autonomous driving technology aligns seamlessly with the emphasis on high-quality development. We view these initiatives as opportunities to leverage our expertise and collaborate with local Chinese partners. Through these efforts, Mobilye aims to enhance our footprint in China and capitalize on long-term growth prospects, while contributing to the broader goals of industrial upgrade and technological innovation in the country. Our proven track record globally and enduring success uniquely position us to support Chinese automakers as they embrace technological advancements and seek to expand their international presence.

CHEN: These initiatives are of great significance to the sustainable development of foreign enterprises, especially in the manufacturing sector. I personally believe that there are more opportunities than challenges. Technological innovation and industrial upgrading are crucial for supply chains to achieve optimization and sustainable development. These initiatives will likely bring new business needs and opportunities to the Chinese market, aiding foreign companies in expanding their business in China.

Additionally, technological and industrial advancements will create demand for talent and promote international and inter-industry talent exchanges. This will stimulate new inspirations and creativity, helping China to foster new quality productive forces and strengthen its talent pool.

XIE: We see great opportunities in China's new reform initiatives aimed at fostering new quality productive forces. On the one hand, enterprises in traditional industries will be encouraged to apply digital, intelligent and green technologies to transform and upgrade these sectors.

On the other, we are excited to see that the plenum requests facilitating revolutionary breakthroughs in technology and pursuing innovation in key generic technologies, cutting-edge technologies, modern engineering technologies and disruptive technologies. China is already the world's second-largest spender on research and development and has around 400,000 high-tech enterprises. We believe the reform measure will make China a global leader in new technology innovation. To leverage China's innovation strength, we have been promoting our corporate venture capital initiative Vale Ventures in China. We are looking forward to meeting innovative startups with disruptive technologies in China and establishing partnerships with them.

CHENG: Over the years, China's economic model has been shifting from one that is planned to one that is market-driven. Looking ahead, it is now transitioning from a model that was dependent on export-oriented, investment-driven growth to one that is powered by domestic consumption and innovation.

State-led investment is playing a vital role in supporting the economy. Investment into strategic sectors such as EVs, advanced manufacturing, tech hardware and AI will help offset the shortfall in property investment.

Fiscal stimulus through infrastructure investment will offset the shortfall of property investment. With the stable and improving performance of the Chinese economy, demand for using renminbi as a currency for international trade settlement and financing is expected to gradually increase.

Q4 While China is expanding opening-up, some are concerned that geopolitical tensions, rising protectionism and global supply chain adjustments may weaken China's attractiveness to foreign companies. What's your take? How important will China be for your global business in the coming decade? What more opening-up measures can China take to offset the impact of the complex external environment?

LUSKIN: China represents a crucial market in Mobilye's global growth strategy moving forward. With its substantial market size, vitality and potential — alongside a strong focus on innovation and quality — China offers immense opportunities. More importantly, China is leading the world in tech-forward automotive advancements, making it an attractive market with consumers eager for the latest innovations. Mobilye's commitment to the Chinese market is unwavering and long-term. We will continue to collaborate closely with our Chinese partners, better serve our China-based customers and foster innovation and growth in the automotive sector on both local and global scales.

CHEN: We have our own presence with purchasing and logistics and a lot of co-workers in China developing the supply chain for the past 30 years. IKEA has a long history and background in China. It has been and will continue to be very strategically important for IKEA.

We see a lot of capabilities that we need, but future demand is also coming from China. Today, we really take pride in having a complete value chain in China, which is a unique quality. Today, we are also working with approximately 460 suppliers in China with whom we have a very long relationship. About 25 percent of what IKEA sells globally comes from China.

XIE: China is of significant importance to Vale. It has been our largest market since 2006 and destination of more than 50 percent of our iron ore products since 2014. Last year, it accounted for more than 60 percent of our total iron ore sales and more than 50 percent of our total net operating revenue.

China is also our critical supplier of products and services in mining, infrastructure and logistics areas. We are very proud to have also established close partnerships with many leading Chinese suppliers, which allows us to leverage the scale and technology that China's manufacturing industry has developed over the past decades. The development that Vale has achieved is inseparable from China, and our future development will also need China.

CHENG: With China's steady economic growth, the country remains a popular destination for foreign investment, especially in technological innovation, energy transition, pharmaceuticals and consumer goods. The way we look at the determinants of long-term growth potential is through the lens of innovation. When we look at the kind of investments China is making in educating its population and providing it with skills for the next round of technological waves, as well as the output by Chinese scientists, we are encouraged regarding the long-term potential of China.

China is a key strategic market for DBS, and we closely monitor the economic growth of the country. China is not just about the domestic market and local opportunities. There is also the cross-border spillover where we do a lot of business with Chinese companies internationally.

Q5 The plenary session has stressed that reform tasks laid out at the meeting shall be completed by the time the People's Republic of China celebrates its 80th anniversary in 2029. How do you expect the new reform and opening-up measures to transform the Chinese economy in the coming five years? What strategies will your company adopt to align with the expected transformation? Looking ahead, in the second half of 2024, what are your expectations for the Chinese economy? How do you think your company will fare in this evolving landscape?

LUSKIN: China's new reform and opening-up measures are expected to enhance technological innovations and strengthen the overall business landscape, making China an even more attractive destination for advanced technological investment despite the current intertwined international situation. Looking ahead, we remain optimistic about China's long-term growth and resilience. We anticipate that the evolving landscape will offer ample opportunities for Mobilye to strengthen our partnerships and drive innovation.

CHEN: In the coming five years, we anticipate that the new reform and opening-up measures will significantly transform the Chinese economy. We believe that "Made in China" and "Intelligent Manufacturing in China" will be further strengthened, reinforcing the country's unique manufacturing advantages with a robust and comprehensive industrial chain.

For the second half of 2024, we anticipate sustained growth momentum for the Chinese economy. We will maintain strategic agility, enhance internal innovation and foster external collaboration to address evolving market trends. We believe our commitment to innovation and collaboration will position us well in this dynamic landscape.

Looking ahead, IKEA will continue to leverage its long-term presence in China to contribute to and benefit from the country's economic development.

XIE: In the first half of 2024, China's GDP expanded by 5 percent, which is on track to hit its full-year economic growth target. In mid-July, the International Monetary Fund raised China's economic outlook to 5 percent, which is 0.4 percentage point higher than its previous forecast. This reflects the resilience and dynamism of the Chinese economy in a complex external environment. Despite the temporary headwinds and short-term volatilities, we see long-term development potential in the Chinese economy.

CHENG: The plenary session emphasized reform in the capital and financial markets. In addition to improving connectivity with foreign capital markets, regulators will unify existing market access and settlement systems. The Chinese government is exploring and establishing inclusive institutional arrangements compatible with a multilevel custody system. This will enable overseas institutional investors to trust qualified local custodians for bond custody directly, or through their global custodians in the future.

DBS raised its growth forecast for China this year to 5 percent from 4.5 percent previously. We are very optimistic about the development prospects of the Chinese economy, especially considering that foreign trade picked up in the first quarter and import and export volume hit a record high, which will inject a strong impetus into the steady growth of the economy throughout the year.

COMMENT

Editorials

Imperative that coolheadedness prevails in the Middle East

The new president of Iran, Masoud Pezeshkian, campaigned on promises to improve ties with the West and adopt a pragmatic foreign policy. He pledged to try to revive the 2015 nuclear deal, and has just appointed Abbas Araghchi, a pragmatic diplomat instrumental to the 2015 agreement, as foreign minister. His election and apparently reconciliatory moves have aroused hopes for potentially constructive interactions between Teheran and the West. Especially as all of the key stakeholders, including Israel and the United States, seemed to recognize that an escalation of the hostilities in the Middle East would not be in their interest.

The Joe Biden administration appeared bent on brokering a cease-fire and hostage exchange deal between Israel and the Hamas to give a boost to the Democratic Party ahead of November's elections in the US.

In spite of its determination to put an end to security threats from militant groups such as the Hamas and Hezbollah, Israel seemingly appreciated the folly of an all-out war where it would have to fight simultaneously on multiple fronts. Iran, too, has had to consider the consequences of getting dragged into a war that could prove to be an existential struggle.

Should all the parties come to terms with the reality that they have more to lose than gain, should they be rational in their calculations and judgments of the situation, they will be able to avoid making a disastrous misjudgment and consequent misstep. Yet that demands self-discipline in the face of less temperate domestic sentiment in each of the three countries.

The recent assassination of Hamas' political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Teheran has added unexpected complexities to the picture in the Middle East. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told Iran's acting foreign minister in a phone conversation on Sunday that the killing of Haniyeh had "directly undermined the Gaza cease-fire negotiation process and undermined regional peace and stability".

If there had been a ray of hope for even a temporary cease-fire and hostage exchange for Gaza, and perhaps de-escalation of broader tensions and hostilities, it might have all but disappeared with the killing of Haniyeh. The reported change in Israel's assessment of the situation is an indication of the severity of the development and the fluidity of the situation. Until late last week, the Israeli intelligence community had assumed Teheran had given up its initial intention to launch an imminent large-scale attack against Israel. On Sunday, however, multiple media reports claimed they had reversed that judgment, concluding instead a major Iranian attack could be launched within days. That would be this week, possibly before the cease-fire-hostage deal talks planned for Thursday.

Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant said on Sunday that Iran and Hezbollah "are threatening to harm us in a way they haven't done in the past", and Israel will operate in ways it has never operated before. The US, on its part, has significantly upgraded its military deployment and combat preparedness in the region in response to the changed dynamics. Many major airlines have canceled or delayed flights to Israel and other countries in the region.

It remains a matter of speculation whether and how the situation will unfold. Hopefully all the parties involved will show reason and exercise restraint, so that the situation does not spiral out of control and end up hurting all. The Iranian mission to the United Nations said in a statement on Friday their response will be timed and conducted in a manner not to the detriment of a potential cease-fire. We can only hope that will be the case.

What is pressingly needed now, as Wang said, is for the international community to join forces and urge all parties to earnestly implement relevant UN Security Council resolutions, to create conditions for the early realization of a comprehensive and permanent cease-fire in Gaza, so as to calm the immediate situation and open the door for communication that can lead to lasting peace and stability in the region.

Olympics springboard for national health

The central authorities sent a congratulatory message to the country's Olympic delegation on Sunday for their accomplishments and sportsmanship at the Paris Olympic Games. China finished second in the overall medal table at the Games, with 40 gold, 27 silver and 24 bronze medals, marking the country's best performance at an overseas Olympic Games.

Apart from commending their outstanding athletic performances and achievements in the message, the central authorities also urged relevant departments to take more concrete actions to promote the vigorous development of mass and youth sports.

It is the fast development of sports at the grassroots level that has laid a solid foundation for the Chinese athletes' dazzling performances on the world stage. More and more people, especially youth, participate in sports, which helps expand the talent pool for competitive sports. Also, a modern sports industry system has been formed that provides support for scientific training and the development of sports.

There were 4.59 million sports venues in China last year, and the area of public sports venues exceeded 4 billion square meters for the first time, reaching 4.07 billion sq m. Thanks to that, about 38.5 percent of the population regularly participate in physical exercise. The country has set the goal of raising that level to above 45 percent by 2035.

But although the per capita area of public sports venues in China, 2.89 sq m, last year was up 10 percent from 2022, it lags far behind that of developed countries — 16 sq m in the United States and 19 sq m in Japan. Not to mention that most of the public sports venues run by schools and government institutions, which account for more than 60 percent of the national total, are not open to the public even during the holidays. If these sports venues are taken into account, there is a 15-minute sports venue circle for most neighborhoods in Chinese cities, an objective the government is striving to realize, but the circle exists only on paper.

The lack of sports venues has thus turned out to be a primary bottleneck restricting further development of mass sports in the country. It is necessary to increase the supply of public sports venues and facilities, not only by building new ones but also by making full use of the sports facilities and resources that already exist.

Since the maintenance of even the idle public sports venues is a heavy burden on the government budget, it does not make sense to continue to allow that to happen while the people are in a dire need of sports venues. The top three public sports venues are basketball courts, fitness trails and table tennis courts, accounting for 70 percent of the total number of sports venues. While the number of venues and facilities for soccer, swimming, tennis and ice and snow sports, which are becoming increasingly popular among young people, is still significantly small.

Apart from that, the government should improve the public fitness guidance services, implement a national physical fitness monitoring system, encourage sports stars and other sports professionals to participate in fitness science activities, and promote the research and popularization of scientific fitness knowledge and methods.

All these will be conducive to promoting the high-quality development of the overall sports industry, which will in turn stimulate sports consumption.

Thanks to the inspiring performances of Chinese athletes, the Paris Olympics should not only "ignite the patriotism of Chinese people both at home and abroad, uplift the national spirit, and unite the people towards progress", as the central authorities' congratulatory message reads, but also prompt relevant departments to work together to create more space and opportunities, and improve relevant public services and guidance for the people to do exercise, and make the national fitness campaign a success.

Song Chen



Opinion Line

Country's green and low-carbon development contribution to world

On Sunday, the central authorities issued a guideline document on accelerating the comprehensive green transformation of development. According to the document, by 2030, China should have made positive progress in realizing the green transformation in key areas, enhanced the coordination to reduce pollution and carbon emissions, and improved the efficiency with which major resources are used.

Policies and standards to support green development should have been optimized, and remarkable results achieved in the comprehensive green transformation of economic and social development. By 2035, a green, low-carbon and circular economic system should be in place, with green modes of production formed, and significant progress made in synergies to reduce pollution and carbon emissions. At the same time, the country's utilization efficiency of major resources should have reached

an internationally advanced level, and its economic and social development should be on a green and low-carbon track, with carbon emissions being on a steady decline after peaking.

To facilitate the advancement of these goals, the document rolls out a series of measures and requirements, including optimizing the development pattern of China's territorial space, improving the mechanism for ecological and environmental protection to forge green development highlands, accelerating green and low-carbon transformation of industries, energy, transportation, urban and rural construction, and consumption. The country will give full play to the role of scientific and technological innovation in this process and strengthen applied basic research and accelerate research and development of key technologies. Green and low-carbon development

remains a leading direction of scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation in today's world, and the realization of the green economy has become an irreversible development trend. It has also remained a major source of China's high-quality development and international competitiveness.

China has so far built the world's largest, most complete and competitive clean energy industry chain, with its solar power and wind power installed capacity reaching more than 1.1 billion kilowatts, new energy vehicle production and sales ranking first in the world for nine consecutive years, and the proportion of new green buildings in urban areas accounting for more than 90 percent of new buildings. As the world's second largest economy, China's efforts will be a great contribution to global sustainable development.

— WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

US must come clean before Games in LA

Although the Paris Olympics concluded on Sunday, the struggle to uphold the spirit of sports continues, with doping allegations made against some athletes.

More than one US athlete who participated in this year's Olympic Games had tested positive for doping before the games began. However, the US delegation not only failed to penalize them, but instead came up with creative excuses to let them compete.

For example, US swimmer Calista Liu tested positive for dorzolamide during a drug test in May. Although it is used in the form of eye drops for treating glaucoma, it can also be used as a masking agent to hide the use of steroids. However, the US Anti-Doping Agency determined just

before the start of the Olympics that there had been no violation, saying Liu's father used the eye drops and she had absorbed it by using the same pillow.

US swimmer Erriyon Knighton had tested positive for a metabolite of trenbolone during an out-of-competition drug test in March, but an arbiter ruled that his positive test was "more likely than not caused by consuming" contaminated meat, clearing him for the Olympics.

Russian hackers who broke into the database of the World Anti-Doping Agency have alleged that they found over 70 percent of members of the US swimming team and over 74 percent of the members from the track and field team had been taking certain drugs for "illnesses" dur-

ing the 2016 Rio Olympics.

The US anti-doping law claims jurisdiction over doping issues worldwide and various international events, yet it fails to regulate domestic leagues like the National Basketball Academy and the National Football League.

For a few gold medals, the US tries to manipulate the process. Even the US Department of Justice and FBI have put pressure on international sports organizations in this regard. For the world to regain confidence in US sports before the next Olympics in Los Angeles, the US first has a lot to explain about certain incidents during this year's Olympics.

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

What They Say

Social media prime factor in UK riots

A violent riot sparked by a knife attack at a children's dance workshop in Southport, England, on July 29 has recently spread to many parts of the United Kingdom. Two children were killed and nine injured, six critically, in the ferocious knife attack. Two adults are also in a critical condition after being stabbed as they tried to protect the children, Merseyside police said.

After the incident, local police did not reveal the name of the murderer in accordance with the law because he was under 18 years old. Subsequently, various rumors began to circulate on the internet, suggesting that the murderer was a refugee who arrived in the UK last year to seek asylum.

The British court soon deprived the murderer of anonymity protection, and the police announced his real name, emphasizing that his birthplace was Cardiff. Despite the clarification by the British authorities, rumors continued to circulate on the internet.

Local public opinion believes that the continued

fermentation of the riots has been due to extreme right-wing forces using social media to spread rumors and fuel the flames of unrest. The riots also reflect some deep-seated problems such as the divisions in British society, the immigration crisis, and the difficulty of supervising transnational social media platforms.

False information has been wantonly spread on social media by the extreme right-wing forces to provoke anger and fuel the rioting, and related algorithms have contributed to the "viral spread" of false information. Data show that 86 percent of respondents believe that social media is an important driving force behind the riots.

After the knife attack, rumors about the identity of the perpetrator were forwarded by millions of people on major social media platforms in the form of pictures, texts, videos, etc. Some accounts also used exaggeration and mixed-cut videos to gain traffic and create chaos. Some well-known internet figures have become promoters of the riots.

According to the British police, many protests that turned into violent con-

licts were organized by far-right groups on the internet. They used rhetoric such as "Save Our Children" to repeatedly hype up immigration topics and incite public sentiment. As such, social media platforms amplified far-right voices and stimulated public sentiment, exacerbating the severity of the incident.

Yet illegal immigration is indeed a problem for the UK. Some British people blame immigrants for social problems such as insufficient medical resources and the declining quality of public services.

And the government's trust crisis, and the difficulty of supervising transnational social media platforms have contributed to the severity of the rioting. Many people believe that it is difficult for the British government to put national needs above party interests because politicians do not really care about the demands of the people.

Meanwhile, some social media platforms owned by foreign companies have neglected to review and manage the accounts of far-right activists, resulting in the infectious spread of misinformation and hate speech.

— XINHUA NEWS AGENCY

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COMMENT

Li Xiaohua

Reform to boost high-quality development

The third plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China last month resolved to further comprehensively deepen reform to advance Chinese modernization, marking a pivotal moment in the country's economic reform, and charting the course of the country's future development and strategic direction.

The third plenary session's resolution, which outlined reform objectives to be fully achieved by 2029, in time for the People's Republic of China's 80th anniversary, said the country will reinforce the socialist market economy. And the multiple references to "structural reform" and "high-standard socialist market economy" in the resolution indicate the country remains committed to traveling this path. In particular, the resolution asserts that market-oriented reforms will continue unabated, because it is necessary for maintaining the high-quality development momentum and ensuring China's economy develops in line with its modernization goals.

The resolution underscores the fundamental role of a high-standard socialist market economy in achieving Chinese modernization. China's transition from a centrally planned economy to a dynamic socialist market economy has helped the country pursue high-quality development, invigorated market forces, and optimized the use of global resources, including capital and talents, and technologies, and allowed the market to play a decisive role in resource allocation.

The world is undergoing unprecedented changes thanks partly to a new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation. Researchers are achieving more breakthroughs in cutting-edge technologies and disruptive innovations are emerging regularly, giving rise to new industries, new development models and drivers of growth.

Amid all this, the United States and its Western allies have intensified their efforts to contain and suppress China.

To tackle these challenges and seize the available opportunities, China has to better harness the market mechanisms, develop a fairer and more dynamic market environment, and implement effective regulations, in order to maintain the market order, address the market shortcomings, ensure the smooth circulation of the economy, unleash the country's innovation potential and propel the internal driving forces, promoting high-



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

This approach includes improving infrastructure, boosting industry resilience, integrating the digital economy, and minimizing, if not totally eradicating regional disparities.

quality development.

The resolution provides a clear timeline for achieving these reforms. By 2029, China aims to complete the proposed reforms, and by 2035 establish a high-standard socialist market economy. The timeline not only reflects a commitment to comprehensively deepen reforms but also aligns with the broader goal of achieving Chinese modernization by 2035. The synchronization of these goals highlights the critical role a modern economic system plays in advancing Chinese modernization and ensuring the economic reform continues to support and drive broader developmental objectives.

The third plenary session has reaffirmed the "two unswerving" principles: unwavering support for the public sector and encouragement for the non-public sector. This balanced approach is essential for harnessing the strengths of different types of business ownership. The public sector's prominence is key to maintaining China's economic system. On the other hand, the non-public sector, including private enterprises, plays a crucial role in promoting innovation and strengthening the country's competitiveness.

Removing the barriers to fair competition and supporting diverse market participants are necessary to navigate the uncertainties and expedite technological and industrial advancements, which will help China adapt to new economic realities and enhance its global economic standing.

Besides, the resolution highlights the importance of carrying out thorough reforms across various areas of the economy. For example, the reform of the economic system is part of a broader strategy that includes improving macroeconomic governance, promoting innovation, and integrating urban and rural development.

The emphasis on systemic integration and comprehensive deployment underscores the need to adopt a holistic approach to achieving high-quality development. This approach includes improving infrastructure, boosting industry resilience, integrating the digital economy, and minimizing, if not totally eradicating, regional disparities. By focusing on these areas, China aims to create a robust economic framework that supports sustainable growth and modernization.

The third plenum has outlined a detailed and ambitious plan for advancing economic reform. The development of a high-standard socialist market economy is essential for realizing Chinese modernization, providing the necessary institutional support for overcoming global challenges and cashing in on the emerging opportunities. In other words, the third plenum's resolution aims to advance Chinese modernization, which should be seen as an ongoing process of reform and opening up, paving the way for a broad and prosperous future.

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Kang Bing

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Welfare grass may appear greener on the other side of the fence, but is not

A young man I know has been trying to migrate to one of the European countries. Having changed jobs a couple of dozen times in the past decade, he recently told me that he was fed up with his superiors' strict demands and the tough competition from colleagues. Immigration agents have convinced him that he should migrate to a European country in order to lead a relatively relaxed life and enjoy various social welfares.

He plans to sell a Beijing apartment he inherited from his grandparents for a few million yuan, which he can use to apply under the immigrant investor program for residency in a European country that welcomes such investment. "Once successful, I can largely lie flat and enjoy the impressive social welfares such as free education for children, free medical care, better eldercare, longer vacations and higher income," he said.

I know the picture he presented is only partly true. But I was not in the mood to argue with him. Experience tells me there is no free lunch anywhere.

But his claim that European countries have better social welfare programs prompted me to compare the social welfare plans of China and European countries. The truth is that as a late-comer, China has been doing pretty well in terms of its social welfare program, which helps protect hundreds of millions Chinese people against various socioeconomic troubles.

China introduced the two-day weekend in 1995. People today may take it for granted but for people of my generation it was the biggest benefit one could dream of. In 2008, China began implementing the annual leave policy, under which employees with less than 10 years of working experience can get five days of annual leave, while those with more than 10 years and 20 years of working experience can get 10 days and 15 days of annual leave respectively. If we add the 52 weekends, and the two Golden Weeks and other public holidays, a Chinese employee enjoys about 140 days of offs and leave.

China has done a remarkable job of improving social welfare, though there is still much room for improvement.

As for healthcare, more than 95 percent of China's 1.41 billion people are covered by medical insurance. Unlike some European countries where patients have to complete complicated procedures and wait for a long time to see a doctor, a patient from even a remote area in China can get timely treatment by the best doctors in the best hospitals in cities like Beijing and Shanghai. The healthcare insurance usually covers between 50 and 95 percent of the medical costs depending on the location and type of insurance one has taken out.

Besides, with China's rapidly rising aging population, providing proper eldercare has become a government priority. Pension has been increasing by 3-5 percent a year for the past 20 years and senior citizens can travel on buses or visit parks for free or on discount. A recent message on our WeChat group in a Sanya neighborhood, Hainan province, said that people aged above 60 could enjoy a buffet meal for just 1 yuan (\$0.13) in a nearby canteen when the actual cost is 18 yuan.

China made the nine-year compulsory education free in 2008. In some rural areas, schools also serve free lunch for students. This has helped raise the compulsory education rate to 95.5 percent. Although higher education is not free in China, public universities' tuition fee is between 5,000 yuan and 8,000 yuan a year, which most Chinese families can afford to pay. And for families facing financial difficulties, their children can get government grants, social donations and/or low-interest education loans from the banks.

Also, people who have lost their jobs for various reasons can get an unemployment allowance for up to 24 months with the sum being 90 percent of the local minimum wages, and attend free vocational training programs to hone their or learn new skills to increase their chances of getting a new job.

The Chinese people enjoy a lot of social welfares without actually realizing or acknowledging them. China has done a remarkable job of improving social welfare, though there is still much room for improvement. Growing stronger economically and financially, China will introduce more social welfare programs by drawing lessons from European countries. And that's exactly why I'd suggest the young man eager to migrate to a European country to rethink his migration decision.

Balthasar Staehelin

Humanity calls for respecting Geneva Conventions

Aug 12 marked the 75th anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions. Ordinarily, this would have been a cause for celebration, but it is difficult to rejoice when there are more than 120 ongoing armed conflicts in the world today, with catastrophic humanitarian consequences. So we must reflect not only on the past 75 years of the conventions but also ask ourselves how we, humankind, envision the next 75 years and how we can preserve the hard-earned gains that were made possible only because of our belief in shared humanity that led to the adoption of the four Geneva Conventions on Aug 12, 1949.

Laws and customs of war predate modern international humanitarian law (IHL). They originated hundreds of years ago from the rich cultural and spiritual practices found in Asia, the Pacific, the Middle East, Africa, the Americas and Europe. The four Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols are the backbone of modern IHL.

International humanitarian law, as a comprehensive body of law that encompasses many international treaties including the four Geneva Conventions and comprises customary law, regulates the means and methods of warfare, and seeks to minimize human suffering during armed conflicts. Each of the four Geneva Conventions protects a special category of people who are not or no longer participating in hostilities. The first Geneva Convention protects wounded and sick soldiers on the battlefield, while the second protects the wounded, sick and shipwrecked of the armed forces at sea. The third convention protects prisoners of war, and the fourth civilians.

The four Geneva Conventions, universally ratified, embody a common language, common values and a global consensus that even in the darkest moments in history, humankind must continue to preserve a degree of humani-

ty. However, humanity today is confronted with a frightening reality of non-compliance with IHL.

Modern armed conflicts have become more dangerous since the dawn of the 20th century. Some of the deadly features of modern warfare include the rapid development of new and lethal weapon technologies, the urbanization of warfare as conflicts shift from open fields to densely populated cities, the frequent use of heavy weapons which have an impact on a wide area, and the deliberate dehumanization of the enemy through labels such as "terrorist".

All these factors, among others, result in armed conflicts that are more lethal, less humane, with devastating humanitarian consequences and alarming risk of IHL violations. This cannot be the status quo.

The shared values of humanity must not be undermined by political polarization. States should not fall in the trap of exceptionalism. There is no elasticity in humanitarian obligations. The destruction of schools, hospitals and essential infrastructure should not be normalized as inevitable part of conflict. The killing of humanitarian workers and other violations of IHL must not become the new normal.

The rules of war are not optional. When the Earth is indiscriminately scorched and IHL violations are committed with impunity, they fuel further cycles of violence often resulting in protracted armed conflicts that span decades. On the other hand, when IHL is respected, parties to the conflict retain a glimmer of hope that could lead them back to peace.

International humanitarian law has the power to change the behavior of the combatants and fighters on the battlefield. The world has no stronger tool at



its disposal to use in times of war to protect civilians. As such, states must do all that is necessary to build a culture of respect for IHL, which can be exemplified by three fundamental pillars: ratification of IHL treaties, implementation of IHL in domestic law, and the dissemination of IHL among armed forces and civilians, as well as policymakers. These pillars combined create a culture of respect for IHL that positively influences behavior on the battlefield during an armed conflict.

International humanitarian law includes many international treaties that have saved countless lives. Treaties that prohibit and limit the use of weapons have prevented the indiscriminate killing and maiming of civilians. Treaties such as the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and the Chemical Weapons Convention have significantly reduced the number of casualties resulting from these weapons.

Weapon treaties are a step toward peace; reducing the number of deadly weapons around the world can make the world a safer place. Weapons that cause superfluous injuries and cause unnecessary suffering are prohibited under IHL. These very weapons often cause scars much deeper than physical injuries, which are carried by generations that can become a barrier to peace, security and stability. Strengthening ratification of IHL treaties is one of the strongest forms of support and commitment for IHL.

In addition, implementation of IHL into domestic law, military manuals, doctrines and decrees is the surest way to prevent IHL violations. Implementation of IHL is too often uneven, but when parties do respect the law, lives are saved.

Equally important is the prosecution of violations of IHL. Parties to the conflict must not endorse a culture of impunity. The efforts and support spent justifying atrocities should instead be dedicated to holding those committing

the atrocities responsible. The criminal repression of grave violations of IHL is an obligation on all state parties to the four Geneva Conventions.

The devastating aftermath of World War II triggered a stark universal recognition that was needed rules to limit their horrific effects on populations. There was a consensus that "never again" should such horrors be repeated. China was among the first countries which recognized the Geneva Conventions — on July 13, 1952. The then premier Zhou Enlai, in his letter to the Swiss Federal Council, highlighted that the People's Republic of China was recognizing these conventions because they are "conducive to a lasting peace among all nations", an important message that must be reiterated and remembered at all times.

In September 2023, during his meeting with Mirjana Spoljaric, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, China's top leader emphasized that humanitarianism is the greatest consensus that can unite different civilizations. The four Geneva Conventions and the underpinning principle of humanity is the manifestation of this consensus that we all need to remind ourselves of again.

The ICRC is the guardian of IHL, but we cannot enforce IHL on unwilling states. The world is in urgent need of powerful voices advocating for the respect of IHL. In the words of the ICRC president, states must make IHL a political priority. The ICRC reaffirms its readiness to support states on this journey of promoting compliance and respect for IHL, as preserving humanity is a crucial call on all of us.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

WANG DONG AND GAO DAN

Rise of the Global South

By steadily fostering a sense of identification and solidarity, developing countries are reshaping the international economic order

The rise of countries in the Global South is reshaping the international economic landscape and pushing the profound transformation of the global economic order. This historical process, a representation of the universally beneficial, inclusive and balanced "re-globalization", embodies the economic takeoff of developing countries and the diversification of the global power structure.



Wang Dong

Against such a background, the countries in the Global South are pushing, in a way that has never been seen before, to form a new economic order that better reflects fairness and win-win efforts.



Gao Dan

Data from the International Monetary Fund show that in 2023, the GDP of

emerging economies and developing economies accounted for 58.9 percent of the global economy, a 7.6 percent increase after they first surpassed the developed economies in 2008. From 2000 to 2023, the emerging economies and developing economies averaged an economic growth rate of 5.2 percent, 3.3 percentage points higher than the average growth of developed economies. The rapid economic growth in the countries and regions of the Global South has contributed to the diversification of global economic growth and played a major part in boosting the world economy. The Global South, represented by BRICS, is making greater contributions to global economic growth than developed economies represented by the G7. According to statistics, China continued to contribute 30 percent of the world's economic growth in 2023, and will remain the largest contributor over the next five years.

Regarding trade in goods, in 2022, the export and import of goods of developing economies

accounted for 45.1 percent and 40.4 percent of the global total respectively, while the proportion of developed economies shrank drastically. In terms of investment, foreign direct investment to developing economies, with a 4.0 percent increase, accounted for 70.8 percent of the world's total FDI. At the same time, to improve the regional consistency in trade and investment policies, developing countries have signed many bilateral, multilateral and regional economic and trade agreements. This has steadily removed the trade and investment barriers among countries of the Global South, given rise to new international trade routes and new models of capital flow, and advanced the depth and breadth of global economic integration.

The huge consumer market in the Global South, with the Chinese market as the locomotive, has been effectively activated, offering new pivots for the global industry and supply chains. The markets of the Global South countries will be connected to create a more open and inclusive business environment, provide high-quality supply to meet the world's new demands, and help optimize the global allocation of resources and production capacity.

Countries in the Global South, sharing a common position, have deepened their cooperation in various forms to enhance their collective discourse power. These countries, upholding true multilateralism, have engaged more actively in reforming the multilateral system. They advocate independent political rights and interests, mutually beneficial cooperation for win-win results, fair and rational rules and regulations, an open and inclusive governance system, and green and sustainable development mod-



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

els. As such, they are sure to play a more important role in global economic development and governance.

As leading representatives of emerging markets and developing economies, BRICS countries made up only 10.4 percent of the global economy in 1980, but the figure shot up to 31 percent in 2020, higher than the proportion of G7. At the 15th BRICS Summit in August 2023, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Argentina, Iran, and Ethiopia were invited to become new BRICS members. In January 2024, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, and

Ethiopia became official members of BRICS, meaning the organization now has 10 members, whose economic aggregate accounts for 36 percent of the global total. The expansion of BRICS has magnified the voice of the Global South countries, reinforced their negotiating capability, given them more power to fight for the right to development in the international system, and enhanced their economic resilience as a whole. By working more closely together, the Global South countries have become the stabilizer of international economic order.

The Global South countries are committed to the people-centered

sustainable development enshrined in the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They played an active part in the 27th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27) in 2022 and the Group of 77 plus China Summit in 2023, vowing to strengthen unity and collaboration among themselves to jointly cope with the international challenges. In addition to economic benefits, the Global South countries, in their cooperation and development, place more stress on inclusive growth and integration of diversities, shedding new light on the path of global development.

After World War II, the US-led Western countries spearheaded neoliberal globalization. This, however, has evidenced a series of drawbacks and increased the global economic governance deficit. In 2013, China put forward the Belt and Road Initiative and its vision of global governance featuring extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits. Countries in the Global South will have a bigger say in global governance and consequently push the revision of international rules and standards in order to better represent developing countries' appeals and core interests. With their rising national strengths and international influence, those countries have already become a key force in propelling reforms in the global governance system, playing a positive role in climate response, energy governance and many other aspects.

Statistics show that in 2023, China exported 4.91 million automobiles, of which 1.2 million were new energy vehicles, a year-on-year increase of 77.6 percent and

marking the ninth consecutive year when Chinese NEV production and sales volume topped the world. NEVs have become a highlight of China's auto industry. China's success in this sector is solid proof that the Global South countries are able to be pioneers in high-tech domains. As the digital, green and inclusive trend of globalization prevails, they will join hands in refining their toolbox of economic policies to bridge the gap in the digital economy and the green and low-carbon economy.

Some Western developed countries have been trying to output a single road of modernization to the world. Now the appearance of the Chinese path to modernization is showing the world that there is more than one way to do that. The Global South countries, based on their cultural traditions, systems and mechanisms, and reality of development, can pursue development paths suiting their own conditions, thus helping create a more diversified and just new order of global development and governance. It is with respect for diversity and inclusiveness that they have risen as a group. In the meantime, they have increased the understanding and support for each other through cultural exchanges and mutual learning, promoting the global exchange and integration of different cultures and laying the cultural foundation for building a more inclusive and equitable world. The Global South will be an indispensable driver of the "re-globalization" process and the mainstay in building a new international economic order.

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ZHOU TAIDONG

Plugged in to promising potential

Small-scale renewable energy projects have increasingly become a solution to alleviate Africa's energy access challenge

Africa has a vast wealth of resources for its sustainable development. It holds considerable renewable energy potential, including solar, hydro, wind, and geothermal energy sources and has the capacity to produce a large amount of hydrogen. The continent also boasts considerable

deposits of raw minerals used in new energy technologies for electric vehicles, stationary energy storage, and green hydrogen (GH₂) production, including cobalt, manganese, platinum, palladium and graphite, among others. Nevertheless, energy poverty remains a concern across the continent. Of the world's estimated 800 million people without access to electricity, 600 million are in sub-Saharan Africa. Poor access to reliable, affordable and sustainable energy has become a serious hindrance to economic and human capital development across Africa.

Small-scale renewable energy has increasingly become a solution to alleviate Africa's energy access challenge. A transition to cleaner energy sources will enable Africa to bridge the development and industrialization gap left by decades of energy poverty, provide needed energy services without damaging human health or ecosystems, and leapfrog traditional electricity models by promoting off-grid and mini-grid energy solutions for greater accessibility.

Several factors hinder renewable energy development in the region. The primary one is the lack of an enabling policy environment. Several African countries have no specific renewables policies, while others have dedicated policies that are outdated. Even when policies

are effective, implementation may have been inadequate due to weak governance structures and poor handover systems for changes of administration. For businesses, navigating governmental approvals for permissions and consent has been a challenge, and projects could be plagued by delays and cost overruns.

Related to the inadequate policy environment, many African countries have limited investment in electricity infrastructure, particularly in generation capacity, distribution networks, and maintenance, which in turn leads to a combination of low energy supply and high electricity costs. Between 2010 and 2020, Africa received only 3 percent of global energy investment, with 0.5 percent of this investment in transmission and distribution networks. It is estimated that at least \$25 billion in electricity grid, generation, and off-grid solutions investment is required annually to eradicate energy poverty in Africa by 2030.

Inadequate management and technical capability also make implementing new technologies difficult. There has been a shortage of project and system design, installation, and maintenance skills across many African countries. For instance, projects involving renewable energy technologies require not only initial installation but also ongoing maintenance, which can be technically demanding. Local personnel may not always have the training or the technological background needed to manage these systems effectively, which can lead to underperformance or breakdowns.

Over the years, China has become a major powerhouse in the field of renewable energy, leading the global energy transition. Its investment in clean energy has ranked first glo-

bally for many consecutive years, and its installed capacity of hydro power, wind power and photovoltaic power generation is also in a leading position. This technological advancement has become a new engine of China's development cooperation with other countries in the Global South.

The green Belt and Road Initiative and the Global Development Initiative have both highlighted climate change and low-carbon and green development. The export of Chinese photovoltaic modules and wind power equipment exemplifies a robust strategy to disseminate sustainable technology and supports African countries in increasing their utilization of renewable energy sources. China has also gradually shifted its investment focus toward green energy projects in Africa. According to the Boston University Global Development Policy Center, China has financed over \$13 billion and developed over 10 gigawatts of clean energy capacity across Africa since 2000. Chinese investments in renewable energy in Africa grew at an average annual rate of 26 percent from 2010 to 2020, with solar, hydropower and wind being the top three technologies.

China has also adopted an approach of integrating capacity building with technology transfer to help overcome capacity constraints in Africa. This involves not only providing the technology but also training local technicians and engineers in its maintenance and operation. Projects include construction of low-carbon demonstration zones, climate change mitigation and adaptation projects, and local personnel capacity building. For example, the China-Africa Clean Energy Technology Demonstration Centre in Kenya showcases clean energy technologies such as

photovoltaic, wind power and biomass energy, and provides technical training and advisory services to African countries. The China-Africa Green Development Fund provides financial support specifically for green technology projects in African countries. These programs ensure that the transfer of technology goes beyond mere installation and helps create a knowledge base within the community. Such a knowledge base can sustain these initiatives independently, thereby addressing one of the critical barriers to the success of green projects in the region.

To further improve the scale and effectiveness of renewable energy cooperation between the two sides, China can forge a new cooperative model with multiple activities to produce more enduring impacts than stand-alone projects.

First, China should improve communication with Africa via multi-level and multidimensional channels. The role of think tanks, businesses and civil society groups should be strengthened. This would help comprehend the heterogeneity of the continent and the disparities in the difficulties faced by each country, which are not all uniform, and significantly enhance China's involvement in African countries' energy section beyond individual project level interactions. It will also allow China to play a more active role in renewable energy consultancy or advisory, capacity building programs, and dedicated efforts in improving standards of social and environmental footprint for many of the energy infrastructure projects. The sharing of knowledge and skill sets in promoting the renewable energy market and technology capacity could be strengthened, including boosting infant wind turbine and solar panel industries from the ground up and devel-



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

oping manufacturing and financing capabilities to lead to the installation of a huge capacity within a limited time frame. Chinese enterprises and ministries can also actively involve themselves in various capacity-building activities among African governments, particularly engaging energy regulators to develop plans or road maps on renewable energy capacity and to establish stable policy frameworks in supporting renewable energy development.

Second, China can encourage active local participation and ownership to foster an environment conducive to technology transfer. China can enhance its own transparency through more effective data collection and regular reporting to counter misinformation and address adverse impacts on the environment as they appear. Dismantling the technical barriers that Chinese enterprises face in meeting global ESG standards will also enable technology transfer between China and Africa to become more sustainable and locally and internationally accepted. Additionally, focusing on impactful research and development partnerships and empowering local actors could

drive a locally led green technology innovation ecosystem in the region.

Third, China can harness the potential of innovative financing. In the post COVID-19 context, it will be increasingly difficult to secure sovereign guarantees from many African governments that are facing debt servicing difficulties due to the pandemic and its consequent economic shocks. Renewable energy can be a very good piloting sector for encouraging project finance and equity investment because government auctions and procurement have become the mainstream practice for wind and solar energy activities worldwide, including in Africa. China can leverage public funds to catalyze private investment. Rather than blending finance project by project, a paradigm shift in establishing green development partnerships or funds with multilateral development banks could also help scale up efforts.

The author is vice-president of the Center for International Knowledge on Development. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

LIFE

Mountain venue sees polo reach new heights of appeal

International tournament for female players ensures plenty of action to entertain spectators in newly built club in Wulong district, report **Tan Yingzi** and **Deng Rui** in Chongqing.

Surrounded by green mountains, shrouded by white clouds, over 100 Chinese spectators enjoyed a summer afternoon in Wulong district, Chongqing, watching an international women's polo match, sipping Champagne and listening to music played by a popular local symphony orchestra.

In recent years, polo, once hailed as "the sport of kings", a high-end team sport with ancient roots, has started to gain popularity in China, as a group of Chinese polo lovers have been trying to revive the sport's culture in the country.

"I knew little about polo before I was invited to watch the match this time, but now I am deeply attracted to this niche sport," said Wang Yan-shan, a spectator who flew from Beijing to the southwestern municipality over the weekend early this month.

In pink, the dress code of the event, the Chinese spectators tasted the charm of the polo event. They sat under the white tents, drank pink sparkling wine and afternoon tea, and chatted with friends, while cheering for the polo players on the field.

From Aug 1 to 3, the 1003 Polo Club hosted the inaugural Rose Polo Cup, an international tournament dedicated to female riders, at its newly built facility on Xiannyu Mountain, or Fairy Mountain, in the district which boasts a breathtakingly beautiful natural landscape.

It attracted top polo players from Canada, the United Kingdom, Singapore, Switzerland, Argentina, Ireland and China. They formed three teams, British Rainbow Team, Singapore Claremont Family Office Team and Canadian Sunshine Team, to compete against each other. The British Rainbow Team won the title.

As a mixed-gender sport, polo has historically been dominated by male players, but women currently represent the fastest growing sector of the game, accounting for 40 percent of US Polo Association membership.

"It is the highest level of women's polo competition in China," says Luo Bin, a polo player herself and the co-founder of the club.

"I hope to take this opportunity to help Chinese players enhance their game, provide the public with a social experience around the sport, as well as make the world polo enthusiasts know about the rapid development of Chinese women's polo."

Founded in 2017 in Beijing with another polo lover, Jackie Wang, the club aims to revive the sport in China, especially among women and young people.

In China, paintings, murals, figurines and other images of polo can be traced as far back as the Tang Dynasty (618-907), with both male and female aristocrats depicted chasing the ball on horseback.

During the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), modern polo was introduced by expatriates who lived in cities, such as Shanghai,



Clockwise from top: Polo players compete at the inaugural Rose Polo Cup on Aug 3 on Xiannyu Mountain in Wulong district, Chongqing. The 1003 Polo Club hosted the event, an international tournament dedicated to female riders, at its newly built polo club in Chongqing, early this month. A local symphony orchestra performs at the event. Spectators follow the action at the polo cup. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

At present, sports have become an important part of many people's lives. While challenging the physical and spiritual limits of human beings, they are also constantly creating more possibilities for social progress and life. Chinese polo development is still in an early stage and needs a lot of investment and promotion."

Hou Tianbo, director of the Chinese Equestrian Association's development department; deputy director of the Polo Professional Committee

Beijing and Tianjin.

During the 1930s, it enjoyed a period of popularity in China and, in 1959, during the first-ever National Games, polo was included as an official sport.

"Situated in the high mountains with an average 1,750 meters above sea level, our club enjoys beautiful views and ideal weather for the sport," Luo says.

Partnering with Wulong district government, the club has a total

area of more than 170,000 square meters. It boasted nearly 100 Argentine polo ponies imported from the South American country this year and a top venue that can host international events.

It also has stables, indoor horse training fields, sand polo fields, event polo fields, grazing areas and other business formats, as well as bars, a clubhouse and art exhibition halls.

Hou Tianbo, director of the devel-

opment department of the Chinese Equestrian Association and deputy director of the Polo Professional Committee, says that this event, staged in a top tourist spot, is an innovative approach to attract general public to the sport.

"At present, sports have become an important part of many people's lives. While challenging the physical and spiritual limits of human beings, they are also constantly creating more possibilities for social

progress and life," he says.

"Chinese polo development is still in an early stage and needs a lot of investment and promotion," he adds.

As polo requires significant investments on horses, training, equipment and facilities, it used to be out of reach of the general population. Now, thanks to the club founders, the Xiannyu Mountain club can offer affordable service packages to the people to experi-

ence the sport. For instance, a 45-minute polo coaching session costs 598 yuan (\$83) for 6- to 17-year-old first timers.

As a famous summer retreat with an amiable climate, the Xiannyu Mountain area attracts thousands of people every year.

"We had many children this summer wanting to play the sport," Luo says. "I hope to bring polo to many people."

This year, the news of the club importing nearly 100 polo ponies from Argentina drew the attention of Argentine Ambassador to China Marcelo Gabriel Suarez Salvia. Argentina is called the Capital of Polo for its leading role in the sport.

He brought his family to attend the Rose Cup and addressed the event, saying polo serves as a medium for deepening exchanges and cooperation between China and Argentina in sports, culture and other fields.

"In Argentina, we bond with horses and connect through polo," the ambassador says. "As the world's largest horse exporter, Argentina is providing crucial support globally, fostering the development of polo worldwide and serving as an important bridge for friendship and cultural exchange between China and Argentina."

It's hoped that this sport can enhance its international profile as it aims to attract more global guests to experience its unique landscape and rich culture, according to local authorities from Wulong district, a formerly low-income mountain region in Chongqing.

"We will make Xiannyu Mountain 1003 Polo Club a signature international tourism project and a 'golden business card' of Wulong's tourism sector," He Qing, the district's Party chief, said at the event.

Wulong district has also taken a series of innovative approaches in developing tourism, providing services and activities for people with various needs, such as field studies for students, competitions for outdoor sports fans, exhibitions for art lovers, health and wellness services for seniors and romantic honeymoon packages for young couples.

Since 2003, the district has hosted the China International Mountain Outdoor Sports Open, one of the largest outdoor cross-country events in the world.

The high-profile international polo event also attracted the attention of local sponsors, which are always a key part of polo events. Chongqing automaker Seres becomes one of the first Chinese new-energy vehicle companies to sponsor a polo event.

"Polo is a sport that combines tradition and modernity, just like our NEVs that boast traditional luxury design and innovative technology," says Clifford Kang, vice-president of Seres. "Also as a Chongqing company, we should actively support the major local event."

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No longer shifting, Shapotou's sands bring tourists to the desert

YINCHUAN — An endless expanse of the Tengger Desert, China's fourth-largest, abuts Shapotou district in Zhongwei city, the Ningxia Hui autonomous region, stretching as far as the eye can see. For many years, Tang Mingxi's relatives fought to keep these sand dunes, which used to draw closer by four to five meters every year, at bay.

In 1958, China's first desert railway, the Baotou-Lanzhou Railway, was inaugurated. To guarantee its safety, anti-desertification efforts poured into Shapotou, 60-year-old Tang's hometown. Thanks to innovative approaches like the use of straw checkerboard barriers, and other afforestation measures, the desert has been pushed back by a significant 25 kilometers, a historic tri-

umph in human efforts over encroaching sands.

Tang returned to Shapotou after graduating from college and started a career in desert control. Today, he is a senior forestry engineer, and has been part of treating 730,000 mu (about 48,670 hectares) of desert. As a child, he saw a deadly sandstorm take the lives of his classmates, but now the vast sands have turned from enemy into friend.

Zhongwei's success at desert control led many people from Africa, who also suffer from encroaching deserts, to visit to borrow from the experience. Other visitors at the time included Western backpackers enticed by the mysterious deserts of the ancient Silk Road.

In 1987, Tao Neng was assigned to

Zhongwei's foreign affairs and tourism bureau. "There were few domestic tourists then, so the tourism bureau was established for overseas tourists," the 62-year-old says, adding that he received six months' language training in Beijing to be able to communicate better.

The experience of taking a group of Hong Kong students through the desert completely reshaped his perspective of his job. It was May, and in the company of a seasoned tour guide, the team took camels deep into the heart of the sandy expanse. At around 8 pm, as the evening shadows were stretching across the dunes, an unexpected sandstorm blew away most of the tents, leaving the group of 10 to seek shelter in the two that remained.

"I remember thinking that they were bound to complain," Tao says. To his surprise, after he took the visitors to a bathroom to wash the following day, they insisted on treating him to a meal, as they felt the sandstorm had been an unforgettable adventure that he had shared with them, a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Ever since, Tao has kept a journal ready for visitors to note impressions of their desert journeys. The imaginative insights they have left is a well-spring of inspiration for him.

In 2004, Tao was transferred to the Shapotou scenic area.

After visiting a number of popular desert destinations in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, Gansu province, and several Middle Eastern countries, he introduced a

variety of activities, including dune surfing and zip-lining above the Yellow River, and also introduced catering services.

In 2007, the area was designated a national 5A-level scenic spot, and attracted nearly 600,000 visitors that year. In 2023, it received more than 1.27 million visitors, and in the first half of this year, the figure approached 600,000, an increase of 10 percent compared to the same period last year.

Liu Shengjun, a 60-year-old from Jiadao village, started his tourism venture in 2010, borrowing over 10,000 yuan (\$1,403) to purchase six camels. "I made 100,000 yuan that year," he says, adding that during peak season, he leads camel rides about nine times a day.

"In the past, when the sandstorms were frequent, we couldn't even eat our meals outside. Now, the environment has improved and there are more tourists. I feel lucky to have been born in Zhongwei, and I'm happy," he says.

More services and facilities targeting the young generation are being promoted. This year, a glamping site with 1,000 well-appointed tents opened, coupled with art, music and gourmet festivals.

"Seeing the children revel in the sand... brings us joy. The tranquility of the desert offers an escape from the hustle and bustle," says Yang Sha, a 39-year-old visitor from Sichuan province.

XINHUA

LIFE



Scenes from *Star Fish*, which will be staged in Beijing on Sept 6, the opening show of the upcoming 2024 Beijing International Puppet Festival.
PHOTOS BY ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

Puppets can string us along

Sino-French production aims to demonstrate the universal appeal of the art form with a show that pulls out all of the stops, **Chen Nan** reports.

Theatergoers to the contemporary puppet show, *Star Fish*, will be taken on a whimsical journey through this creative collaboration between artists from China and France.

Inspired by the delightful 2018 novel by Zhou Xiaofeng, its story takes place in the depths of the ocean where two stars, who are twin brothers, tumble into the human world, kicking off an adventure that blends cultural charm with theatrical magic.

"I was deeply touched by the novel when I read it for the first time, though it's written for children. Steeped in the ocean's mysteries, it paints a picture of the brotherhood between the two stars as they navigate the complexities of human existence in the big blue ocean," says the show's producer Han Chi. "It's a tale that resonates with themes of unity, discovery and courage, weaving a narrative tapestry that captures the imagination and stirs the soul of both children and adults."

Star Fish will be staged in Beijing on Sept 6, as the opening show of the upcoming 2024 Beijing International Puppet Festival, which will run from Sept 6 to Oct 6.

According to Han, who is the curator and producer of the festival, 28 productions and more than 50 shows from 11 countries are on the agenda, including from the United Kingdom, France, Brazil and Spain. In addition to live performances, the festival includes online screenings of nine other productions from around the world, as well as workshops, which will offer attendees the opportunity to explore the backstage at puppet shows.

In *Star Fish*, the audience will be introduced to a dreamlike world inhabited by puppets of variously sized fish, with the lead character, Xiao Nu, one of the twin stars, becoming a 3.5-meter whale pup-

pet when he falls into the ocean.

Han invited French director, Marjorie Nakache, to be part of the show, which took the creative team about 18 months to finish.

With a deep background in theater and puppetry, Nakache brings a unique perspective to the production, infusing it with a blend of French theatrical experience and a deep respect for the narrative traditions of both countries.

"I love the novel, which is a beautiful story. The collaboration between artists from both countries unfolded as a celebration of artistic synergy," says the director, who is the founder of French theater company, the Studio Theatre de Stains. "We did a lot of experiments on puppets. We wanted to ensure that every movement and narrative thread was a harmonious blend of Chinese folklore and my theatrical knowledge and experience."

Nakache adds that *Star Fish* is more than mere entertainment, and that the performance resonates with audiences of all ages and backgrounds.

"Puppets are not only for children but also for adults, and can create an imaginative experience that cannot be achieved in other theatrical productions without them," she says. "Puppets allow us to incorporate ideas that cannot be done by real actors."

“Steeped in the ocean’s mysteries, it paints a picture of the brotherhood between the two stars as they navigate the complexities of human existence.”

Han Chi, puppet show producer

It is not the first time that the two have worked together. In 2022, Han invited Nakache to work on another puppet show, *Mending the Heavenly Metamorphosis*, which was about the Chinese mythological female character Nyu Wa, who created humankind out of clay. The show premiered during the 2022 Beijing International Puppet Festival.

Since then, both artists have navigated cultural nuances and artistic intricacies, building an atmosphere of mutual respect and creative exchange. Through workshops, rehearsals, and shared artistic exploration, Nakache has overseen a production that embodies the spirit of international cooperation and artistic innovation.

"Though we speak different languages and have different ways of thinking, we achieved a shared goal, which made us very happy and proud," says Nakache.

With *Star Fish*, the artists will not only dazzle the audience with a visual spectacle and heartfelt storytelling, but will also demonstrate the power of cultural exchange through the arts, says Han.

"Nakache's direction underscores universal themes of empathy, discovery, and the beauty of diversity, inviting audiences to connect deeply with the characters and themes woven into the fabric of the puppet show," Han says. "As audiences immerse themselves in the enchant-

ing world of *Star Fish*, they embark on a journey where imagination knows no limits, and where the beauty of storytelling unites hearts across continents."

Han was born and raised in Harbin in Heilongjiang province, and was introduced to traditional Chinese puppetry by her journalist father, who founded the HanFeizi Shadow Puppet Theatre in 1992.

"After interviewing the people behind a traditional Chinese shadow puppet theater in our hometown, my father used his own money to support it, because it was dying," says Han.

Shadow puppetry is a form of theater in which colorful silhouette figures made from leather or paper are accompanied by music and singing. The ancient art form was inscribed in 2011 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.

"In our hometown, shadow puppetry shows, which are on the provincial list of intangible cultural heritage, combine the local dialect and folk music. My father loves the art form, which faces a challenge from contemporary entertainment. He founded the HanFeizi Shadow Puppet Theatre under his penname of Han Feizi," says Han Chi, whose younger brother, Han Xing, performs in the theater company. Han Xing is also performing in *Star Fish*.

"Thanks to my father and the senior shadow puppet players in the theater, I learned all about the history and making of puppet shows. I want to make puppet shows appeal to contemporary audiences, by combining them with different theatrical elements, such as dance and visual effects," says Han Chi, who is now the director of the HanFeizi Shadow Puppet Theatre.

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Poetry opens doors to cultural treasures

NANCHANG — If the classical poet Li Bai were alive today, he would be astonished to discover that he is beloved of today's youngsters, not just for his lyrical genius but also because his verses now grant free entry to many scenic spots in China.

Lushan Mountain, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Jiangxi province, is offering free entry to students who can recite his 200-character masterpiece, *A Ballad of Lushan Mountain*.

As of mid-July, more than 480 tourists have passed the test and received a free ticket, which is normally priced at 160 yuan (\$22), thanks to the renowned Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet.

"Lushan Mountain rises by the Southern Dipper,

Like a screen penetrating the silky cloud.

Its shadow falls into a lake with green luster.

Two ranges are giant gates above the ground."

"The landscape described by Li Bai is no longer confined to books; it's as if I'm standing alongside him, admiring the beauty of Lushan," says a 21-year-old tourist surnamed Liu, who is a postgraduate student from Zhejiang province.

Liu managed to finish reciting the poem quickly, making only two errors in the process. "I took every opportunity to practice before arriving, whether on the high-speed train or in the taxi," she says.

This intriguing initiative is part of a campaign allowing students from all over the world to gain free or discounted access to Jiangxi's tourist attractions by reciting specific poems or excerpts from other classics.

In all, 123 scenic spots are participating in the campaign, which runs until Feb 28, 2025.

Jiangxi is leveraging the culture behind these poems both to attract visitors and to enrich their travel experience, says Kuang Kai, an official with the provincial culture and tourism department.

"Jiangxi has long been a land rich in poetic heritage, with many poets leaving behind thousands of verses over the centuries," says Kuang. "The selection of poems is tailored to reflect the particular characteristics of each city and scenic spot."

An increasing number of the country's tourist attractions are now pursuing long-term development by tapping into cultural treasures. In the first half of this year, over 32,000 tourists earned free tickets to Jiangxi's Tengwang Pavilion by successfully reciting *Preface to Tengwang Pavilion* by Tang Dynasty poet Wang Bo.

In Qufu in Shandong province, the birthplace of the prominent philosopher Confucius, visitors can enjoy free entry to many historic sites after passing a test related to *The Analects*.

Learning classical literature is a popular trend in China.

The televised *Chinese Poetry Competition* show, a hallmark of the interest, has captivated viewers for years and allows participants from all walks of life — scientists, students, deliverymen, police officers and pilots — to demonstrate their knowledge and passion for classical poetry.

"The classics are cultural genes embedded deep in the blood of the Chinese people," says Peng Min, an editor who won the fifth edition of the competition. "They are not only alive today but continue to enrich the lives of modern people with their enduring vitality."

In an interview with Xinhua, Zhang Yiwu, a professor at Peking University, expressed his belief that poetry recitals campaigns can encourage visitors, especially the young, to develop a deeper appreciation for classics.

"Our livelihoods have improved significantly, which gives people time to pursue higher goals," Zhang says.

Standing atop Lushan Mountain and gazing at the surrounding peaks, Liu can't help but wonder if, over 1,000 years ago, Li Bai had the same experience of climbing the mountain in the drizzle to marvel at the scenery.

"Poetry gives me the inspiration to be brave enough to explore, and passionate enough to truly live," Liu says.

XINHUA



The creative team of *Star Fish*, gathering artists from China and France, poses after the theatrical production's preview in Beijing on July 15.

LIFE

Music for global harmony

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra returns with concerts building bridges between people and cultures, **Chen Nan** reports.

Under the baton of its music director, Russian-born conductor Vasily Petrenko, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra launched a tour of China on Thursday with nine concerts in seven cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, and Xiamen, Fujian province.

The tour, which concludes on Sunday, marks the orchestra's first visit to China with Petrenko and its first tour of the country since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The orchestra and Petrenko are performing a repertoire comprising a rich blend of British, Chinese and Russian music, including works by Benjamin Britten, Tan Dun, Guan Xia, Dmitri Shostakovich and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov.

"All the programs are designed to show how music bridges and connects cultures and people, to show that classical music is one of the most unique forms of art, which allows people in any nation, background or religion to enjoy and experience the same emotions," the conductor said in Beijing on Wednesday, a day before the orchestra's two concerts at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing on Thursday and Friday. "Nowadays, when the world is in turbulence, it is important to show the world how it is possible to deliver harmony and peace."

One of the highlights on the program is a specially arranged orchestral suite from the Chinese opera *Mulan* by composer Guan. Having premiered 20 years ago, the Chinese opera was based on the legendary story about a young girl named Hua Mulan in ancient China who takes on a male identity to replace her ailing father to join the army and save her country from the intruder.

"The suite that we are playing combines all the themes from the opera, such as the wedding music, the war music, and the march music. It's very special for me and it's the first time for me to perform it," says Petrenko.

Asked about his approach to a new music piece, the conductor says that, "It's like reading a book, but there is difference."

"When you are reading a book, you read it line by line. When you read the music, you need to see the whole picture. It feels like there are 10 people in the books who are talking at the same time. That's what a conductor hears in an orchestra," he says. "By reading the score, you just hear it in your mind."

Violinist Ray Chen, who was born in Taiwan and raised in Australia, will join the orchestra and Petrenko on the tour, performing Austrian-American composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold's *Violin Concerto in D Major, Op 35*, which will coincide with the release of the Deutsche Grammophon label of his new recording of the concerto, also with the orchestra.

Other music works on the program will be excerpts from *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon Cello Concerto* by Tan, Shostakovich's *Symphony No 5* and *Scheherazade, Op 35*, an orchestral suite by Russian composer Rimsky-Korsakov that was inspired by the collection of largely Middle Eastern and Indian tales known as *The Thousand and One Nights* (or *The Arabian Nights*).

British composer Benjamin Britten's *Four Sea Interludes* from the composer's first successful opera *Peter Grimes* will also be performed during the tour.

"I've been to China many times with different orchestras from around the world. I have seen new concert halls



Top: The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra's violinist Ray Chen and conductor Vasily Petrenko perform at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing on Thursday. **Above:** Under the baton of Petrenko, the orchestra kicked off its China tour at the NCPA. The orchestra will perform in a number of cities during the tour, including Changsha, Wuhan and Nanjing until Sunday. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

built in China over the last 20 years and I feel that people are coming to the concerts because they have a habit for it. They want to come to the concerts because classical music is part of their lives," says Petrenko. "China, in terms of audience, is picking up strongly in all aspects, like understanding and youth — the country has one of the youngest audiences in the world."

"I learned that the concert (Thursday's at the NCPA) is completely sold out. For other concerts, 80 or 90 percent

of the tickets are sold," he adds.

According to Huw Davies, acting managing director of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, since Petrenko became the music director of the orchestra in 2021, he has been expanding repertoires and working with the musicians to show the orchestra's quality.

"He is a true collaborator, encouraging and inspiring our musicians," says Davies.

It's been about seven years since the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra made its

last tour in China, Davies notes.

"It is a tremendous honor for the orchestra to return to China after a long absence. Throughout its history, the orchestra has toured China and the seeds of partnerships have been planted with many of China's most prestigious and influential cultural institutions. We are excited by the possibilities that these partnerships present and look forward to establishing new ones, strengthening our cultural connections and bringing the joy of orchestral music

to audiences across China," he says.

Last year, a new memorandum of understanding forging a closer partnership was signed between the orchestra and the NCPA. This collaboration will see Royal Philharmonic Orchestra musicians and staff members working in partnership with musicians from the NCPA's resident orchestra — the China NCPA Orchestra.

In 2004, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra performed in Shanghai to mark the reopening of the Shanghai Concert Hall. During the latest tour, the orchestra returned to mark the 20th anniversary of the Shanghai Concert Hall with two concerts on Saturday and Sunday.

"As audiences eagerly anticipate the resonant strains of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Petrenko's direction, this tour promises not just performances but an immersive journey of cultural fusion and artistic renewal, affirming music's timeless power to unite and inspire across borders," says Wray Armstrong, general manager of Poly Armstrong International Arts and Communication Co, also the founder and chairman of Armstrong Music and Arts, which Armstrong founded in 2009 in Beijing, bringing a number of the world's leading classical music artists to China and introducing top Chinese classical musicians to an international audience.

Following a partnership signing attended by the British Ambassador to China Caroline Wilson DCMG in Beijing in March last year, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra's visit to Beijing will mark the start of a multiyear collaboration with Beijing Poly Theatre Management Co designed to widen access to great orchestral music across China.

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The peak of natural beauty is the height of ambition

For as long as I can remember, I have had a fascination with climbing mountains. Coming from



Michael Rhys Card
Second Thoughts

Though I can't pinpoint exactly where this fascination comes from, the reason may be as simple as the answer mountaineer George Mallo-

ry gave to the question why climb Qomolangma — known in the West as Mount Everest. His reply was, "Because it's there."

Luckily, Beijing has also proven to be a fertile ground for this hobby, with the Great Wall snaking its way through the imposing mountain ranges to the north of the city. But when it comes to mountains in China, there has only been one image that springs to mind — an iconic view, so much so that it features as an image on the 20 yuan (\$2.8) note — these are the karst mountains of the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, part of the South China Karst, which was designated a UNESCO World Her-

itage Site in 2007.

After many years of living in China, I finally got the chance to visit these natural wonders while on a trip to Xingping ancient town. There is a lot that could be said about the area in general, from the renowned cormorant fisherman posing for photos on the banks of the Lijiang River as countless tourists float by on bamboo rafts to the many ancient towns and villages dotted throughout the region such as Yangshuo and Xingping (a town that was visited by former US president Bill Clinton, who desired to see "the real China") offering enough unique local history and culture to



A view of the Lijiang River and karst mountains from Xingping town, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. MICHAEL RHYSCARD / CHINA DAILY

warrant the trip alone.

But the real stars of the show, and the main reason I visited the area, were undoubtedly the frankly staggering amount of karst mountains, their millennia-long formation arising from soluble rocks that

were broken down over time by certain acids, forming sinkholes and caverns, such as the Reed Flute Cave in Guilin, and eventually eroding into the topography that is visible throughout the region today. I thought I knew what to expect

upon arrival but photos and banknotes do not do these natural wonders justice. No matter where you go or where you look, these jagged green-topped monoliths pierce the skyline in all directions as far as the eye can see.

The abundant beauty and awe-inspiring views of the region even outweigh the stifling heat and humidity that usually keep me hidden away indoors under an air conditioner.

Whether hiking, relaxing on a boat cruise down the river or simply enjoying the local area, the combination of karst mountains, ancient towns, meandering rivers and lush vegetation creates one of the most captivating natural landscapes I have had the privilege of witnessing and will be one I surely return to in the future.

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CULTURE

In full flow

Ancient waterway poised to tap deep heritage channeling tradition with innovation toward sustainable future, **Alexis Hooi** and **Zhang Li** report in Guilin, Guangxi.



An aerial view of Lingqu Canal, which dates back to the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC). The man-made waterway is a pioneering hydraulic and navigational feat, helping the economic and social development of surrounding areas. FU HONGYUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Ask Ji Zhenyong to pick his favorite spot in town and he will point immediately to the weathered stone walkways next to the water's edge.

"The canal is linked deeply to our history and heritage here, you can say it runs in our blood," he said.

Ji, 54, is a resident of Xing'an county in Guilin, South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. He is also the 17th generation of *doujun* — traditional weir and water lock sentinels charged with guarding and maintaining the Lingqu Canal, an ancient waterway built 2,200 years ago when the country was first unified.

"We've been so much a part of Lingqu, looking after it," Ji said. "Of course, we don't actually guard it now in modern times, but it's still our role as responsible residents to help keep it flowing steadily and smoothly, through a healthy, clean and sustainable environment."

Ji's sense of duty reflects the latest efforts to preserve and promote Lingqu's physical, cultural and social value — the man-made waterway is the first of its kind, a pioneering hydraulic, navigational feat stretching 36.4 kilometers through four major towns as it links the Xiang and Lijiang rivers and, by extension, the major Yangtze and Pearl river basins.

The International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage recognizes Lingqu Canal as a World Heritage Irrigation Structure, "an exquisite illustration of Chinese technical and engineering capabilities ... helping the economic and social development of rural areas".

Lingqu is also on the UNESCO World Heritage tentative list, being considered for nomination as a site of outstanding universal value.

According to the UNESCO citation, the canal is lauded as a model of early canals that reflects the "Asian hydraulic and navigation technology of ancient civilization". It "integrates navigation, irrigation and flood control functions and is an outstanding example of comprehensive, sustainable and effective use of natural resources in traditional Chinese agricultural society", helping to maintain stability in the south of a unified country.

Successful blend

Today, the Lingqu Canal "stands as an important cultural heritage and a multifunctional hydraulic project serving irrigation, flood control, water supply and tourism", altogether offering a successful blend of tradition and innovation ranging from trade to tourism.

"Following the unification of ancient China under the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC), Qinshihuang, the era's first ruler, set about building



Clockwise from top left: Children play on the banks of the ancient Lingqu Canal. Children play on the banks of the Lingqu. A Lingqu boat ride allows visitors to take in the lush greenery lining the canal. Young visitors to Lingqu learn more about the waterway. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

a waterway for grain transport that would help sustain his armies heading south, with the project completed in 214 BC," said Chen Xinghua, honorary president of the Lingqu research association.

"Known subsequently as the Lingqu Canal, this vital link became a benchmark for flood control and irrigation, spurring the agricultural development of the area, making it a water transport, cultural and tourism hub," Chen said.

"Lingqu connected China's central plains with its south, playing a major role in cultural and material exchanges between China and overseas. It connected the hinterland with the southern ports and, as such, the ancient Maritime Silk Road," he said.

"For example, figurines of foreigners in the Han (206 BC-220) and Tang (618-907) dynasties were successively found on the banks of Lingqu. They are the products of cultural exchanges between China and the West," Chen said.

Protecting Lingqu's rich legacy for everyone includes its structures, surrounding environment and water quality, said Bi Huangwen, secretary of the Xing'an county Party committee.

"We will strengthen the environment along the canal, maintain and restore its scenic spots and cultural relics and uphold high water quality, all adhering to international standards," he said.

"We all know that to be listed as a World Heritage Site, it is very important to protect the original features of the ancient canal ... to carry out the relevant measures in line with local development."

To that effect, major rural tourism demonstration areas and villages will help spur the pillar tourism sector in line with Lingqu's sustainable growth, Bi said.

"In 2022, Lingqu and its surroundings received more than 7.59 million tourist visits, raking in 7.7 billion yuan (\$1.06 billion) in tourism consumption and winning national industry honors," he said.

"Through protection, promotion and utilization, this ancient canal is radiating new vitality, and the local culture it nurtures will continue to live on. Lingqu still plays its role in irrigation, flood drainage and water supply, covering more than 4,300 hectares of farmland yielding local specialty produce such as rice noodles, glutinous cakes and Sanhua rice liquor."



36.4 km

length of Lingqu, which links the Xiang and Lijiang rivers

“Through protection, promotion and utilization, this ancient canal is radiating new vitality, and the local culture it nurtures will continue to live on.”

Bi Huangwen, secretary of the Xing'an county Party committee

er Zeng Jinglan, who set up a studio right next to the waterway.

Zeng, 67, has taken part in exhibitions and exchanges worldwide but returns to her roots in Xing'an, painting the flora and fauna that thrive along Lingqu.

"I've always been drawn to the grass, flowers and birds, right here at home," Zeng said.

"I once also wrote a poem about the beautiful environment here. I was abroad then and when I came back, it was exactly how I had imagined it to be."

Zeng has more than 100 students, ranging in age from 4 to older than 50, sharing Lingqu's cultural and artistic traditions with them.

At the Xing'an No. 2 Primary School nearby, 12-year-old Jiang Xuan has also been doing her part to help those traditions survive and thrive.

Jiang has been spending much of her co-curricular activities as a young docent introducing Lingqu's heritage and culture to visitors.

"I live just 5 km from here and often practice my *guzheng* (Chinese zither) by the water," Jiang said. "Lingqu is very close to us."

Her principal, Lei Miao, said the school conducts regular classes on Lingqu's fascinating history and heritage, such as on classical poems extolling its beauty and importance, to ensure that future generations understand the depth of its links with the community.

"There's a small library dedicated to Lingqu heritage. We've also introduced textbooks on Lingqu as part of the curriculum, with the students helping with the illustrations," Lei said.

"Lingqu belongs to all of us."

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